



Limerick Chamber

Advancing business together



Limerick Chamber

Submission on Limerick Divisional Policing Plan 2023

January 2023

Introduction

Firstly, Limerick Chamber would like to thank An Garda Síochána for the opportunity to submit our views on the Limerick Division Policing Plan for 2023. Following on from the very successful public meeting, Limerick Chamber commend An Garda Síochána on running an inclusive consultation process. The public meeting, being very well attended, displayed the positive relationship between the people and business of Limerick and An Garda Síochána.

Ensuring the safety of businesses, employees, residents and visitors to Limerick plays a central part in revitalising Limerick City Centre and surrounding towns and villages. Many of our members are located within the city centre and suburbs with public access to their premises and are able to provide key insight into actions that are necessary to ensure that Limerick City improves as a safe area to live, work, visit and socialise.

Limerick Chamber is committed to supporting An Garda Síochána and other organisations to create a safer region, as seen in our submissions made on the [Public Use of CCTV](#) and also on the Local Authority [Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy](#).

Limerick Chamber is the largest business representative body in the Mid-West, with c. 400 member organisations supporting 50,000 jobs across the region. Limerick Chamber has engaged with some of our members to provide insight on their current security concerns for this submission.

Data

Data suggests overall crimes reported are on a downward trend. However, Limerick Chamber understands, from speaking to our members, that crime and anti social behaviour is not being reported. The time it takes to report each individual issue has significant implications for businesses. This is especially true when businesses feel they are not getting an appropriate response either from phone lines being busy and remaining on hold, or else physical response time not being appropriate. Reporting fatigue is something that is experienced by businesses where they become weary of the process and feel that they are not receiving an appropriate outcome which leads to issues going unreported. However, Limerick Chamber understands that there are changes being made to the phone system to improve processing times but under-reporting of crime could lead to the normalisation of petty crime.

Noting the data issues outlined by the CSO, there are some worrying trends in the underlying data where there are increases in theft from shops, attempts or threats to murder / harass and sexual related cases.

* From the CSO "The new classification statistics Under Reservation has been applied to reflect that there are data quality issues in the underlying sources. In the case of Recorded Crime statistics, this classification systems serves as a warning for users that there are deficiencies in the data and revisions are expected."

Limerick Division - Data Under Reservation * (Source: CSO)

