

# ***District 'A' Local Area Policing Plan***

A Submission From



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## Introduction

### Merchants Quay Ireland – Homeless & Drugs Services

Merchants Quay Ireland (MQI) provides a wide range of services for people who are homeless and problem drug users<sup>1</sup> in partnership with Dublin City Council, the Health Services Executive, the Homeless Agency and other statutory services. Our services range from open access crisis intervention and health promotion services, to day support programmes, educational programmes, vocational training and settlement support services. We work with approximately 4,000 people who are homeless and drug users at our various centers every year. For more information visit [www.mqi.ie](http://www.mqi.ie)

MQI believe that homelessness and problem drug use are primarily public health and social care issues. We feel that drug treatment, social and health care interventions and the provision of appropriate housing are the most effective means of addressing these issues including addressing public nuisance and any anti-social behaviour that may be associated.

Homelessness and drug use are major social problems of our time. In recent months there has been increased focus on the day time activities of out of home drug users with growing concerns about anti social behaviour. Nonetheless it should be noted that much of the anti social behaviour taking place in our cities actually takes place in the vicinity of pubs and clubs particularly at closing times, where alcohol use is a major factor.

Numerous research studies in the U.K have shown that anti-social behaviour reflects wider problems of social exclusion and deprivation such as, poverty (Haworth and Manzi, 1999) and drug use (Scott and Parkey,1998).

Services working with drug users and people who are homeless can play a role in minimising anti social behaviour and public nuisance issues by providing

- A place for people to go during the day. Rough sleepers and many persons staying in emergency accommodation have nowhere to go and this can result in issues relating to loitering and congregating in particular areas.
- A pathway into treatment. Almost seventy-five per cent of those who accessed MQI's residential programme (High Park) in 2005 were homeless drug users.
- Links into settlement and integration services to facilitate people in addressing their accommodation, training and employment needs.
- Access to health and other social care services.

Merchants Quay Irelands Drop in Service for Homeless Persons and our Needle Exchange Service are based in the city centre where people who are homeless and drug users often find themselves. Our services are unique in that we provide the only five days per week needle exchange in Dublin and in our homeless services we are especially geared to meeting the needs of homeless drug users. The lack of adequate needle exchange services in the Dublin region together with a sharp rise in the numbers of homeless drug users have driven increased demand for our services in recent years.

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<sup>1</sup> A problem drug user is “any person who experiences social, psychological, physical or legal problems related to intoxication and/or regular excessive consumption and dependence, as a consequence of his or her use of drugs or other chemical substances” Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (1982) Report of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. The Stationery Office. London.

We are keen to reduce demand for our services at Merchants Quay and to this end we are supportive of the establishment and further development of localised services for people who are homeless and drug users. This however, has proven difficult in the past with issues in relation to services location and local opposition.

### **Community Liaison Officer (CLO)**

MQI initiated a Community Liaison Pilot Project and in March 2005 we employed a Community Liaison Officer (CLO) to address the following areas:

Neighbourhood Nuisance to work towards effectively addressing neighbourhood nuisance in the local area. The CLO deals with all such issues that are brought to the attention of Merchants Quay Ireland, and any other critical incidents that may occur in the general Christchurch area.

Representation The CLO represents Merchants Quay Ireland at relevant local community fora including the local task force, the Community Policing Forum, a local area community forum and two service user forums. In turn, the CLO brings the views of others involved in these forums to the attention of management at MQI. This has led to some significant policy changes that have impacted positively on the local community

Linking with the Local Community The CLO is also responsible for the development of links with members of the local community to build positive relationships and to exchange information and knowledge. Those the CLO links with include local residents, An Garda Siochana, community business interests, drug users, and local community groups and services.

Community Training As part of the liaison work with the local community, the CLO has the remit of co-ordinating training for relevant groups in the locality.

Internal Merchants Quay Ireland Liaison Linking with the relevant MQI services related to local community issues is also an important aspect of the CLO's role. This ensures that timely and efficient two way communication between the local community and MQI services.

### **Discarded Needle Collections**

The MQI Outreach Team collect discarded needles in the Christchurch area on a daily basis. The Outreach team also respond to requests from individuals or organisations to remove discarded needles.

## Recommendations

Merchants Quay Ireland makes the following recommendations for consideration in the development of the District 'A' Local Area Policing Plan.

