



Commitment for Change

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More Gardaí on the beat
in neighbourhoods


Labour

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Everywhere I go, people are telling me their concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour. We need more Gardai visible in communities they know, serving people they know.

Hard working families are entitled to live in peaceful law-abiding communities. I am convinced that changes in the manning, deployment and organisation of the Garda Síochána would have a hugely positive impact on people's quality of life and on the rates of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Labour is the party of communities, the party that understands the trauma that anti-social behaviour inflicts on our people, and the effect that fear of crime has on all of us.

I believe that the Gardai should be a lot more focused on community policing. We need more Community Gardai, who will really get to know the area they police, and who can become known by the people who live in these areas. Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour in this way is a key priority for us.

To deliver on this, I commit that we will triple the number of Community Gardai within 3 years. This will amount to an increase from approx 500 at present, to 1500 by 2010.

I have been all over the country meeting people in the last few months. People everywhere tell me of their hope that there is a better way to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. They tell me that the real debate now in relation to the guards is about having guards visible and active on the ground, working in partnership with the local community. People can be sure that the effective policing of their communities will be at the top of the agenda for me, and the Labour party, in government.



Pat Rabbitte

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Cost

To deliver this commitment requires reform, rather than significant additional expenditure. However, we estimate that to deliver the various elements would require some expenditure, not exceeding €10 million.

Time for Delivery

Currently, the number of Gardai allocated to Community Policing amounts to 482 or 4% of the total Garda force.

Having more guards visible in the community will be an ongoing commitment of the next government. As an interim target, we will triple the number of Community Gardai in 3 years, making a total of 1,500 Guards working directly in our communities.

Rationale

In our communities, people everywhere feel a concern about crime and anti-social behaviour. This fear is real, and the lived experiences of those who are tortured by anti-social behaviour is something that cannot be tolerated.

Over the last few years there have been a lot of measures, many of which we have welcomed, to tackle this phenomenon, but the more we look at it, talk to people about it and hear from experts, the more we are convinced that the real way to tackle these problems is through having more Gardai visible in communities they know, serving people they know. It is about building a real relationship, based on partnership, between our communities and the Gardai who police them.

When the Garda Síochána was founded in 1922, Ireland was a rural, close-knit society. The crime rate was low and anti-social behaviour was sparse. Policing was simpler then.

But since then there has been a rapid transformation and severe social and policing problems have become more and more obvious. There are more crimes, more drug and alcohol abuse, more public order offences and more anti-social behaviour, making life a misery for so many citizens.

And some communities are now facing a situation where human life has become incredibly cheap, as armed drug gangs wage war on each other and innocent lives are lost in the process. Whole communities – including some of our most marginalised communities – have suffered in their quality of life due to lawlessness, vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

Labour recognises of course that a great deal of anti-social behaviour has its roots in a whole range of social problems thrown up by decades of poor planning, inadequate or non-existent services, poor labour market support and widespread educational disadvantage. All these issues must be tackled. Anti-social behaviour cannot be fought and defeated without the wholehearted commitment of central government on a "whole government" basis, with a commitment to rationally determined, adequate, long-term funding.

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But we also need to tackle the phenomenon of anti-social behaviour directly, on the ground. We have a responsibility to ensure that people are free to live in peace and safety, free from harassment, intimidation, vandalism and fear.

The reality is that, although the growth in crime and anti-social behaviour – and, in particular, the impact of alcohol and illicit drugs on crime – have created new demands on policing, Ireland's policing structures are virtually unchanged since the foundation of the State and are now far removed from internationally recognised best practice.

- Crime has increased substantially, serious drug use has spread nationwide, much crime goes unreported and the detection rate is on the decrease.
- There is a need for a radical shake-up of existing controls and oversight mechanisms within the Gardaí. The Garda Síochána has long been very defensive about itself and slow to admit to serious structural and procedural problems within the force – and even slower to do anything about them.
- The relationship between the Gardaí and many local communities is problematic and getting worse. In those areas confidence in the Gardaí has waned, particularly among young males – the group Gardaí are most likely to encounter.

We believe in rebuilding confidence in the relationship between Gardaí and community through community structures that reconnect police and community.

Implementation

We will deliver this commitment by:

- revising Garda rostering, so that Gardaí are on the streets where and when they are most needed
- driving the civilianisation process, so that the maximum number of Gardaí are available in communities and not in offices filling out forms
- creating a new career structure for Community Guards within the force to ensure that community policing is respected and valued
- creating local policing forums in individual communities to ensure that the Guards and the community work more effectively together

For more information, please contact

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