Fig 1.1: Recorded Crimes

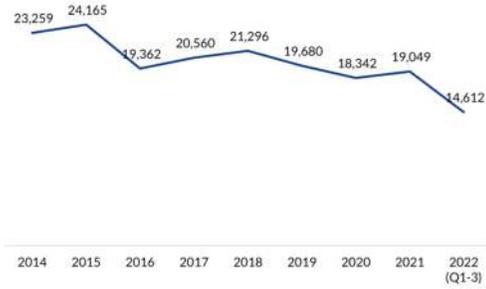


Fig 1.2: Sample of Downward Trends

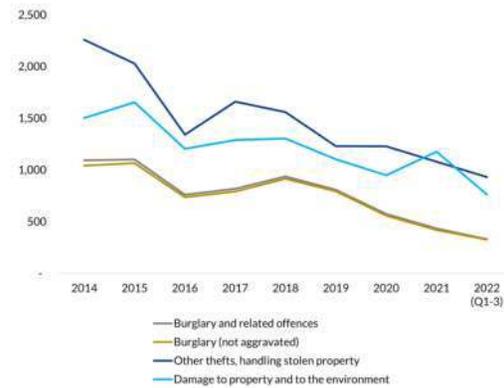


Fig 1.3: Sample of Upward Trends

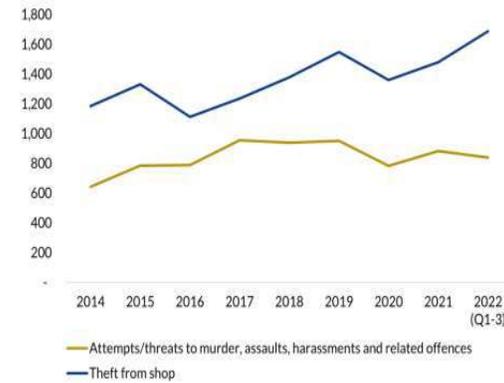
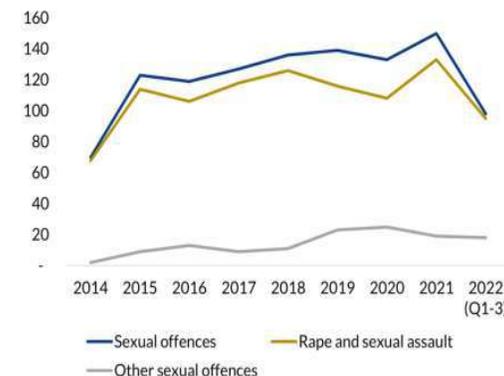


Fig 1.4: Sexual Related Crimes



Business Feedback

Limerick Chamber, and our members, would like to commend An Garda Síochána for their tireless work in keeping the streets safe, however we feel that they are under-resourced which results in a lack of visible police presence. We understand there is an issue with funding and constrained resources. Limerick Chamber holds ongoing conversations with business owners and has received several pieces of feedback which point to worrying outcomes for businesses. Dealing with crime is not unique to Limerick, as highlighted in a recent RTÉ Prime Time report about Dublin City Centre, but it is an area where many businesses deal with similar issues no matter the location.

Feedback from members indicate that constrained resources is leading to slow response times and long waiting times when reporting issues over the phone. However, there are some instances where issues have been dealt with in a prompt manner. Business would like to see more consistency in this regard with faster response and phone times. Businesses further highlighted that when they have dealt with Gardaí directly it was cooperative manner and they are keen to maintain that positive relationship.

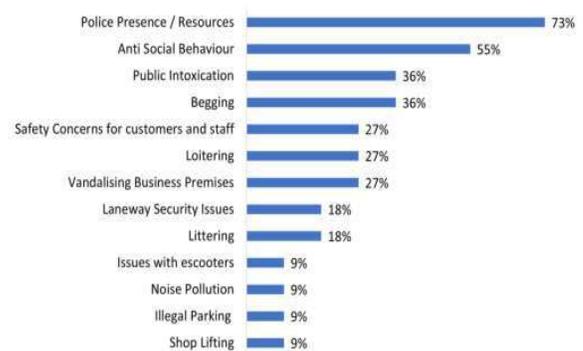
The overarching consensus in the feedback we received was that there is a critical need for a stronger visible presence of uniformed Gardaí on foot patrol around the city centre. Businesses in customer-facing industries have flagged concerns of the safety of their customers and staff, with businesses receiving feedback of the disruption and intimidation caused by both youths and adults present around their businesses and city centre.

Experiencing intimidatory behaviour is a large disincentive for people to visit, work in and spend money in an area. Some of our members operate their staff entry and delivery points down smaller side streets and laneways, streets that are often poorly lit and not well monitored. These streets, as well as main door access to businesses, have been identified as gathering points for anti-social behaviour, loitering, begging, open drug use / dealing and littering with disruptions to deliveries and concerns over staff safety being flagged - further adding to the intimidation felt by staff and customers. Worryingly, several business have reported observing the concealment of bladed weapons and narcotics near their premises as well as the littering of used drug paraphernalia - which poses a serious health and safety hazard. To add to the intimidation felt by staff and customers alike, business owners have observed an increase in petty theft from their stores which not only results in a loss of revenue but also a loss of time when attempting to report the crime.

Illegal parking has become extremely obtrusive in Limerick City Centre. It is essential that this is tackled. Not only does it create an unsafe environment but it takes away from some of the investment made in public realm projects. It also has serious implications for business deliveries by obstructing access. The increased use of fast travelling e-scooters on footpaths and scrambler use on roads and pedestrian areas in the city centre creates further hazards for other city users and has become a serious accident waiting to happen.

It is important that businesses feel that reporting is worth it with a tangible outcome. Some members have highlighted the desire to be updated on how a case has progressed past initial investigation e.g. to court, prosecution etc.

