



AN ROINN DLÍ AGUS CIRT AGUS COMHIONANNAIS
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

WHITE PAPER ON CRIME

Report of Proceedings of Regional Consultation Meetings on The Community and the Criminal Justice System

May/June 2011

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1. Introduction

During May and June, 2011, as part of the final consultation stage of the White Paper on Crime process, regional meetings were held in Tralee, Waterford, Limerick, Galway and Dublin and were attended by some 270 participants. Participants came from across the community and included representatives from community and voluntary groups, including minority groups, as well as statutory organisations and public representatives. The meetings were designed to facilitate a dialogue in respect of the relationship between the criminal justice system and the community it serves. At the outset, meeting participants were addressed by senior personnel from An Garda Síochána after which an open forum, facilitated by Dr. Barry Vaughan, NESC, gave participants an opportunity to comment on the following discussion topics:

- Public confidence in the criminal justice system and in its capacity to tackle crime and the fear of crime.
- Communications between members of the public and the criminal justice system.
- The responsiveness of the criminal justice system to members of the public.
- A greater role for members of the public in responding to crime, whether by providing information or engaging in local voluntary activity.

The views expressed by those attending the consultation meetings are contained in the Appendix. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department.

This phase of the consultation process also incorporates a discussion document which was published in June 2011. The document further explores the issues above and invites written submissions by the end of August 2011.

2. Overall Conclusions

Issues which emerged from consultation meetings included:

2.1 Confidence in the criminal justice system

Generally, confidence was expressed in An Garda Síochána but not in the criminal justice system as a whole. While there was a belief that the Gardaí would investigate cases effectively, there was less confidence in the system beyond that point.

The prevailing sentiment from participants was that the public, especially those who report criminal activities in the community, need to see such matters being investigated adequately and a person being punished when they commit crimes or else it will affect their willingness to report crime which will in turn affect the effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

There was some dissatisfaction expressed with the amount of information given by the Gardaí to victims and witnesses once the file had moved to prosecution phase. It was suggested that each

Garda station should have a liaison officer who would have access to all investigating Gardaí's files and who would be in a position to give the required information to the victim.

Under-reporting or disengagement from the legal process was seen as most evident in respect of sexual and domestic violence where speakers were highly vocal that breakdowns in the system resulted in high attrition rates due to such a lack of confidence.

Some participants voiced concern over the reporting of crimes in certain housing estates/neighbourhoods. They noted that there was a fear of reporting any criminal behaviour from anti-social behaviour right up to murder. There was a perception that the Gardaí either wouldn't or couldn't protect people living in these areas and that if they engaged with the Gardaí their property or their families would be targeted by gangs.

A number of audience members said that many people they worked with still believed that criminals had access to Garda radio communications and so were aware of who was reporting crime. Senior representatives of An Garda Síochána in attendance at meetings underlined the security of the national digital radio system now being used and the inability of outside parties to access Garda radio traffic.

2.2 Community Policing

There were several interventions on the necessity of community policing and the positive effect that the presence of a community police officer can have on a community, particularly those who are more vulnerable. It was generally held that the presence of community police promotes confidence in the community and removes fear. The community are more likely to engage with and report criminal activity to a police officer they are familiar with and whom they trust. There was also commentary about how the lack of community policing in certain areas is affecting those living in rural Ireland, in particular, older persons. Concerns were expressed that community Gardaí seem to be the first removed if more bodies were needed in another area or if budget cuts were in place.

2.3 Victims

Many speakers acknowledged that services for victims had improved but noted gaps in those services. The provision of information and support were of particular importance as victims can feel out of the loop. The position of victims of sexual and domestic violence was highlighted at all meetings.

2.4 Legal Aid and Court Delays

The issue of legal aid arose on a number of occasions during the course of the meetings. Many audience members felt that the current system is unsustainable as it tends to reward repeat offenders without any consequences and at the tax payers expense. It was argued that the system needs to reflect not only the needs of the accused but also of the community as a whole and that there should be repercussions for repeat offenders. Deductions from social welfare payments in respect of legal aid to habitual offenders was a common suggestion. Delays in cases coming to court and time wasted for Gardaí and others due to delays and adjournments were mentioned by several speakers.

2.5 Joint Policing Committees

Contributions on Joint Police Committees (JPCs) noted that as they have only been recently set up, it is difficult to fully judge their effectiveness. However, the integrated nature of their structure has been found to be very effective in some communities. In addition, their public nature and the community involvement in the Committees were viewed as important in aiding communications with local Gardaí. The importance of a public platform for both the Gardaí and local authorities to pass on information to communities and to receive information from them was highlighted. The replication at national level of the Joint Police Committee model was advocated.

Some comments were of a less positive nature. Some of those working in community-based groups voiced dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of JPCs and felt that Local Policing Fora would be much more effective than JPCs which they believed tended to be politically focused and did not have enough community members involved.

2.6 Intimidation

The threat of violence and intimidation was an issue of particular concern at the Dublin and Limerick consultations. Many participants stated that fear of becoming a victim themselves prevented persons in the community from reporting criminal activities. Concern was voiced about the ability of the criminal justice system to adequately protect those who reported crime or those who were the victims of crime. One area in which the audience noted that there was not enough protection was in the aftermath of a criminal being released from prison and attacking or intimidating the victim or person who they believed had reported them to the Gardaí.

2.7 Sentencing

There was a perception among many contributors that sentences are too lenient and that sentencing does not meet the needs of victims. A common criticism was that the victim is seen as a mere witness in the crime being investigated and that their voice is not heard, even at the sentencing stage.

Many contributors believed that consistency in sentencing needs to be a priority for the criminal justice system. Other stated that the public at times feels that repeat offenders are not being punished and that it was therefore not worthwhile reporting crimes. Intimidation against people who report crimes was also noted as being an aspect of this. If a person reported a crime and the person was convicted but not given a custodial sentence, there was a fear in the community that they would then be targeted by the offender.

Some participants working in the area of domestic and sexual violence noted an inconsistency in how the criminal justice system dealt with women in general and claimed it was sometimes a lottery of which judge would be in court on a certain day as to what the outcome would be.

2.8 Community Service Orders

Community Service Orders were viewed as an innovative way for communities to deal themselves with criminal activity in their own areas and as a way of reducing the prison population by providing offenders who would otherwise serve short-term sentences with work in the community.

2.9 Restorative Justice

Many contributors expressed the view that the criminal justice system needs to look further at a variety of restorative justice models and a belief that they have not been adequately utilised thus far. A number of audience members spoke about the value of restorative justice methods and the need to put an effective system in place for managing any expansion of the current system. Restorative justice was noted by some as an innovative way for communities to deal with criminal activity in their communities. In that regard some speakers expressed the view that the public felt disenfranchised from the current criminal justice system.

2.10 White Collar Crime

A number of audience members commented on the lack of effective policing/prosecution of white collar criminals. It was argued that there is a perception amongst the public that because there had been no key cases yet taken against any of the people at the heart of the financial collapse that people had gotten away with these crimes and that white collar crime isn't taken seriously enough.

2.11 Integrated approach to criminal justice

Many of speakers noted that an inter-agency or an integrated approach needed to be taken in the criminal justice system. JPCs were given as one example of where this works well at a local level but many called on further integration between national bodies and government departments. Two specific areas mentioned were local authority housing matters where anti-social behaviour issues arise and anti-social behaviour by young children which, it was argued, needs to be dealt with at the earliest possible opportunity. The importance of crime prevention measures, including education and social policies, was also highlighted.

