



Submission to the Garda Síochána Policing Plan 2018



An Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála,
Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil
Department of Housing, Planning,
Community and Local Government



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1. Introduction

Age Action is the leading advocacy organisation on ageing and older people in Ireland. Our mission is to achieve fundamental change in the lives of all older people by eliminating age discrimination, promoting positive ageing and securing their right to comprehensive and high quality services.

We want to make Ireland the best country in the world in which to grow old and we work with older people to build a society free of ageism where their rights are secured.

We are grateful for the opportunity to make a submission to the Garda Síochána Policing Plan 2018.

2. Background

According to the most recent census figures the number of people aged over 65 has increased since 2011 by 19.1 per cent to 637,567. There was also a 15.6 per cent increase in the number of people aged over 85 to 67,555.¹

The number of older people in Ireland will continue to increase rapidly in the years to come, changing the shape of the society the Garda Síochána is responsible for policing.

In supporting policing efforts that meets the needs of older people it is important to acknowledge that people aged over the age of 65 are the least likely to be the victims of crime, but they are also the most likely to be worried or fearful about becoming a victim.²

The apparent paradox is a result of a number of factors including the fact that an older person is often more vulnerable to a physical assault and would take longer – both emotionally and physically – to recover from it; the numbers of older people who live alone, particularly in rural or isolated communities; and the perception that older people are particularly vulnerable to being targeted by criminals for house break-ins and burglaries.

¹ <http://cso.ie/en/media/csoie/newsevents/documents/pressreleases/2017/prCensussummarypart1.pdf>

² <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/q-cv/qnhscimeandvictimisationq32015/>

We also believe that the decision to close almost 140 Garda station since 2011 undermined the sense of security that they provided many older people while also making it more difficult to access the other services provided by stations.

3. Recommendations

We would like to make a number of recommendations for consideration under the **Community Engagement and Public Safety Pillar** of the Strategic Statement 2016-2018.

i. Review and Update the Garda Síochána Older People Strategy

In 2010 the Garda Síochána published a strategy for older people following extensive consultation with representative bodies, including Age Action, internal consultations with members of the Garda Síochána working closely with older people and discussions with officials in other State bodies.

The Garda Síochána is to be commended for producing such a strategy that included a four point action plan with specific initiatives identified for each point, responsibilities allocated to specific officers and anticipated outcomes.

While undoubtedly many of the initiatives were delivered, others were not, and it would be a worthwhile exercise for the Garda Síochána to review and evaluate the implementation of the strategy.

This could serve as the first step towards producing a new, updated, strategy that takes into account the growing numbers of older people, the increased awareness of elder abuse, concerns among older people about online fraud and other developments since 2010.

ii. More support for initiatives that assist older people

As was noted above, the fear of crime among older people is greater than the likelihood of becoming a victim but, as the Garda Síochána Older People Strategy notes, fear of crime

“can significantly limit or restrict the movement and activities of individuals, which can further impact physical, social and emotional well-being”.³

Age Action spokespersons, when invited to comment on attacks on older people, frequently make the point that the best deterrent against criminals is good neighbours.

We are aware of, and appreciate, the work of the Garda Síochána in supporting **community alert and neighbourhood watch schemes**. As well as deterring crime, many of these provide a welcome sense of security for older people and they are particularly important in communities that are isolated.

We would like to see more support for these schemes and suggest, as a first step, a State-wide mapping exercise be carried out to identify those communities or areas that do not have one of these schemes operating. They could then be prioritised for targeted piece of work by the local Gardaí, with support where required, to put such a scheme in place.

It may also be useful to examine those schemes that are already running to see how many are actually active on the ground and, where inactive schemes or groups are identified, they are also targeted for greater support to restore their functionality.

We would also like to see Community Gardaí actively promoting the **Senior Alert Scheme**. As was reported earlier this month there is a significant underspend in the amount of funding set aside for the scheme.⁴

Callers to Age Action’s information service concerned about security issues are frequently surprised to know the scheme exists and, of those aware of it, many are uncertain how to apply.

³ An Garda Síochána Older People Strategy

⁴ <https://www.rte.ie/news/2017/0727/893330-senior-alerts-scheme/>

The recent Pobal report on the operation of the scheme highlighted that only one per cent of our population of over-65s avail of the scheme, rising to a still low figure of 17 per cent among over-85s.⁵

The announcement from Minister for Rural and Community Development Michael Ring that he is instructing officials to improve the promotion of the scheme is welcome.

This is an area where we believe the Garda Síochána could play a valuable and active role and it is surprising to see that only 2 per cent of individuals in possession of a Senior Alert Scheme were informed of the facility by Gardaí.⁶ This is a figure we believe could be substantially higher.

4. Conclusion

We would like to thank the Garda Síochána for the opportunity to participate in this consultation process. The force is held in very high regard by the older people who trust and rely on it to ensure their safety and security in their homes and in their communities.

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⁵ <https://www.pobal.ie/Publications/Documents/SAS%20Analysis%20Report%202016.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.pobal.ie/Publications/Documents/SAS%20Analysis%20Report%202016.pdf>