

Submission by Dublin Town to The Garda Commission

31st January 2018.

Introduction

Dublin Town is the Business Improvement District for Dublin City Centre. The role of the organisation is to enhance business in the city centre retail core from St. Stephen's Green to Parnell Street.

Dublin Town promotes the city through various marketing initiatives and also addresses barriers to visiting the city and issues which make the city unattractive in the minds of customers.

The Company began its operations in 2008. Despite the economic crises which materialised at that time, the issue that most businesses wished to discuss was anti-social behaviour and perceptions of public safety. These concerns were echoed in consumer surveys undertaken by Dublin Town and others, most noticeably Dublin City Council through its 'Your City Your Voice' programme. It was consistently found that approximately one-third of Dublin residents did not visit the city due to concerns regarding public safety and in particular, issues relating to drug related anti-social behaviour. Dublin Town, then trading as the Dublin City Business Improvement District, sought to address these issues with An Garda Síochána.

Dublin Town's work with the Gardaí is centred on the both Store Street and Pearse Street and with the traffic corps.

Engagement & Co-operation

Dublin Town's experience has always been that the Gardaí have sought to engage proactively with the organisation and its members.

We see the level of engagement and co-operation between Dublin Town, its members and the Gardaí as a model of effective partnership.

Dublin Town organises its overall district into 5 subdistricts. 3 member meetings are held in each of these districts each year. Attendance across the entire 5 districts averages 200 business people for each round of meetings. Each meeting is attended by Gardaí at Inspector or Sargent level and on occasion by Gardaí at Superintendent and Chief Superintendent rank. This is most likely to be the case when specific issues arise. It has been our experience that matters raised are followed up by the Gardaí to our members' satisfaction.

Better City For All process: Better City For All

Clearly some issues raised required a more strategic response. This was the case in relation to drug related anti-social behaviour. This concern was at its most acute on the North Side of the city and particularly in the O'Connell Street area. In 2008 there was regular media commentary on open public drug dealing and drug taking in the area. The strategic response to difficulties arising included the Creation of the Better City For All process. This process began in 2011 and participants included Dublin City Council, Ana Liffey Drug Project, Merchants Quay, Simon Community, Dublin Town (known at that time as the Dublin City Business Improvement District) and the Gardaí. The Gardaí were represented by then Chief Superintendent Pat Leahy (now Assistant Commissioner) and Inspector Johanna O'Leary (now Superintendent). The group took a collaborative and wide ranging approach to addressing the issues arising. The group reported in 2012 and its programme is still in

operation and is being built upon. A key element of this work is joining the dots between service providers the Council and the Gardaí. An essential element of this is 'Assertive Outreach' which engages with vulnerable people on the street and seeks to find solutions to their difficulties. The Gardaí are integral to this programme.

This model of Garda collaboration with the wider community is a model that could be considered in a broader context and within other divisions. It has had a significant positive impact in Dublin City Centre. Perceptions of public safety have improved in the city and media commentary on drug related issues has practically ceased. This could not have been achieved if substantive changes had not occurred at street level.

Small Areas Policing

The Gardaí in Store Street, under the direction of Chief Superintendent Pat Leahy also developed a programme of Small Areas policing. This approach where 'Small Areas' are assigned to individual Gardaí looks at the deployment of resources based on CSO statistics of population clusters, on crime clusters but also and importantly based on people's concerns as expressed through surveys. Therefore quality of life issues that can often have a large impact but which are not readily captured by statistics are systematically addressed.

The roll out of this programme in the business district has been transformative and very much welcomed by the business community. It is very noticeable that at a time when Garda resources were declining the strategic decisions made by the Gardaí enhanced the levels of satisfaction with the Gardaí amongst business members and also perceptions of public safety amongst the public.

Key Performance Indicators such as Public Perceptions; Needle Finds; Complaints have all moved into positive territory. At a well-attended meeting called by the Gardaí in Store Street in December 2016 business were asked for their views on policing in the area. All responses were all positive. When asked what they wished the Gardaí to do next, the unanimous response was for the Gardaí to continue doing what they were doing. Feedback from the business community had been very different just 5 years previously.

The SAP model has received important recognition at EU level.

It is the view of Dublin Town that all communities stand to gain from the roll out of the Small Areas Policing Model. This should be considered a priority across all Garda divisions.

Potential Future Changes

Through customer feedback and anecdotal evidence, it would appear that safety concerns arise for those using transport. Consideration could be given to the establishment of a Transport Division perhaps allied with the Garda Traffic Corps, to provide a dedicated resource for dealing with issues of anti-social behaviour on Public Transport into and out of the city.

Resources

The reduction in Garda resources during and following the economic crises have been well documented. Dublin City Centre lost a large number of Gardaí during this period. It would be naïve to think that the reduction in the number of available Gardaí would not hinder the ability of the Gardaí to detect and prevent crime. As noted above, the issue of most concern to city centre businesses is perceptions of safety and the customer experience in the city centre. The issues that create concerns in the minds of the public such as begging, loitering and general anti-social behaviour do not occur when there are Gardaí on the street. Therefore, as Garda numbers rise and

there is greater deployment on the street we anticipate that perceptions of public safety should improve. However, it should be stressed that there are insufficient Garda resources to meet with the need for a continuous presence on the street. Larger Dublin City businesses and Dublin Town have previously expressed their interest in having a model in Dublin akin to the Belfast Beat. Under the Belfast Beat Model, businesses pay for additional police presence on their streets and work with the police on matters which are of concerns for the local business community. These tend to be more minor issues such as illegal trading, parking violations and street drinking etc..

In Summary

In Summary, Dublin City Centre's business community and Dublin Town as a representative body enjoy a very good working relationship with the Garda at both management and operational level. We believe that models such as the Better City For All approach and Small Area Policing could serve as examples and models for roll out throughout the country which we believe would bring additional benefits to those communities.