2.12 Technology and Media

A number of speakers considered that the Gardaí should have a better social media strategy and enhanced technological means for members of the public to interact with the force. In particular, the need for email and direct phone numbers for individual Gardaí was noted by a number of speakers. It was also said that the Garda website was not updated enough to be a useful forum for communicating with the public. The benefit of a social media outlet in times of emergencies was stressed. For example, if a person was to go missing then their details and a photograph could be passed on an infinite number of times using the public's help.

Appendix

Summary Report of the Proceedings of Consultation Meetings

Meeting 1

31 May 2011 - Tralee - The Education Centre, Institute of Technology

Comments from the floor

Topic 1: Public Confidence in the criminal justice system and its capacity to tackle crime and the fear of crime

The opening speaker referred to the fact that most of the community will go through life without experiencing the criminal justice system, however many were fearful and this fear is increased by some types of media coverage. They noted that there was huge public awareness of crime and the assistance which is in place already by the Department of Justice but that there was very little interest on the part of the media in reporting such positive news and it was only the negative aspects which ever got coverage. Therefore many people were fearful of becoming a victim of crime and that fear then spreads. The speaker felt that a publicity drive was very important as there are many systems in place to help persons who become victims of crime but the community doesn't hear about them.

The next contribution referred to the way "career criminals" are treated by the system and the effect that this has on public confidence in the system. The speaker felt that such persons are arrested, charged, then released and then there are multiple adjournments so the case drags on and Garda time is wasted in court repeatedly. Even if a person has committed multiple crimes previously they are given free legal aid. During this time the person is walking the same street as their alleged victims with the potential to intimidate them. The speaker felt that this behaviour was unacceptable and because people didn't see those people being punished for their actions they did not have confidence in the system as it is seen as working to a criminal's advantage. The speaker felt that criminals should have to compensate society through community works rather than being sentenced to jail and then walking out again after a few days due to overcrowding, as this was of no benefit to anybody. Finally, he said that consistency in sentencing needed to be a priority as different judges are giving different outcomes for the same cases depending on what area of the country you committed the crime in.

The next speaker spoke about consistency of sentencing for sexual offences. They felt that there was confusion in the community as to how sentences were handed down. They believed that it was important that the Gardaí invest in training in this area as co-operation with Gardaí is necessary. The speaker noted that the greatest difficulty in this area lay with the court system itself and the impact this had on the victim. Multiple adjournments without reason where the victim was sent home on a number of occasions took their confidence in the system and resulted in a high attrition rate for sexual offences cases. The speaker expressed the need for a case management system and pre-trial hearings to improve this.

Another speaker said that there is a high regard and confidence in the Garda as a force and in their ability to tackle crime. He said that this confidence started to break down, however, after the file was sent onwards. He considered that imaginative solutions were needed to tackle criminal activity. He gave the example of the recent rise in the theft of scrap metal in rural areas and said that it would be a

cost effective way to reduce this activity if scrap metal dealers had to be paid into a bank account rather than cash in hand and then the person could be traced. The speaker noted that since there are only a small number of dealers in the country this crime could be wiped out and it would be cost effective. Finally, he referred to electronic tagging and said that the delay in introducing it when the technology is available reduces confidence in the system.

The next speaker referred to the difficulties associated with alcohol and crime and, in particular, youth crime. They believed that the laws which govern alcohol need to deal effectively and in an integrated fashion, with the Gardaí, the HSE and local authorities all working together with a lead person in command and setting the agenda at local level.

The next speaker spoke on the impact of sanctions on a person convicted of a crime. They felt that it was only when you have the realisation of a high sentence that you get the full attention and reaction from an accused and that people should know they will be sentenced appropriately when they come before a court. If people get a suspended sentence, they behave for that period of time then re-offend immediately after. It's only with sanctions you get a reaction. The speaker also felt that community service orders were an appropriate way to make a person pay for their action, as by having to do community work in their own area they would be paying back the community they had wronged.

The final speaker on this topic talked about unreported crimes and said that people were slow to report domestic and sexual violence out of fear of not being believed. These difficulties and obstacles cause a high attrition rate for these crimes. They spoke particularly about the ineffectiveness and arbitrary nature of barring orders given that the breach of such orders gets a different response from different judges and a person cannot be sure of how they will be protected in those circumstances.

Topic 2: Communications between members of the public and the criminal justice system.

Joint Policing Committees (JPCs) were the subject of the first contribution. The speaker noted that the integrated nature of the committee was innovative and should be utilised in other areas, such as in dealing with anti-social behaviour where social services, Gardaí and local authorities should be working together more effectively as they are dealing with these issues at the coal face.

The following contribution concerned the adversarial criminal justice system which is in place in Ireland and the fact that the inquisitorial system in place in Europe allowed people to enter the system at a lower level and therefore they were more willing to co-operate. One aspect of the system which was stated was out of touch was the Jury system as most people don't ever serve on a jury.

The next speaker referred to the lack of communication by the criminal justice system with the partners of violent offenders as many are not aware of the release date of their partners/former partners - cause for a high level of ongoing fear.

Another speaker said that confidence in the system is established through communications and at the moment what is being communicated by the media is the impression of a system which is over-burdened and under-resourced. This gives rise to a fear factor being communicated versus the reality. This speaker also spoke about communication with the public on what happens to a person after they are convicted. The public hear that a person is released early but they don't understand why a person who is convicted of a crime would get out early. This is particularly noticeable for sex offenders who do not engage in treatment while in prison and yet are still eligible to be released early.

The next speaker said that alcohol was a key issue in the system and there was huge pressure placed on the criminal justice system due to alcohol. Community Service Orders were mentioned as a way for communities to deal responsibly with crime themselves. The final point made by this speaker was that community police are a visible sign of policing in an area and their presence promotes confidence in the community and removes fear.

One speaker described JPCs as a fantastic opportunity for all involved and a great way to share views and communicate. The system is very structured where crime statistics are laid before the Committee and you can compare them with previous years. The speaker stressed the importance of these figures being publicly available to communicate to the public.

Another person said that a lack of confidence in the system leads to unreported crimes and an acceptance of anti-social behaviour as a result. They referred to the importance in engaging business leaders in tackling criminal behaviour and believed that a business representative should sit on the JPCs. Finally, they said that certainty was more important than severity in sentencing and that if someone knew that they were bound to be punished for a crime then they would pay attention.

The next speaker stated that public consultation on the criminal justice system was very important for those working within the area. They spoke of the importance of ongoing professional development for lawyers and judges and the perceived aloofness of those working within the criminal justice system. They referred to the difficulties with the adversarial system and said that the Law Reform Commission had done great work in this area and this should be encouraged. Finally, they noted that the integration now seen at a local level with the JPCs needs to be replicated at a national level.

The next speaker stated that we need to view the system in terms of social justice rather than criminal justice and a holistic approach should be adapted to the communities affected by the system. They spoke of the strategic need for groups such as neighbourhood watch and community alert groups working with community police. They noted that if the community trust the Gardaí in their area there is a greater flow of information, and confidence in the system is much higher. When the local community understand what the position of the Gardaí is, then they don't have to interpret it themselves. People were quite prepared to accept the realities of the current economic difficulties when these are communicated to them, rather than just leaving them in the dark.

The following contributor spoke on the lack of policing for school attendance and said that previously this was the first contact that Gardaí had with children who would be at high risk of eventually committing crimes and so could work with families to prevent this. They also noted that 'anti-social' families were being shifted from one part of a town to another and from one estate to another and that the Gardaí and the Council had no powers to deal effectively with them as they were now getting sued.