### Support for the Development of Low Threshold Services

Garda support for the development of new daytime services for people who are homeless and problem drug users including "wet" services, new needle exchange services and safer injecting facilities, as a means of addressing public nuisance and reducing the numbers of homeless people and drug users needing to travel to the city centre for basic services would be of great value.

Recommendation 1: Garda support for the development of new daytime services and low threshold services for people who are homeless and problem drug users in a range of locations.

### Collection and Disposal of Injecting Paraphernalia

Discarded needles, syringes and other related drug use paraphernalia are a significant source of public concern. One of the most effective ways of addressing their disposal is the placing of appropriate 'sharps bins' in public areas including public toilets, hostels and days centres. We recommend the development of a *Syringe Management Action Plan* for the local area which would involve the key stake holders including drugs and homeless services, local residents, Gardai, drug users, local business people etc to

- Maximise appropriate syringe/needle disposal
- Ensure rapid syringe/needle collection
- Continually monitor and improve practices
- Promote harm reduction and public health approaches.

Recommendation 2: Garda support for the placing of appropriate 'sharps bins' in public areas including public toilets, hostels and days centres.

Recommendation 3: The development of a Syringe Management Action Plan for the local area involving key stakeholders including drugs and homeless services, local residents, Gardai, drug users, local business people etc.

### Confiscation of Injecting Equipment

Some of our service users have alleged that 'clean works' (drug paraphernalia generally associated with injecting drug use) are sometimes confiscated by members of the Gardai. In such situations we do ask them to take this up with the Garda Complaints Commission however we would be concerned about the negative public health impact of any such practices. We support a policy that clearly protects the health and safety of members of the Gardai and the general public while taking cognisance of the of the compulsive nature of drug use and the public health concerns associated with drug use, particularly injecting drug use.

Recommendation 4: That Garda management would ensure that injecting equipment is not confiscated.

### Partnership Working

No one agency can tackle this issue alone it therefore requires a partnership approach. In areas where there are homeless and drugs services it is essential these services work with Gardai to

ensure a consistent year round approach. The Interim evaluation of the Community Liaison Pilot Project reported that good channels of contact and communication have been developed between the Gardai and MQI over the first year of the Project. When the need arises, newly developed links between both organisations facilitate the speedy assessment of issues that arise, and the assessment of whether a Garda response is an appropriate response. It is thus recommended that the good working relationships and partnerships that have been developed continue and the expansion of this model of partnership working to work with other drugs and homeless services.

**Recommendation 5:** The continuation of good working relationships and partnerships that have been developed and the expansion of this model of partnership working to work with other drugs and homeless services.

We recommended the management of drug related anti-social behaviour at a local level by establishing multi-agency partnerships between all key stake holders including drugs and homeless services, local residents, Gardai, drug users and people who are homeless, local business people etc. In recent years there has been a welcome move towards the development of community policing initiatives and the establishment of policing forums. A recent study on policing and social marginalisation in Ireland (Mulcahy & O'Mahoney 2004) recommends that more resources for these consultative mechanisms is crucial, the establishment of codes of practice to facilitate the effective and efficient operation of these committees and the provision of adequate and appropriate training for those involved in these committees.

**Recommendation 6:** The management of drug related anti-social behaviour at a local level by the establishment of multi-agency partnerships between all key stake holders including drugs and homeless services, local residents, Gardai, drug users and people who are homeless, local business people etc.

The authors, of the report mentioned above, also recommend that consideration be given to the establishment of consultative mechanisms that specifically focus on communities whose relations with the Gardai have historically been conflictual. This would obviously include the community of people who are homeless and drug users whose relationship with Gardai can arguably be characterised by mutual mistrust and suspicion.

Improving consultation is one important aspect of improved policing. Consultation exercises such as this can be of great value where the Gardai incorporate community priorities when planning their local strategies and we are keen that the Garda will continue to develop partnerships with other local players including the city council, drugs and homeless service providers, the health services and so on.

**Recommendation 7:** The establishment of consultative mechanisms that specifically focus on communities whose relations with the Gardai have historically been conflictual including the community of people who are homeless and drug users.

**Recommendation 8:** That the Gardai incorporate local community priorities when planning their local strategies.

In addressing the problems of homelessness and drug use it is important that the rights and entitlements of those affected, equal to all others in Irish Society, are pivotal in the development of appropriate responses and interventions. Moreover, the implementation of examples of best practice to deal with anti-social behaviour can ultimately protect the fundamental rights of the drug user and people who are homeless and at the same time safeguard the community at large.