Fig 1.5: Sample of Issues Experienced by Members



Source: Internally Gathered from Limerick Chamber Members

Impact

Footfall

Feedback from members has indicated that crime and anti social behaviour has a negative impact on the footfall in towns and cities. As a result this impacts business revenues and attractiveness of locations. A more visible Garda presence would help to mitigate the safety concerns felt by people. This is particularly important given the impact of rolling crises that businesses have faced, over the last several years from Brexit, Covid-19, staffing issues and other implications from the war in Ukraine.

Staff Retention & Workplace Safety

Limerick Chamber has heard multiple reports from businesses that staff safety concerns are affecting business operations. Some staff are refusing to work late nights and evenings due to the increase in crime and anti-social behaviour. For staff continually dealing with these issues, they are ending their employment and moving elsewhere. This has significant business implications and adds further pressure on business operations. Furthermore, outside staff retention, businesses have a high level of concern related to staff safety, largely driven by violent crime and intimidation.

Visitor Experience

Limerick markets itself, not only as a place to live and do business, but also a place for tourists to visit. Safety for visiting guests is a core concern for hospitality members. Issues faced by tourists and other visitors has the potential to negatively impact Limerick's brand and marketing efforts. If these issues are not addressed it could affect tourists decisions to come to Limerick.

Return on Investment

Businesses in Limerick make a significant investment in their premises to improve their customer experience offering, which benefits the overall ambience of the area. However, Limerick Chamber has received numerous reports from businesses whereby their premises has been damaged or vandalised. This results in businesses paying for repairs, which affects the bottom line of the business and also desire to invest in the future. To ensure Limerick is an attractive place to do business we must ensure that there is a return on, and protection of, their investment.

Recommendations

1 Increased Numbers of Uniformed Frontline Police

While acknowledging the funding constraints. Based off our member feedback, it is imperative that uniformed frontline, on the beat, policing is increased.

2 Redeployment of Gardaí

With c. 14 members of An Garda Síochána working within Limerick Courthouse, there is scope to redeploy these members to frontline policing with courthouse duties being undertaken by security firms, as is the standard in other cities.

3 Static Post - Pilot Programme

Some of our members have highlighted the potential benefits of having Gardaí stationary at key population areas in the city. This could be trialled and piloted on O'Connell Street to assess the potential impact and efficacy. 'Chatting benches' have been introduced by Gardaí in the past, not only would this create a physical semi-permanent Garda presence but it would also increase communications with the local community.

4 Demographic Management

Ireland's population is due to increase in the coming years, in the last year we have observed significant unexpected increases in our population. It is essential that any policing strategy includes adequate workforce planning accounting for any retirements and changes in population at a county and regional level in order to maintain a sufficient population of An Garda Síochána. It is not sufficient for a one size fits all policy to be undertaken at a national level without county and regional targets. This is particularly relevant for county Limerick, which occupies the majority of the land area of the overall division albeit with a more spread out population.

5 The Importance of Reporting

It is important to continually run campaigns to inform organisations of the importance of reporting incidents. For businesses that have regular issues there can be an element of fatigue with reporting and they might eventually stop reporting if they feel it is not worth it, as has been the case. However, robust data is critical for policy decision making and will benefit the region in the long-term. It also provides an evidence base for seeking further resources / funding.

6 Road Safety & Illegal Parking

Provisional Road Safety Authority (RSA) figures for 2022 indicate that 18 more people died on Irish roads versus 2021. The three major cities; Dublin (13), Cork (13) and Limerick (10) had the largest share of deaths. Any effort made to reduce road deaths would be most welcome. There also must be a marked increase in enforcement of illegal parking and combating dangerous vehicle users (i.e. scrambler use).

7 All Agency Approach

While An Garda Síochána have an essential role in our society, it is important to note that this work cannot be done alone or in isolation. It is critical that other organisations and support services are part of implementation of plans especially with regards to the availability of social services in the evening. Often, due to the lack of evening supports for homeless, mental health and addiction service, Gardaí end up dealing with these vulnerable people. This takes up Garda time which could be spent elsewhere, that is why there needs to be increased social services, especially in the evening.

8 Community Policing

It would be beneficial for businesses if they had a main point of contact in their local Garda Station that could be contacted via email. Feedback from our members outlines that sometimes the phone lines to the Garda Station are busy and it can be difficult to flag non-emergency or recurring issues which can sometimes result in issues going unreported.



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