The final speaker on this issue noted the effectiveness of the JPCs and that during these public meetings the presence of Gardaí on the street comes up at every meeting and the current embargo on recruiting was causing difficulties in maintaining numbers on the street. They believed that JPCs were a great way for the Gardaí and the community to interact.

Topic 3: The responsiveness of the criminal justice system to members of the public.

The first speaker noted that for sexual offences bail was an issue as strict conditions were not being set or enforced and sexual offenders were routinely committing offences while on bail. This they felt affected confidence in the system. They also felt that jurors do not reflect society as most people do not serve on juries and that there was a need for research on jury deliberations as we don't know how effective the jury system is.

Another speaker referred to victims of domestic violence and said that while the Victims Charter was a positive move towards improving treatment of victims, it was still patchy as victims are still not being informed where their case stands or if the accused has been arrested, held in custody or been given bail. This, they felt, needed to be addressed. In addition, victims should be spoken to about what is realistic to expect from the whole process.

The next contribution related to victims and their removal from the whole judicial process because they are not interested parties from the criminal justice point of view, they are only there to progress the case as witnesses. It was noted that organisations which show victims around the court room and inform them of how the whole system works are doing invaluable work which should be done by the prosecution. Currently many victims feel removed from the case and totally ignored, except when they have to give evidence. The final point made during this contribution was that repeat offenders should not be able to access free legal aid over and over again without any repercussions.

This last point was continued by the following contributor who said that the system as it stands was offender focused and the victim was kept out of the loop and had very little support. The speaker said that 80% of victims didn't engage in support systems and that the Courts Service should provide such support. They pointed out the effectiveness of the Family Liaison Officer for serious offences where the prosecution barrister explains the court process to the victim and thought that this should be expanded to include more offences.

Another speaker considered that free legal aid should be given in the form of a loan as it was currently a 'gravy train' for those involved in the system. He noted that if such persons make money in the future they should then have to pay back some of the loan received. Currently, the community was left wondering why people who obtain free legal aid do not contribute at all, even when they are repeat offenders.

The closing speaker on this topic said that there was an inordinate waste of finance and police time in the district courts, particularly for public order offences. These matters, they said, were dealt with expeditiously in the U.K by lay magistrates without the need for them to be adjourned time and again. They said that the public want to see Gardaí on the streets and not having to spend all day waiting tied up in court and that this needed to be addressed. Finally, they stated that if we want to see a criminal justice system that works we must be prepared to pay for it.

Topic 4: A greater role for members of the public in responding to crime, whether by providing information or engaging in local voluntary action.

The first speaker said that there was a greater need for a link to be made between a lack of education and crime. This would need to be a long-term goal and strategies would need to be put in place to support this. The speaker noted that both formal and informal educational programmes are needed to

reduce crime and that the current trend in cuts to special needs and traveller education would have long-term effects on the system.

Another person considered that the public had to be prepared to report crime and speak up about it. They said there was a fear on the part of a person who reports a crime having their name revealed and then being abused or intimidated. The community need to know that if they report a crime the Gardaí will support those who come forward and this is the importance of community policing as a person will trust a Gardaí they are familiar with. The speaker referred to the return of criminals to the community after serving their sentences and the effect this had on the community, particularly if they are allowed to intimidate witnesses after their return. They believed that there was a lack of protection for these persons which resulted in people not engaging with the system or reporting crimes.

The final contribution concerned the use of prison as a response to crime and the need to place greater emphasis on prevention. The speaker felt that restorative justice would benefit the community and the victim greatly. We need to understand the issues behind crime and offending behaviour better and get the community involved. Finally, it was stated that an integrated sentence management system should be integrated into the community and used as a preventative tool to avoid a prison sentence.

Meeting 2

1 June 2011 - Waterford - Institute of Technology

Comments from the floor

Topic 1: Public Confidence in the criminal justice system and its capacity to tackle crime and the fear of crime

The opening speaker referred to delays in the justice system. They stated that the Gardaí had limited resources to work with and that far too much time was tied up in the court process itself rather than Gardaí being placed in the community. They believed that this was a waste of time and money and that there was needless bureaucracy in the system due to adjournments. They believed that the legal profession had a vested interest in delaying matters to the cost of the public.

The next contributor noted a lack of confidence in the system after Gardaí had done their job. They mentioned a particular case in their area where the Gardaí had apprehended persons for criminal activity. The case had gone to court and the judge had directed the jury to acquit on the offence charged and the defendants were convicted of a lesser offence. This, they felt, was taking justice out of the hands of the community and affected the confidence of the public in the system. They also felt that cases should be retried if they fail due to technical issues.

Another speaker stated that sentencing is a big issue for the public. He noted that the community in general have great time for the Gardaí but certain cases put their confidence to the test as justice was not seen to have been done and sentencing was not seen to be adequate.

The following speaker stated that when a person is convicted and they are sent to prison for a very short time the victim feels very hard done by and as if they have not been vindicated by the system. As a solution they recommended that community sentencing be looked at. They felt a CSO should be appropriate to the crime committed, that such sentencing could add to the community and would be much more productive for all than a 7 day prison sentence.

A speaker said that the community loses respect for the system when a person commits 30-40 crimes and they never receive a prison sentence. They felt that when anti-social behaviour was reported in housing estates and then the witness could see the same person still walking around the estate the next week behaving in the same manner and that those persons were not learning any lessons as they were not being punished in any way for their crimes. They stated that the community needs to see a person being punished when they commit crimes or else it will affect their willingness to report.

Another person referred to delays in the system, in particular, the delay between when a statement is made to the Gardaí and when the decision to prosecute is made by the DPP and the delay for the matter to be actually heard at trial when a number of adjournments and postponements occur. They noted that in some extreme cases a delay of up to 4 years lapses between when the offence occurs and the trial is completed. They made the point that even when a case is heard and a person convicted, the sentence can be very disappointing for a victim. This they noted was especially true for sexual offences where sentencing guidelines and sensitivity training were badly needed. Finally, they

said that there are an inadequate number of places for the rehabilitation of sex offenders in the system and that it should be made mandatory rather than voluntary as it is at the moment.

The next contribution was about rural persons living in fear as they were a particularly vulnerable group. It was said that many people were turning their homes into fortresses as criminals were targeting small pieces of equipment on their land and they were being repeatedly victimised. It was stated that there was no local Garda in the area who knew the community and could effectively deal with this issue. Finally, it was suggested that stronger sanctions needed to be imposed on such criminals, in particular for offences committed while on bail.

One speaker stated that there is no consistency in sentencing and that the damage to families by delay in hearing cases could not be measured. They said that they had heard of cases where when a judge was not available to hear a case on a specific date they were adjourned for over ten months. They said that life sentences being so short in length was a particular issue for the families of murder victims and that while there has been great improvement in the length of sentences over the last ten years, the public needed to see that justice was being done. Finally, they noted the Garda Liaison Officer for serious cases was a greatly welcomed initiative and it had helped with public confidence. They felt that the victim's family should not be re-victimised by the criminal justice system.

The next speaker expressed delight with the new court building in their area and said that it was a huge improvement on what had been in place previously. They felt that the problem in the system was not with the Gardaí but with judges and how they deal with cases. They also felt that public confidence was being undermined by the manner in which corrupt solicitors and bankers were being treated. The public did not see these people being pursued through the courts and they felt that this created an impression that there is one rule for those with money and another for those with none. White collar crime, the speaker said, was stealing and should be treated as such.

