

## Strategy Statement Pillars 2016-2018

Submission made by the Traveller Visibility Group, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2017.

<b>National And International Security</b>
<b>Strategic Commitment</b> Protect the State and the people against terrorism in all its forms and other threats to the State's security. Actively contribute to international security. Ensure that we are fully prepared for any major emergency situation that may arise
<b>Key areas for consideration:</b> Enhance terrorist financing and intelligence analysis capabilities. Improve cyber security and cyber crime investigation capacity Build relationships to reduce extremism
<b>SUBMISSION:</b>
<b>Confronting Crime</b>
<b>Strategic Commitment</b> Focus on preventing crime from happening; putting victims at the heart of the Garda service and implementing a renewed approach to crime investigation
<b>Key areas for consideration</b> Professional service provision to victims of crime and especially Sexual crime Improve investigation management Target OCG's Manage offenders
<b>SUBMISSION:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>I. Many Traveller families do not feel that the Gardaí offer protection to them. This is because they experience a very slow Gardaí response time to calls of incidents on halting sites (Spring Lane Halting site is an example here). Practices of frequent stop and search and questioning of young Travellers (especially van drivers and young Traveller men generally) do not build trust. Also Garda car patrols on halting sites/ group housing schemes up to three times a day with no interaction from the Gardaí with the community do not build trust. Many Travellers do not feel they are treated with respect when they need to use Garda stations (e.g. lack of eye contact, unfriendly manner, Gardaí casually dropping into an unrelated conversation stating they know other family members who have criminal records all makes innocent people presenting to Garda stations feel criminalised and racially profiled).</li><li>II. Issues of feuding are something Gardaí need to be sensitive around. Sometimes they can make matters worse. There needs to be more understanding around this and families involved in incidences of feuding need to be offered adequate protection. The Traveller projects can provide an insight and the West Cork Traveller Conflict Initiative is an example of Gardaí working with Traveller organisations to look at developing better responses to this.</li><li>III. Members of the Traveller community experiencing Domestic Violence have often reported a slow response from the Gardaí and perception that domestic violence is common place amongst the Traveller community and that Travellers have their own ways of resolving this. However, this is not the case and victims expect to be treated just as seriously as those reporting domestic violence in the wider community. Trying to leave a domestic violence situation in the Traveller community is difficult because people are part of the one extended family and there is judgement due to traditional values in the Traveller community. This makes it difficult for individuals to report instances of domestic violence, along with the fact that they fear that their children will be brought into care if it is reported, and requires an exploration of key stakeholders to support</li></ol>

ways of overcoming this for victims which can keep them safe. An appreciation of this and commitment to it by Gardaí, who are often the first response to these instances, is necessary. We have dealt with instances of domestic violence involving individuals having to relocate themselves in Cork from other parts of the country. This can lead to a number of problems for them in terms of accessing social welfare allowances and accommodation as services providing these resources to them require proof of the situation otherwise they will not get these resources in Cork and may have to return to the situation. Again, an understanding of how the Traveller community needs to be sensitively dealt with in this regard requires consideration so that individuals feel respected and believed and so that ways of supporting proof can be identified and applied appropriately for better outcomes.

## Roads Policing

**Strategic Commitment** Adopt a cross organisational approach to promote and enforce public safety on our road network and deny its use for criminal activity

**Key areas for consideration** Enhance partnerships, High visibility enforcement Driver education Moving from a Traffic Corps to Roads Policing

### SUBMISSION:

- I. The Traveller Visibility Group is located on 25 Lower John Street. This street has a number of side streets (alley ways) on it which are located close to TVG and which can be described as the hub of a lot of anti-social behaviour including drug and alcohol use, congregating of groups of people which can be intimidating, and reports of attacks by passers-by which regularly result in Gardaí having to access our premises to look through CCTV footage. Along with this there are also a number of derelict buildings beside TVG which can, from time to time, have suspicious activity coming from them which can be concerning and lead to people feeling fearful accessing our project at different times throughout the day. It has to be noted that there has been Garda presence on this street from time to time but it can be ad-hoc. More visibility on the street and consultation with staff in TVG as well as local residents of Lower John Street and surrounding areas is necessary to explore ways forward which will result in a decrease in anti-social behaviour and activity, and support people accessing this street feel safe.
- II. Traveller Horse Ownership is something which is culturally significant to the Traveller community. It does require Garda response from time to time if there are difficulties around straying horses for example. However, there have been difficulties around the enforcement of Cork City Council's control of horses' by-laws and reports by Travellers of heavy-handed practices by Gardaí and officers in the horse pound when horses are impounded which can leave Traveller men and young Traveller boys devastated. Operation Copall (Nov 2013) whereby 83 horses were rounded up in a mass impoundment starting at 6am on the day in question, as a result of the Department of Agriculture, Cork City Council and Gardaí plan, is an example of this. There is a horse initiative working group which exists in the city, led by the Healthy Cities Coordinator which is identifying initiatives to support Traveller horse ownership, and which also has Gardaí membership. We urge consideration of this in policing of issues relating to horses and roads; and appreciation of the fact that many Traveller men, through the

enforcement of new by-laws for the city, have lost horses and struggle to partake in a hobby and past-time which is very much embedded in their culture. This is having a serious impact on some Traveller men's health. Ongoing commitment to exploring balanced solutions with all key stake holders on the topic is necessary in order to create opportunities that will support Travellers to continue to keep horses and to be compliant with legislation which will in turn support more harmony in the general community around the keeping of horses in an urban setting. This is important under roads policing because a practical support that could be facilitated by the Garda is in relation to road closures for organised events like Trots which also include safety management plans etc.