In doing so, this will ensure that measures, for example, which are ‘tough on drugs’ do not as a result become “tough on drug users”.

Recommendation 9: The implementation of examples of best practice to deal with anti-social behaviour that ultimately protect the fundamental rights of the drug user and people who are homeless and at the same time safeguard the community at large.

## **Training, Information and Awareness**

The Gardai are a potential point of contact and information for many people including drug users and people who are homeless. Thus an awareness of the services that are available and referral procedures in operation would be beneficial. It also means that when Gardai ‘move people on’, which generally happens to people who are homeless when they occupy public spaces especially in numbers, they can be in a position to refer people to appropriate services to meet their needs.

We also recommend that Garda training on drug use and addiction includes training on harm reduction approaches and associated public health issues.

Recommendation 10: That Garda training includes information on the drug and homeless services that are available and referral procedures in operation so they can refer people to appropriate services to meet their needs.

Recommendation 11: That Garda training on drug use and addiction includes training on harm reduction approaches and associated public health issues.

## **Criminal Justice Initiatives Promoting Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation**

**Arrest Referral Schemes** In such schemes, generally, a dedicated drugs worker works in police custody cells and makes contact with drug users who are arrested referring them to appropriate drug treatment to address both their drug use and their offending behaviour. Involvement in such schemes is voluntary and is not an alternative to prosecution or due process. These schemes are widely used in England and Wales. The location of these schemes at the entry point to the Criminal Justice System is important as drug using offenders can be identified and offered assistance as early as possible. Evaluations of such schemes in the UK have indicated that such schemes are successful in targeting drug users not in contact with drug treatment services and in reducing offending behaviour and drug use (Home Office, 2006).

Given the high proportion of Irish drug users coming into contact with the Gardai the introduction of such a scheme in Ireland would be very welcome and would undoubtedly impact on the rates of drug related crime in Dublin.

Recommendation 12: The introduction of Arrest Referral Schemes

**Restoration of the Legal Requirement for Assessment and Treatment** In the past all drug users receiving custodial sentences were legally required to receive an assessment and treatment/rehabilitation. This was later modified to an option by the Judge which might or might not be applied (Cassin & O’Mahony, 2006).

Recommendation 13: The restoration of the legal requirement that all drug users receiving a custodial sentence have access to assessment and treatment/rehabilitation.

## Summary

### Support for the Development of Low Threshold Services

Recommendation 1: Garda support for the development of new daytime services and low threshold services for people who are homeless and problem drug users in a range of locations.

### Collection and Disposal of Injecting Paraphernalia

Recommendation 2: The placing of appropriate 'sharps bins' in public areas including public toilets, hostels and days centres.

Recommendation 3: The development of a *Syringe Management Action Plan* for the local area involving key stakeholders including drugs and homeless services, local residents, Gardai, drug users, local business people etc.

### Confiscation of Injecting Equipment

Recommendation 4: That Garda management would ensure that injecting equipment is not confiscated.

### Partnership Working

Recommendation 5: The continuation of good working relationships and partnerships and the expansion of this model of partnership working to work with other drugs and homeless services.

Recommendation 6: The management of drug related anti-social behaviour at a local level by the establishment of multi-agency partnerships between all key stake holders including drugs and homeless services, local residents, Gardai, drug users and people who are homeless, local business people etc.

Recommendation 7: The establishment of consultative mechanisms that specifically focus on communities whose relations with the Gardai have historically been conflictual including the community of people who are homeless and drug users.

Recommendation 8: That the Gardai incorporate local community priorities when planning their local strategies

Recommendation 9: The implementation of examples of best practice to deal with anti-social behaviour that ultimately protect the fundamental rights of the drug user and people who are homeless and at the same time safeguard the community at large.

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## **Conclusion**

Merchants Quay Ireland are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the District 'A' Local Area Policing Plan and would ask that the recommendations, as summarised above, are taken into account when the plan is being developed.

## References

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Appendices  
MQI Fact Sheets

Appendix 1: The Nature and Extent of Heroin Use in Ireland

Appendix 2: The Changing Nature of Homelessness in Ireland

Appendix 3: Alcohol and Drug Use - Cause or Consequence