The next person spoke about how the system was failing to deal with youth crime. They said that there was no fear of the Juvenile Liaison Programme, no fear of prison, no rehabilitation available in St Patrick's Institution, when juveniles were actually sent into detention they were released early and so learned nothing from the experience and the cycle began again. They felt that the Gardaí did their job but the failings in the system itself and the lack of prison space and resources was undermining their work.

The final speaker addressed what they termed the "perennial" issue of lack of resources in the An Garda Síochána.

Topic 2: Communications between members of the public and the criminal justice system.

The first speaker stated that there needed to be greater discretion available to Gardaí in respect of drugs offences. At times a place in a treatment centre would be much more effective than a criminal conviction and would reduce the cost of and the time needed to run a case.

The next person spoke about how during the 'boom years' there was a greater number of community police on the street and they either walked or used bikes to patrol the streets, thus engaging with the community on a one-to-one basis as they were more approachable. They went on to note that the number of community Gardaí has now been reduced and they drive around in a car making it more

difficult for the public to interact with them. It was also felt that if an officer is needed for a court date or an event they are always taken from community policing before any other area.

Another speaker said that disadvantaged estates are being run by gangs or families and those who live in these communities are fearful of coming forward to give Gardaí information in case they are injured or killed. The speaker thought that there should be greater communication between the housing authority and the Gardaí in order to deal with these families and that an integrated solution and an interagency response was needed if the Gardaí want people to feel safe enough to report crimes in these areas.

One speaker referred to the role of community police and the positive impact that their presence had upon the elderly community in an area. They noted that when a crime happens in a community, the elderly feel isolated and that there needs to be a Garda strategy to make these people feel safer. A message needed to be better communicated that people didn't need to live in fear.

A number of points were made in the following contribution. Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert only seemed to work after there had been a spate of violence in the area and as soon as the violence subsides, the community stop coming to these meetings. The second point made was that there is a need to extend Community Service Orders and the third was that an ombudsman for judges was necessary. Finally, it was stated that social welfare and housing authorities need to link up with the criminal justice system as many people are claiming social welfare while in prison and tackling people through their income may be most effective.

The next speaker said that there had been major improvement with inter-agency work but that the work of bodies such as the JPCs needed to be tangible. It was pointed out that a joined up level of thinking occurs on a local level but not nationally and that the Department of Justice and Equality should work with other bodies like the Department of Social Protection and others more effectively.

Another speaker referred to the fear ethnic minorities felt when using the legal system or calling the police. They noted that many had lost faith in the system as they were misunderstood in their dealings with the authorities due to cultural differences between the parties such as intonation or volume of voice. The speaker said that this lack of cultural awareness by those working in the criminal justice system meant that these persons were less likely to report crime. It was considered that a lack of interpreters in police stations needed to be addressed as even if a person has a good grasp of English, in a situation where they are arrested, they may not understand the full effects of their arrest in the English language.

Young people and crime was the focus of one person's contribution. She praised the Youthreach service for its success but noted that by the time children reach the age of 16 many have already been participating in criminal activities for many years and that there is a need to look at having a junior version of Youthreach in conjunction with the Department of Education.

The following speaker felt that the Gardaí should release ads encouraging people to report anti-social behaviour as some people don't feel that they can contact Gardaí as their complaint won't be treated seriously enough.

Another person spoke about the importance of community police officers being allowed to remain in an area for an extended period of time as it takes time for a Garda to become known in an area and if

they move to another area then the whole process has to start again. The speaker noted that there should be a career path in community policing so that people can remain working in that area.

The next speaker remarked on the rising unemployment numbers and that at present people are barely hanging on. They thought that if more of a burden was put on the community through higher taxes that crime will, in turn, increase. They felt that the public could see those who are alleged to have committed white collar crime walking around without consequence and it removed their confidence in the effectiveness of the system.

One person said that many groups are retreating back into themselves and back to their core focus due to budget cuts and that this is a time when we need greater integration and cross-departmental approaches in working at a preventative level.

The final speaker thought that further guidance was needed on how to run JPCs effectively and that it would be useful to know how other JPCs are currently being run in order to set out good practice guidelines.

Topic 3: The responsiveness of the criminal justice system to members of the public.

The first contribution focused on the effect of begging on older persons. The speaker noted that aggressive begging tactics can have a profound effect on older persons or those with a disability, leaving them feeling threatened. They said that at times people are slow to go out alone and this has a high consequence on your quality of life. They thought that begging laws should be enforced.

The next person spoke on intimidation. They noted that a lot of crimes are not reported when people live in certain estates as there are families living in those estates who rule them and life would be made very difficult if anyone was to report crimes to the Gardaí. The speaker felt that such persons needed greater support from those working in the system in order to feel safe enough to report.

The next speaker said that it was highly frustrating for Gardaí in court to deal with the exploitation of loopholes in the law by solicitors and that this should be dealt with immediately. They believed that something needs change in respect of white collar crime as there is a perception that the system looks kinder on rich persons and that you can buy your way out of a crime.

Topic 4: A greater role for members of the public in responding to crime, whether by providing information or engaging in local voluntary action.

The closing speaker felt that community Gardaí have too big an area to cover and that there are not enough Gardaí on the ground in an area. They noted that the community could become more involved by joining the Garda Reserve and this could aid the lack of numbers on the ground in the community as currently there is a severe lack of community Gardaí at weekends when they are needed most.

Meeting 3

8 June 2011 - Limerick – Mary Immaculate College

Comments from the floor

Topic 1: Public confidence in the criminal justice system and its capacity to tackle crime and the fear of crime

The first speaker praised the Gardaí in addressing support for victims of crime. They noted that victims need adequate information like booklets on what steps are involved in the criminal justice system. They need an acknowledgement that a crime has been committed against them. They also need help in healing and recovering. These needs should be addressed early after a crime has been committed.

The second speaker echoed the comments of the first and noted that proper communication will very often prevent complainants withdrawing complaints. They said that it is important that there is engagement in this with victims.

The next person spoke about the capacity to tackle fear. They noted that there was a fear of a revolving door system where those convicted of crimes were out on the street quicker than they were arrested. They said that the community didn't feel that the punishment fits the crime and the public were in greater danger if they reported crimes as the criminal would get out on probation and would have free rein in the community again. They finished by stating that there was a perception that the system was failing victims and there was need for a stronger remand capacity.

The following contribution addressed race crime and the lack of confidence to report it. It was stated that there was a negative attitude to the reporting of crime by foreign nationals. They believed that the public should be more aware that racism is a crime and that there needs to be more training around the legislation already in place. They believed that the immigrant community will not report a crime if there are no consequences for the criminal.

The next speaker referred to the fear of crime amongst the elderly who are afraid to go out at night. He said that there had been no follow up after this issue was raised at previous consultations and hoped that the follow up to these consultations would be different.

One person noted that a person's confidence in the system depended on their experience of it and that a lot of court users for domestic violence offences do not have confidence in general. They said that sanctions should be looked at and that the 'journey to conviction' had to be reassessed as the longer it took, the more fearful a victim became and the greater the chance for intimidation. They said that the process should be shorter and that the number of adjournments was a particular problem. Another matter they mentioned was that the victim and the perpetrator of the violence are sometimes put standing together in the same small area for hours and while this doesn't happen in all courthouses there needed to be consistency as people want to know before they report a crime what sort of response they will get from the Gardaí and the courts.

The next speaker continued on the same topic by setting out the difficulties associated with victims and criminals mixing together in the courts system and the potential for intimidation. They said that if a victim is in court being intimidated and the defendant keeps getting adjournments they lose faith in the system. They noted that this causes attrition.