### **Community Engagement and Public Safety**

**Strategic Commitment** Promote and embed a new community policing ethos across An Garda Síochána to enhance trust and confidence and to ensure a visible, accessible and responsive service

**Key areas for consideration** Enhancing our community focus , Provision of information , Building relationships with all communities, High visibility patrolling

#### **SUBMISSION:**

- I. Travellers experience high levels of discrimination in their day to day lives. This discrimination can particularly present itself when they access facilities in the community including pubs, hotels, restaurants and fitness centres. Discrimination can have a devastating effect on individuals in the community and is something that has been underlined in the AITHS (2010) as one of the over-riding impacts upon Traveller's health and which has severely contributed to the low health status of the Traveller community in Ireland. Thus, we are urging that the strategic plan seeks to provide an insight into how it will respond to this issue for the community in terms of committing to following up on discrimination instances reported and treating them with utmost seriousness. Furthermore, providing proactive responses to Hate Crime legislation and supporting Traveller projects and Travellers in highlighting the high instances of discrimination that exist in our society in relation to Travellers.
- II. There have been instances of use of armed responses on halting sites over the past number of years in Cork. These instances have included large numbers of Garda being present to support Cork City Council officials when they visit halting sites. This is unwarranted and results in racializing Travellers negatively in the public and officials minds as a dangerous and potentially violent people. It further concerns Traveller projects and the Traveller community in that it can appear that Gardaí are too keen to accede to council requests for Garda escorts. Also, some of the evictions that Gardaí have supported have been illegal and local Gardaí have not sought information from local Traveller projects beforehand to ensure they are fully informed and responding adequately to all parties. Furthermore, it can be considered to be a waste of public money and as something which is negatively impacting on the relationship between Travellers and the Gardaí. Working closely with Traveller projects and establishing more balanced ways of approaching situations are likely to have better outcomes for the community and the situations at hand.
- III. Drug dealing, as with all communities where this is happening will want to do something about it. Unfortunately, Travellers who are aware of people in their community dealing

drugs feel very frightened about how to approach and report this to the Gardaí because the community is small and there could be threats of violence which could result in long term feuds etc. Again, consultation and with Traveller projects and families to identify supportive structures around this is necessary. Another opportunity may be to nominate a Garda to participate in the TVG Drugs and Alcohol Project (funded by the Cork Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Force).

- IV. There are a number of initiatives across the city which Traveller projects and Travellers lead and are part of and which have Gardaí presence. We would like to encourage this going forward. It is a real positive also that we can use the free Garda bus service on outings etc. but there have been difficulties with accessibility of this over the past year in relation to the TVG delivering equine programmes to young Travellers across the city. Challenging behaviour of some young Travellers on the bus may have exacerbated this but we need to work together around this so that a service just does not become available anymore. Much more could be done to ensure optimum use of Gardaí with the Traveller community that focuses on protection and advice rather than criminality. Community Guards could also increase their productivity by being more proactive and creative in engaging the Traveller community, especially with youth. Horses, soccer tournaments, sports and education (which could include opportunities for young Travellers with community Guards) should be key areas for more hands-on initiatives that could build more trust and understanding. This has developed well with some community Gardaí but the fact that these Gardaí are also used as the Guards to attend to evictions, horse impoundings, and crime within the community can be a conflict of interest and needs consideration by the Gardaí if you are working to build relationships within communities.
- V. Gardaí awareness of Traveller culture and the sometimes complex issues for families on the ground is what we would fundamentally be recommending for so to support more positive outcomes around policing in the community. This is paramount in light of the state recognition of Traveller ethnicity on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017, the launch of the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (2017 to 2021) and public services obligations under section 42 (positive duty) in the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014.

### Organisational Development and Capacity Improvement

**Strategic Commitment** Professionalise, Modernise and renew An Garda Síochána to meet with the changing demands and expectations of communities; and emergent security and policing challenges

**Key areas for consideration** Promote ethical behaviour, Enhance good governance, Train and develop staff  
Use technology better

#### SUBMISSION

- I. Traveller Culture Awareness training along with Equality and diversity training is something which we consider necessary for Garda staff and services to engage in genuinely and meaningfully; in respect of working with and responding to the needs of the Traveller community.
- II. TVG has worked with Garda Dave McInerney (Dublin Based) who is part of the Garda Racial Intercultural and Diversity Office in partnership with the Traveller Midlands Mediation Services in relation to conflict resolution initiatives for Spring Lane Halting

Site. This has been extremely positive and is an example of developing good models of practice with Travellers. We feel that examples like this deserve more recognition in order to develop ways that initiatives like this can contribute to Gardaí commitment to protecting rights and supporting equality.