



Not for the first time, the members of An Garda Síochána have been collectively tarnished and belittled by strategic decisions made by Garda headquarters

The circumstances surrounding the commissioning, compiling, release of selected extracts and eventual publication of the Crowe Report was a very clear and easily understood example of the somewhat bizarre elements of the manner in which An Garda Síochána has been managed and overseen in recent times.

Furthermore, it demonstrated that the deteriorating industrial relations and unhealthy relationship between members of the Force, their representatives and management is not something that those in positions of leadership had any intention of resolving. A cynic might question the timing of the information being released, given the report was in the possession of the organisation for a considerable time.

A more detailed analysis however reveals more significant failings and exposes a management culture which would conceal incompetence, outsource its responsibilities and contradict its own public narrative. Firstly, the question must be asked as to why, if the issues as presented actually exist, it was not examined and addressed using supervisory and management skills at the appropriate ranks. Secondly, it should be established why it was considered necessary to spend taxpayers' money to examine internal practices and governance; what is the purpose of a management team in a public service institution if not for these very functions? Thirdly, why would a regime that has built its reputation on strict discipline and correctly holding individuals to high standards bemoan an inability to invoke the relevant regulations to address any perceived breaches of the most fundamental breach of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, Neglect of Duty?

While the specifics of the policing environment may differentiate it from many workplaces, fundamental principles of good management and leadership are very relevant. It is almost inconceivable that any manager faced with what they perceived as a performance issue amongst a small group of employees would choose to approach the issue in the manner chosen in this instance. The decision of a public sector management team to commission a private consultancy firm to establish the circumstances and then use a public oversight forum as the platform to selectively release certain details is completely unorthodox, without any precedent and completely reckless.

There is no matrix or statistical measure of the impact of this course of action on either the employees whose reputations have been dragged through the mud or the impact on public confidence in policing, something the previous Garda Commissioner has accused the Garda Representative Association of undermining when raising legitimate concerns about critical shortfalls. Not for the first time, the members of An Garda Síochána have been collectively tarnished and belittled by strategic decisions made by Garda headquarters. The strategic decision-making and management of communications has been corrosive to morale and detrimental to the motivation of our hard pressed colleagues. Attacks and criticisms of police are nothing new, they are to be expected from agenda-driven, political outliers or those motivated to subvert the authority of the state, but such a blatant act of sabotage from those charged with managing, motivating and maintaining the confidence of the public truly is unique.

The circumstances of the most recent report and how the information was released bore an alarming similarity to when the Garda Commissioner and chair of the then Policing Authority publicly apologised to the public

for gardaí not responding to 999 calls. The impact and damage done by that episode was without doubt a significant factor in such an overwhelming majority of gardaí losing confidence in the Garda Commissioner. The damage done to morale is immeasurable but perhaps more concerning, it may be irreversible. To suggest to bereaved families that the very women and men who attended the horrific scene of a collision that took their loved one's life or stood with them through a lengthy investigation and prosecution in the pursuit of justice are not committed to saving lives on our roads is offensive to all involved. What the report failed to capture was the dismay and frustration of dedicated, motivated gardaí being goaded, taunted and humiliated by recidivist dangerous road traffic offenders on a daily basis, who act with impunity on the streets, roads and public parks of our cities, towns and villages as policies unfit for purpose forbid them to interact, disincentivise proactive policing and create a fear to act.

The appointment of a new Garda Commissioner is an opportunity to heal and thrive for everyone in the organisation. Commissioner Kelly will find himself at the helm of a workforce that is enthusiastic, committed and willing to give their absolute best to policing and to the citizens of Ireland.

Many inhibitors to achieving the shared goal and vision of management and those on the frontline are internal and can be overcome in an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual respect.

The Garda Representative Association remains committed to finding solutions that will enhance service to the public and create a positive workplace for everyone within the organisation.

If the new commissioner chooses to listen, he will find the association to be a constructive stakeholder in rebuilding trust and confidence in the leadership of An Garda Síochána.