Another speaker said that we do not have a criminal justice system as such; we merely have semi-autonomous bodies in the Gardaí, the independent judge and the independent prosecution. They said that better liaison is needed between these segments of the system.

The final speaker noted that it is mostly minor offences that are committed in communities on an ongoing basis and that it was only for serious offences that defendants were held in custody before trial. They believed that there needs to be more protection available for those who volunteer information as if you complain the gangs in the community can readily identify you. They stated that there was no proper case management in the criminal justice system which is particularly necessary at District Court level. Compensation needed to be extended from assault offences to public order offences in the community. They believed that victim impact statements were not properly used at lower court level. Referring to bail, they said that the 1997 Bail Act had not worked in practice. There was a reluctance on the part of the judiciary to take into account previous convictions. They recommended that there be a statutory provision requiring the District Court to impose conditions which would apply while a case was under appeal.

Topic 2: Communications between members of the public and the criminal justice system.

The discussion opened on the subject of Joint Police Committees (JPCs). The speaker was opposed to the Committees being moved from town to county level. They said they were more useful than meetings with the local Superintendent, which used to be more of a P.R. exercise than any real discussion and that JPCs should remain at local level with perhaps one JPC meeting for the whole county each year. They finished with the issue of 'boy racers', which they noted was a big issue outside fast food outlets and which caused considerable problems for elderly people living in such areas. They said that there doesn't seem to be any power to deal with what happens at the weekend. Another person said that communications tended to be damaged when incidents are reported and not acted on, or even recorded. They said that such inaction damages confidence. They recounted a local incident where a car which had been reported abandoned to the Gardaí was not moved and was eventually burned out.

The next speaker referred to the role of Local Policing Fora and the lack of one in the Limerick area. They stated that they operate on a very informal level, whereas JPCs operate on a formal level in Council chambers, which was intimidating for the local community. Community engagement would be more effective in these Fora but for political reasons they hadn't been delivered.

One speaker said that JPCs were welcomed but that the legislation needed to be looked at further. In terms of communication they noted that public representatives can now have meetings with Garda Superintendents on key issues which the public have brought to their attention. They believed that information was key as in the rural communities so much information used to be passed on by the public.

The following speaker referred to the reduction in the number of Gardaí. They said that the court system needs to free up Garda time as they were just hanging around corridors for hours wasting tax

payers' money. They noted that the same was occurring with jurors and witnesses who have taken the day off work. They believed that the free legal aid scheme was verging on a scandal and that it was a gravy train for the lawyers. They said that repeat offenders should have their dole cut or if in the future they own property and have jobs it should be recouped at that time. Legal aid should be given in the form of a loan and paid back when a person can afford it.

One person spoke on judicial workloads and said that there were issues emerging which exasperated the public. They said that there was an overload in Limerick in comparison with the system in Cork.

The next speaker referred to community policing. They noted that a lot had been achieved by accessibility and people must trust their local community police officer as they may not just trust any Garda. They said that if you ring after 5pm many rural stations were closed and you were put through to a main station where you don't know anybody. This affected the reporting of crimes. They also noted that if the community police officer moves on or is promoted, the local community had to start building trust all over again. They thought that JPCs were not effective mechanisms for dealing with crime, but simply a PR and political exercise. Local Policing Fora were much more effective when used in conjunction with community policing and out of the media spotlight.

Another speaker referred to Garda time spent in court and said that video linkage from the prisons to the court was providing huge savings to the Gardaí, Courts Service, the tax payer and the Prison Service. They believed that dedicated warrant officers were needed for attachment of earnings etc. as Gardaí shouldn't be doing such work. They spoke of the waste of time and money as a result of Gardaí having to spend all day in court to give evidence on a minor issue or two in a case. They spoke about restorative justice and said that it needs to be managed if there is to be more reliance on it. In relation to case management, they believed that it should be trialled on juvenile cases and then expanded. They said that some judges were coming on board now and were pushing cases to be moved faster but that a holistic approach needs to be taken. The speaker said that they were an advocate for the JPCs but that there needed to be more room for manoeuvre as the county level JPCs need to be more strategic while the local have more focus on the gritty. A difficulty with Local Policing Fora was the requirement for the Gardaí to attend various meetings which take them away from other policing tasks.

One speaker said that leniency in sentencing lowered reporting rates, made people reluctant to engage with the criminal justice system and undermines the Gardaí.

Another noted that existing local fora were hugely useful in having Gardaí present in the community but that it would be useful to have other members of the criminal justice system present. They said that communities were largely ignored by other agencies outside the Gardaí and that they should also engage.

Another speaker said that while there are now a number of programmes for young men who get into trouble, there is a lack of preventative programmes for those who haven't yet come into contact with the system.

One contributor said that there was a need for the public to report crimes in time to the Gardaí as a delay in reporting affects their ability to catch criminals.

Another made a point about the value of scrap metal and the need to put in place a cost effective preventative measure to stop people selling on stolen copper cylinders and other scrap.

The final speaker said that we should look at where communications strategies have been effective in the past, for example, crimes like drink driving had once been socially acceptable but this had been eroded over the years due to advertising campaigns and was now no longer acceptable.

Topic 3: The responsiveness of the criminal justice system to members of the public.

The opening contributor noted that sometimes when a person reports a crime they do not realise that they will be involved as witnesses in a court case. They said that their group was unable to get volunteers in the Limerick area to support victims of crime as there was a fear of potential repercussions from gangs.

The next speaker referred to the lack of support for jurors. In some cases, they could be on a jury for 5-6 weeks for a serious crime like a murder trial and are subject to traumatic evidence of a very graphic nature and yet they are offered no support in the aftermath of a trial. Jurors need to be acknowledged and get support for the work done.

Another speaker believed that it was the responsibility of the criminal justice system to protect those affected by domestic violence. There was a need for consistency in response to crime victims. Training courses for front lines services were important as a change in attitude and practice was needed. Training was important as more agencies needed to understand the importance of consistency.

One speaker said that the system was unable to deal with children under 12 years of age who are involved in criminal activity. They noted that the issue was broader than the criminal justice system. The role of parents should be looked at as they were abdicating their responsibility in some circumstances by turning a blind eye.

The final speaker noted the difficulty some migrants had interacting with agencies of the justice system. They noted the problem of incarcerating migrants who are in breach of immigration laws with criminals. They said there was a need for sentencing guidelines and to look at plea bargaining to see if it would work as an open transparent system in this jurisdiction.

Topic 4: A greater role for members of the public in responding to crime, whether by providing information or engaging in local voluntary action.

The first contributor stated that people in the Limerick area were afraid to volunteer to work with victims of crime such as the hold that organised criminals had over the community. They said that there was a perception of violence and fear in many estates.

The next speaker repeated these comments and that people had a fear of admitting crime or that they were the victims of crime. They thought that the Gardaí handing a leaflet to a family member in the week that their loved one had been killed is not enough support.

Another person spoke about ‘wayward’ children and the fact that their parents are paid child benefit despite not controlling their children. They thought that there should be deductions from such benefits as it could be a cost effective way to reduce youth crime.

One speaker said that the intimidation of witnesses was greater in the Limerick area than in any other area of the country. They suggested that there should be automatic sanctions put in place where a defendant or their acquaintances interfered with a witness even after they get out of prison.

Another speaker referred to the compulsory early retirement of Gardaí and thought there should be some way for them to stay involved in the force in some function after this time as they had built up a considerable knowledge.

The next speaker said that rather than penalising parents by removing payments from them for 'wayward' children they should be supported as penalising parents in this way could force children to become homeless.

The final speaker noted that the public want to become more involved with restorative justice as they felt that becoming involved was a civic or public duty. They noted that this would be an innovative way of involving members of the public in the criminal justice system.

