



## An understaffed, overburdened workforce is ready to buy into a shared vision of an effective police service which is a good place to work

**T**he newly appointed Garda Commissioner has taken up his role at a time when the pressures on policing are numerous, varied and unpredictable. Social tensions domestically, coupled with international geopolitical uncertainty, are a constant, if unquantifiable, additional pressure on top of the day-to-day demands of keeping a population safe. The responsibility and expectations placed on the Commissioner are an onerous burden which must be borne under intense scrutiny and oversight. In order to succeed in the role Justin Kelly will need to lead, motivate and inspire his workforce.

Adversity breeds resilience they say and there is no doubt gardaí collectively feel battered, bruised and traumatised as the streets have become more hostile and traumatic and emotionally draining incidents more common. Social media has placed additional pressures on members and their families which has been hugely detrimental to the wellbeing of those who respond to complex and difficult situations on a daily basis. Despite the unpredictable challenges of policing in a modern, diverse nation there remains a steadfast resolve amongst gardaí to rise to the challenges and deliver a quality service to all members of society.

An Garda Síochána has a proud history of maintaining law and order while protecting citizens from criminality, disorder and subversion wherever that threat may have emanated from. The capacity of the organisation to deliver on its fundamental responsibility to the State and its citizens has traditionally been achieved because of the connections and trust between communities and gardaí. The organisation may have evolved but it never strayed too far from the principles and values that shaped it from its inception and gave it a legitimacy and credibility amongst the population we serve. This connection with communities should never have been compromised, taken for granted

or gambled away by the lazy, experimental superimposition of a policing model bearing remarkable similarities to ones which have failed in other jurisdictions.

Of course it is not credible to suggest that An Garda Síochána has not been without its failings or weaknesses; nor would anyone argue that change or modernisation was not required. Like every organisation there have been dark days and failings at various points in the organisation's history. Acknowledgement and analysis of failures and wrongdoing are well-documented and make for stark reading in the form of reports issued by commissions of investigation and tribunals of enquiries. Anyone who has taken the time to study such reports will see a recurring theme highlighted as a contributory factor to critical organisational failure. The importance of the rank of superintendent in ensuring consistency and proper standards is a focus by both Mr. Justice Morris and Mr. Justice Kevin O'Higgins.

Concerns aired at the recent annual conference of the Association of Garda Superintendents echoed concerns previously raised by the Garda Representative Association and the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors about the effectiveness of the Garda Operating Model.

What is abundantly clear and undeniable is that the policing model as introduced has weakened community links. There is consensus across all ranks within the organisation and those reliant on the services of gardaí to protect communities and businesses have made similar observations. It is entirely logical and reasonable to predict that the expansion of geographical areas and numbers of personnel under the command of superintendents will lead to the very problems and shortcomings uncovered and highlighted by previous external independent inquiries. After all, "those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it".

What those within the organisation will take some encouragement from will be the comments of Commissioner Kelly at the recent Police and Community Safety Authority meeting held in public. The Commissioner acknowledged the violence being faced by gardaí, announced the piloting of tasers for some frontline personnel and highlighted inadequacies in the legislation gardaí are having to rely upon to deal with lawlessness and the anti-social use of e-scooters and motorbikes. His commitment to review the Operating Policing Model and the public acknowledgement that the model has led to inefficiencies and is not working well was indicative of a clear change in thinking within Garda HQ.

The appointment of a new Garda Commissioner will not change the complex, hostile and unpredictable environment our members are experiencing on a daily basis. No individual can reverse the cultural and societal changes that have impacted on policing services across the world. What one individual can do is provide leadership, acknowledge difficulties and make their team feel supported when asked to undertake difficult tasks. The Commissioner appears to be listening and has demonstrated an awareness and understanding of some of the most pressing concerns of Garda members. An understaffed, overburdened workforce is ready to buy into a shared vision of an effective police service which is a good place to work.

**Ensuring the organisation has the capacity to create a positive working environment that cultivates and facilitates growth and improvements in service will require leadership and meaningful engagement from the Commissioner and his team.**