

# Lack of policing causing concern in rural areas

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Further to the response to these developments within the force, 'the Organisational Development Unit (ODU) within An Garda Síochána was set up in 1994 to enhance the effectiveness by researching policy issues and carrying out reviews and evaluations of specific areas of policing'[1]. By and large the new system was correct but some corrective action was needed to be taken to iron out the teething problems that prevailed within the new system. Unfortunately, the required remedial action did not take place and what we received was 'fire brigade' response to the detriment of many country garda stations and communities.

One of the major problems that arose from the new regionalisation policy was, that, suddenly the local garda on the beat was a thing of the past and not alone were they not know in the community but now the opportunities were also very limited for the local garda on the beat to get to know, in a manner familiar their predecessors, the community that they were now serving. As a consequence the new policy seen outlying stations open only for a short period of time each day.

Unfortunately, for one particular community the effective policing system has been proved to be disappointing. Since its inception the policy system has been fragmenting on a continuous basis, almost the point of extinction. The unstinting work undertaken by the local community alert groups has proved to be of great benefit and support to the local gardaí and a visual success of the new system.

The villages of Lanesboro and Ballyleague that divides the counties of Longford and Roscommon straddles the river Shannon. It is a crucial and strategically important area in terms of policing, as all traffic, be it motor traffic going east to west and visa versa and boat traffic along the Shannon coming out of and

going into Lough Ree and beyond can be routinely and easily monitored. With the growing instances of crime and movement of drugs throughout the country as a whole, a crossing such as the Lanesboro Ballyleague crossing is of the utmost importance in the fight against crime and should receive due policing attention.

The Lanesboro Gardai which is part of the Longford Westmeath division, , have responsibility for the town of Lanesboro and the parishes of Rathcline, Newtowncashel, Killashee, Kenagh, Colehill, and Ardagh to the east as well as Ballyleague and the greater part of the parish of Kilgefin to the west. Anybody that is familiar with the areas mentioned will realise that this is predominately a rural area and will also be fully aware of the size of the area involved. The enormity facing the local gardaí – with a full compliment – in adequately policing the area in its entirety to a level expected and demanded by all the inhabitants in this area is long and arduous. As a matter of fact it belies the Garda mission statement that states that community commitment and personal protection are two of their objectives for each and every citizen.

In the initial stages of the newly implemented policy in 1992, the strength in the force in Lanesboro totaled 12, comprising of three sergeants and nine Gardaí aided and abetted by the recently introduced 'green man', a sophisticated intercom system, that patched you through to Longford Garda station if the local barracks was unattended. Although not sufficient in numbers those 12 men – an all male station – ensured to the best of their ability that the area was policed to the highest standard. This, you must remember, was at a time that the crime rate and other instances that involved gardaí involvement was not as great as it is today but still was on the increase. Their commitment was without exception.

In the Ireland of today and indeed the Lanesboro Garda area, the instances of crime and the need for garda involvement in many other issues has grown out of all proportions and the men and women of the present force are fighting seriously against a rising tide. The reason for this is the continuous downsizing of the force in Lanesboro which at present has a station force comprising of two sergeants and four gardaí. To anyone, even the uninitiated, this is a complete mystery as to why this was allowed to happen in such a strategically important area.

Instead of bolstering the numbers in Lanesboro to an acceptable level we see, on an ongoing basis, gardaí serving Lanesboro are regularly to be seen doing their duty in Longford town causing further erosion of the protection that should be afforded to the people of the Lanesboro Garda area.

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politicians that the Garda force would be brought up by 20000 to a strength of 16,000. What with the peace process in place in Northern Ireland and the lesser need for the continued big numbers along the border it is incredible to believe that an area such as the Lanesboro garda area should be downsized to the extent it now finds itself.

If this is happening to an area with such strategic significance such as Lanesboro then many more garda areas in the country with perceived lesser significance are facing a similar if not more drastic cuts. It is a question that the hierarchy within the Garda Síochána has to seriously look at and take the necessary action. All areas in the country deserve to be policed to the highest level and we hope that in the very near future the imbalance that now prevails will be rectified to the satisfaction of all garda areas that are presently feeling the pinch in regard to declining garda numbers.

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