Meeting 4

9 June 2011 - Galway Courthouse

Comments from the floor

Topic 1: Public confidence in the criminal justice system and its capacity to tackle crime and the fear of crime

The first speaker stated that the system was not effective. They noted that in respect of Domestic Violence we have good legislation and that the Gardaí were generally brilliant in policing. However, it was in the implementation of the orders that victims of crime were let down. They gave the example of when a barring order or a safety order was breached by a perpetrator and they were arrested. They said that there was a very low conviction rate for such breaches and that the implementation of the laws was not consistent.

Another speaker thought that the criminal justice system had taken a knock from recent cases as the public viewed the courts as lacking in follow through. They said some persons are jailed for not having a TV licence while others committing 40 burglaries and get no prison time. They said that the crime should match the time and that repeat offenders should be given custody.

A speaker noted that a lot of people would not report crime for fear of reliving the trauma when the case went to court. They said that there was a noted inconsistency with sentencing policy and that a suspended sentence could be handed down for ruining someone's life. This was particularly noticeable in respect of sexual violence where the courts totally misunderstood the severity of the offence and matters were taken too lightly. They said that there was a prevailing view that sexual offenders were not fully to blame during sentencing. They believed that there was a lack of public confidence when the public reported crimes and then saw the offender walk free with no sentence and this caused a knock-on effect of a lack of reporting.

The next speaker again spoke about sexual crimes and said that when a tough sentence was handed down, a victim felt that it was worthwhile reporting the crime against them. The speaker noted, however, that more often than not, victims found it was not worthwhile. The speaker made two suggestions. First, they noted that there was a need for national sentencing guidelines to provide consistency in the lower courts and secondly a need for a permanent criminal court of appeal. They said that while this would cost more money in the short term, it would create consistency and reduce the number of appeals in the longer term. Finally, they noted that in most EU countries the victim has a right to see the whole prosecution file.

Another speaker said that crime is a public issue not a private one and that the criminal justice system involves everyone. They said that community integration was essential to tackle crime and the fear of crime. They stated that you could change people's attitudes by becoming involved in the community and that it was very important to change attitudes by giving back to the community at a local level. They believed that the prison system is currently very overcrowded and that the current policy of those sentenced to short-term sentences being signed in and then released immediately again was

affecting the confidence of the communities in which these offenders lived. The sentences being handed down by judges needed to be carried out or people would be less likely to report crimes again.

The next speaker said that young people feel that the criminal justice system weighs heavily on the poor and less educated and that they are treated more harshly than those with money.

One person spoke about the effectiveness of the restorative caution scheme to divert young people from criminal behaviour. They noted that it allows a person to take responsibility and apologise and also to engage with the Gardaí to move away from criminal activity. They stated that currently restorative programmes are only considered in 10% of cases and that we need to look at these alternatives more often.

The next speaker reiterated that they felt that there was dissatisfaction with sentencing policy, particularly in respect of persistent repeat offenders.

Another person said that the increase in violent crime amongst younger people appeared to be out of control. They said that some young people now have a fear of going out at night in case they are targeted for an unprovoked attack. They believed that alcohol and drugs were a large cause of offending behaviour.

One speaker stated that Garda statistics show that alcohol was the main contributing factor for violent offending in respect of domestic violence, sexual violence and assault. They said that Irish society's attitude to alcohol was being passed on to children and before we attempt to lecture young people on alcohol intake we need to look at our own behaviour.

Another speaker stated that married women have no confidence in reporting a rape within the marriage and noted that despite the change in the law that there has still only been one conviction.

The final speaker said that alcohol was the drug of choice for most, especially young people. They said that millions were spent on alcohol promotions and that the voluntary code of conduct for advertising was not working and adverts were glamorised and targeted towards young people. They wanted alcohol advertising to be banned in the same way that tobacco advertising was and that a stand needs to be taken on this matter.

Topic 2: Communications between members of the public and the criminal justice system.

The first speaker asked what the point of the White Paper on Crime was. They noted a lack of consistency in implementing reports, as we don't know how successful the last consultation was as each change of Minister resulted in a new Department shake-up and that success or lack thereof needs to be communicated to the public. They said that there appears to have been an increase in violent crime over the past number of years. Younger people were buying weapons and were not satisfied in a fight unless someone was seriously injured and that civics lessons do not seem to have worked. Finally, they noted that sentencing activities need to be coordinated and that there needs to be a sincere effort and more purpose to these White Papers.

The consultation was welcomed by the next speaker who said it was important that the community feels like they have not been overlooked. They noted that JPCs need to have targets set and that the community voice needs to be heard more in the JPCs as currently they are very politically weighted

which results in a back and forth at times. They stated that Garda input has been brilliant and that reports are always ready and then they go out to the public. However, sometimes public representative's fight about things and waste time. They suggested that there be an independent chairperson and greater ownership by community groups of the JPCs.

The next speaker believed that persons in the criminal justice system should be properly trained to deal with minorities, including travellers and migrants, and that their response to domestic violence needs to improve. They said that misunderstandings happen when you do not understand the root cause of domestic violence or racism and you are unable to deliver. They noted that the Garda strategy has made great efforts but needs to be resourced better. They also said that complaints to the Ombudsman should be seen to have been dealt with, as if they are not, this affects confidence.

One speaker noted that everything which had been said so far was common sense. They said that the penalties do not fit the crimes being committed and alcohol was far too easy for young people to get. They believed that the JPC was working well in their area and was very effective.

The next speaker stated that while publicans need to go before a judge to get a licence, this was not the case for supermarkets and the main problem with alcohol abuse amongst younger persons was that they were able to get cheap alcohol from supermarkets. They considered that the sale of alcohol needed to be more regulated and that house parties were now causing problems.

The next speaker agreed with the previous speaker and said that supermarkets should be checked. They said that farmers were living in fear in rural areas. Local community Gardaí were needed in specific areas as crime in rural areas was only going to get worse without local policing.

Another speaker said that a notice for JPC meetings should go out to communities. They believed that bail is a major issue which needs to be sorted as currently if the District Court refuses bail then the High Court is just letting people out. They that community policing is very important as everyone in an area used to know who their police officer was as the Gardaí lived in the community but now people commute and are moved around a lot so there is no communication between the community and the Gardaí. They said that there was a great fear that due to cutbacks that community police would be removed from communities.

One speaker stated that there is a campaign by Gardaí on the issue of knife crime and there is good work being done on the issue but it is unknown to the general public as it isn't advertised. They said that communication was failing as good work was not being brought to the public's attention. They said that due to dangers in some areas, young persons were now afraid to leave their houses without carrying knives.

A speaker thought that it was important that something practical comes out of the White Paper on Crime as we have enough theory and reports. They said that if the recession did anything positive, it was starting to rebuild communities. JPCs are the way forward but currently they are too narrow in their function. While the JPC is working and has had positive outcomes there needs to be greater integration of agencies and support in stabilising and shaping that. This could be done, they said, by harnessing resources already available in the community. They believed that there needs to be positive activities through clubs of societies for young people involved in crime to encourage them to avoid criminal behaviour.

The next speaker considered that all Gardaí should be community Gardaí and should be working on community and building relationships in their areas. They noted that there were no migrant groups present tonight and that their views should be sought, as currently there is a perception that if a migrant complains, the complaint will not be properly dealt with. They also said that the judicial system needs to reflect all of society and needs to understand the people in the system.

One person said that there was a communication problem when women were attacked, in particular, if the investigating office was not on duty. There should be a liaison officer in every Garda station for when an arresting officer is off and a person wants an update on their case.

The next speaker stated that building relationships shouldn't just be done on an ad hoc basis and should form part of a Garda's job specification. They should be liaising with community groups and women who have suffered violence, in particular when their former partners are released from prison.

Another speaker said that there is no substitute for a Garda on the beat and that if there is a cost issue due to the recession then Garda reserve should be used.

The final speaker thought that there should be an inter-departmental strategy on crime between the Departments of Justice, Children, and Health. At the moment, they said, money was being taken from youth services and there was very little investment in youth and young people. They said that when there was greater equality in society there was less crime.

Topic 3: The responsiveness of the criminal justice system to members of the public.

One speaker noted that women find that judges make inappropriate comments and questionable rulings against them. They said that women feared having a judge on the day of their case who did not understand domestic violence. They believed that Gardaí have improved but are still not consistent in training. They finally noted that judges needed to be properly trained.

The next speaker said that alcohol and drug addiction are currently seen as a mitigating factor in criminal cases and that they should not be. They also noted that where young people are committing crimes, their parents were abdicating responsibility.

One speaker stated that there was no fear amongst young people as they know that they will be sentenced and then let out of jail immediately again. They also noted that parents need to be held accountable and that criminals should be forced to be embarrassed about their crimes.

The next speaker noted that there was currently not legal definition of what domestic violence was and a definition may be helpful to the courts.

Another said that there is a huge difference when young people know their Garda and know their name. They said that this, and involvement of community Gardaí with local clubs reduced Public Order offences. They also noted that the Garda reserve had been working out positively.

The next speaker stated that young people get blamed for a lot and need to be given leadership roles to develop. Young people need to be engaged in communities. They also noted that US criminological models do not work here and that we need to find a model that suits Ireland.

Topic 4: A greater role for members of the public in responding to crime, whether by providing information or engaging in local voluntary action.

The first speaker said that the problem with local policing from their experience was that community policing works and that Gardaí patrolling an area reduced crime. They thought that the Garda reserve could be better used and feed back information into the regular force and that it would be cost effective. Training people from a community to work in that community would be very effective.

The next speaker stated that parents are not encouraging their children to do the right thing and they are let run wild in public and have no respect for older people. They need to be taught to control their children during their younger years.

Another speaker said that in rural areas people were afraid as they were hearing news of violent attacks on the television nightly and then of perpetrators getting their sentences halved or getting a very short sentence. They believed that parents must be made take responsibility for their children as at night young people were on the streets and drunk and causing trouble. They said that the media was glamorising crime and the people involved with crime and that many papers were making criminals famous by giving them monikers.

The final speaker suggested that there should be educational scholarships on the causes of crime as this is something which needs to be studied more, in order to provide a tool of best practice and so that we can learn from it.

Meeting 5

15 June 2011 - Dublin - Institute of Public Administration

Comments from the floor

Topic 1: Public Confidence in the criminal justice system and its capacity to tackle crime and the fear of crime

The opening speaker spoke about the disengagement of the judiciary, and thought that some of them should be present to hear the consultations. They said that current sentencing policy leaves a lot to be desired and that there should be mandatory minimum sentences for drug dealers as they currently feel that they'll get away with what they're doing. Sentencing should do what it is supposed to do and sentences less than the mandatory were giving the impression that people were getting away with crimes.

The next speaker said that travellers lack of confidence in the criminal justice system. They referenced a Garda study of attitudes from 2007, which found that travellers had a very low level of confidence in comparison with the general public and they said that it was up to the Gardaí to improve this relationship. They said that travellers are over represented in both the courts and the prisons. The final point made was that sentencing was inconsistent and either perceived as being too harsh against some parties or too low against others.

The next person focused on restorative justice and noted how little of it is currently going on in Ireland. They said that other countries spend time looking after people through restorative justice models and that the involvement of families is very important. They noted the importance of restorative justice practices in bringing together people in a community conference and looking at crime in a broader sense.

The fear of crime and of organised criminal gangs was the concern of another speaker. They noted that such gangs try to control an area and those who live in that area. Fear of crime is deliberately generated by such gangs so that the area becomes a 'no go' area. They said that there was not sufficient emphasis on cleaning up areas.

The next speaker referred to CSO statistics which show that 55% of the country have little to no confidence in the criminal justice system. They juxtaposed that figure with one which said that 70% of the public are happy with the performance of the Gardaí. They stated that a high number of people are not reporting crime for a number of reasons, such as not believing that the incident was serious enough. Approximately 1/3 stated that Gardaí either couldn't or wouldn't be able to do anything about it. Another reason given for non-reporting was that the outcome wouldn't benefit them as it would cost to report or take a case. The speaker said that figures should be used to convince people that their complaints would be taken seriously and Gardaí would do something about their reports.

Another speaker stated that gangs were intimidating people into not reporting crimes. The public, they said, were being threatened with attack if they were to report matters. They said that there isn't a

good enough response from Gardaí, as these people are not properly protected and they then lose confidence in the system. What was needed was a citywide workshop on intimidation.

The next speaker referred to the problem of underage drinking and thought that Gardaí were not harsh enough on this issue.

One person said that the public confidence in the criminal justice system and its capacity to deal with fear was low. While there had been an improvement in community policing, it has not gone far enough. They said that people fear intimidation from particular families who live in specific areas. If you complain in certain areas you are putting yourself at risk and if the person you complain about doesn't get any visible sanction there is little likelihood that you will report again. They also said that the law is seen to work too slowly and that the public needed to see drug dealers locked up and not just the smaller street dealers. They said that people feel that they are not being believed and that they need to be able to report crimes to Gardaí that they trust which is why experienced Gardaí with a passion for community policing are necessary. They thought that the Gardaí, the community, the HSE and the local authority need to play a part at the preventative stage. They said that this was especially true for the HSE as it was very obvious early on when families are in trouble. Finally, they said that Limerick had been let down by regeneration. They said that when a house was de-tenanted in a housing estate it was left free for far too long and eventually burnt down and the community were left living next to many of these houses.

The next speaker said that the rural community have no confidence in the system as there is no policing in their areas. They noted that for many rural persons their 'local' station is up to 20 or 30 miles away. Resources were lacking for such stations and many had few vehicles and once those vehicles broke down the stations were left with nothing.

Another speaker opened by discussing restorative justice and noted that it needs to be looked at further and that the juvenile and adult caution schemes should be developed. Public order offences for Garda abuse and alcohol related offences could be diverted out of the system to save time and money. They noted that under the current restorative model the accused person goes through a community panel and the process is explained to them carefully and they would either have to pay a fine or say sorry and maybe seek alcohol treatment. The speaker said that in their experience this process worked and the offender rarely committed another offence. They further said that communications with victims was generally lacking in Ireland and that victim support was downgraded again recently. It should not be left to individual Gardaí to explain the process to victims and sentences should also be victim focused. They said that from a financial perspective restorative justice is cheaper than custodial sanctions and believed that mediation was also needed in the system.

The next speaker referred to intimidation of the families of drug users by drug dealers. They said that these families are being threatened with violence if they do not pay off debts, which are owed, and that something has to be put in place to protect these families.

One speaker spoke about businesses in the community and that there was a fear of crime related to the way in which the media represented crime. They said that something had to be done to tackle this and the question had to be asked as to whether the organs of the state facilitated this misrepresentation.

The next speaker said that businesses were lacking in confidence in the system and were just upping their own security without the support of Gardaí. This was upping costs and causing many businesses

to close. In addition they said that private landlords had no support when they have bad tenants and that it is almost impossible to remove somebody who is over staying their lease.

Another speaker said that teenagers have a fear of Gardaí and feel like they are being targeted or suspected by Gardaí for just being themselves.

The next speaker made a number of points. The first was that there is a lack of confidence from the new communities in Ireland as for many their Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) experience had been bad and was designed to embarrass. They said that long-term residents were treated badly and asked inappropriate questions by Gardaí. They believed there was a lack of confidence in the investigation of cases of racial discrimination. They said that human rights training should be given to Gardaí, judges and any other personnel dealing with minorities in the courts.

The final speaker said that there was huge fear in certain Dublin communities and that drug dealing and organised crime was a big contributor to that fear. Community policing was under-funded and should be increased as it was building relationships, which was key to reducing fear. They also noted that families were now going to the credit union to get loans to pay drug debts for their children.

Topic 2: Communications between members of the public and the criminal justice system.

The first speaker opened with a discussion on the rural community. They stated that it was difficult for people to know where their local station was and if someone was living close to a number of county boundaries there was very little communication between the various Garda stations about ongoing, local issues.

One speaker referred to the effectiveness of the integrated task force strategy used in Cork to tackle the drugs problem. They noted that on paper it was a wonderful strategy, however more and more statutory agencies were withdrawing and becoming more insular. They stated that JPCs were incredibly top heavy with 46 members on the committee and only two from community organisations. It was essential to them operate in a fashion similar to local policing fora which are proven to work within the community and promote confidence if utilised effectively. They noted that consistency was essential as in some areas they operated very well due to the presence of good Gardaí and in others they didn't work as well due to Gardaí not working as well with the community. Finally they said that they said that an integrated approach needs to be used in respect of the White Paper in order for it to translate into something practical.

The next speaker said that communications needed to be improved in the rural area as the population didn't know what Garda station was responsible for their local one. They said that the Garda's job should be to help the community rather than moving people on to another station.

The next speaker said that great work had been done by the Gardaí in respect of victims of crime. The Garda Victims' Charter was useful and well written. However, the real problem in respect of the victims of crime relates to communications. A victim's expectations needed to be managed very early after an offence takes place and a time frame for prosecution needed to be set out as most people were not familiar with the workings of the criminal justice system and expected communication every week. They also said that the lack of communication from the DPP was a big problem and in many cases it is only the lead investigating Garda who can give information about a case. They said that

there is no reason why every victim couldn't be given a PULSE number and on calling the Garda station that any Garda could give any informational updates on the case.

One speaker said that the backlog for Garda clearance was months in some cases and it was causing difficulties for those who wanted to take up employment and should be rectified immediately.

Another said that there needed to be a Neighbourhood Watch representative on the JPCs as at present they had no voice and the speaker believed that such representation would be very useful. They thought that Neighbourhood Watch as it currently stands is somewhat outdated and should be revamped. They stated that a rebranding would help Neighbourhood Watch schemes from falling into disuse when the crime rate falls in an area.

The next speaker said that the Garda involvement in the National Drug Strategy was very effective and that local drug task forces need to communicate. They noted that Garda vetting procedures were holding up people from getting jobs and needed to be improved. Finally they said that holding a referendum on judges' pay when one was so badly needed in respect of children's rights was disgraceful.

One person stated that in some areas regular Garda consultations are run with ethnic groups including travellers. Initiatives include regular meetings and clinics on site and credit card sized Garda contact cards are handed out. Such initiatives boost confidence in Gardaí. The problem, they noted, is that many of these initiative are ad-hoc and run by proactive persons and not rolled out nationwide.

The next speaker referred to court support for victims and said that the DPP only talks to victims of serious offences and this only happens once. Families should get a meeting more than once over a 4-6 week trial. They believed that the family liaison officer is very good but that pre-trial visits are necessary and that victims and witnesses needed to be communicated with.

Another speaker referred to the location of prisons and the difficulties that families had in accessing their loved ones. Families should be facilitated in seeing prisoners and more phone calls and weekend visits should be allowed.

The next speaker said that the JPCs had been a success and had improved confidence in the community. Local people could see their value and could potentially get more people involved. They suggested that training should be held with community Gardaí in an area and feedback should be sought from them to open a two-way dialogue between the community and the Gardaí. Finally, they spoke about the problem with drug dealing on buses and stated that there should be a text service available to report such behaviour.

One speaker said that there was room for improvement in communication by Gardaí. At the moment he noted that Gardaí from Kevin Street station were writing for a local newspaper. They noted that the Gardaí have to look at technology also and each Garda should have a calling card as people were reluctant to call stations and emails would be more effective. They said that currently there are two ways to report a crime, by physically walking into a station and telephoning in a report. This was of no use to a person who was deaf or disabled and there should be a text based service. They noted that respect for community policing was huge and that the community Garda needs to be maintained in that role and not moved onto another as it promotes better results. Next they stated that any report to a Garda station should be given a reference number so they can track the complaint. The name of the investigating officer, they noted, should be put beside the reference number so that the station

sergeant can see the progress of cases. The investigating officer should give victims their mobile number so that they can be tracked down easier. Finally they noted that teenagers needed to be communicated with more effectively and should be involved in any discussions on responses to youth criminality.

Another speaker said that more effective use of technology was necessary, in particular there was a need for email addresses for the Gardaí. They said that an interagency approach to youth crime was needed as other agencies only worked 9 to 5 and the Gardaí worked 24 hours a day. In addition they noted that crime against businesses had increased and it was difficult for management to know how to protect themselves. Finally, they said that a proper roster system for the Gardaí was needed to ensure that available resources were deployed according to demand.

The Garda website and facebook was referred to by the final speaker who said that there was no effective online presence as both of these were dead. They noted that getting involved online was effective and quick and that Gardaí could get information out very quickly in emergency situations.

Topic 3: The responsiveness of the criminal justice system to members of the public.

The first contributor referred to the victims of domestic violence and said that their treatment by judges and those working in the courts can be intimidating and inconsistent. They said that victims are not always treated with respect and the sanctions imposed depend on the judge involved. They thought that all personnel interacting with victims should be trained in domestic violence issues.

The next speaker said that victims are not used to being in the courts and the impact of attending court proceedings was not taken into account. They noted that so called 'minor offences' can still have a very serious on the victim involved.

Another speaker thought that the police response to travellers was one of over policing and under protection. They noted that communicating with the traveller community was very important and lacking in these areas, particularly for funerals. They said that where there has been better communication with travellers, they have been able to pitch their response appropriately and not over police.

The next speaker said that there was a lack of Gardaí from local areas, especially when there was a large event on. They noted that during the visits of Queen Elizabeth and President Obama there wasn't a Garda to be seen in local areas. They said that big events take community Gardaí away and when community policing disappears the confidence of the community goes.

One speaker said that there was a disconnect between the judiciary and the community, especially in respect of sentencing policy.

The final speaker said that intimidation needed to be reduced and that a targeted approach should be used. They said that it was learned behaviour and was exhibited by boys from a very young age. There should be an integrated approach to tackle this behaviour at an early stage as this would save vast amounts of money. They noted that agencies now needed to work together more than ever but that many were pulling back due to budget cuts.

Topic 4: A greater role for members of the public in responding to crime, whether by providing information or engaging in local voluntary action.

One speaker said that teachers can pinpoint children in classes whose family are currently struggling and would welcome the opportunity to be able to work with those children to try and stabilise families. It was also noted that cuts in special needs and in resource teachers would mean larger classes and less support which defies all logic as proper intervention at school level would keep people out of prisons and reduce overall costs.
