

# Weekend Review

Saturday, October 16, 2021 Editor Madeleine Lyons Phone 01-6758000 email weekend@irishtimes.com



## Disappearing Dublin

The landmark places that are going, gone – or have been saved by people power. Page 3



# GARDA MISCONDUCT THE CLEAN-UP, THE BACKLASH

As allegations of Garda corruption proliferate, Commissioner Drew Harris is clamping down on wrongdoing within the force. Initially welcomed, his efforts are a source of growing disquiet



**Conor Gallagher**  
Crime Correspondent

and shown how vulnerable the force may be to wealthy criminals willing to pay for information.

The Garda has faced a barrage of negative headlines relating to allegations of corruption, criminality and misconduct over the past fortnight. The most serious of these relate to allegations that sensitive Garda information was passed on to the Hutch organised crime group.

It is understood the information that kickstarted this corruption investigation came to light only while gardai were extraditing the alleged leader of the gang, Gerry Hutch, back to Ireland to face a murder charge in relation to the shooting of David Byrne at the Regency Hotel in 2016.

The Garda National Bureau of Criminal Investigation (NBICI) is investigating if serving gardai were involved in passing on sensitive information to Hutch criminals via an intermediary.

If investigators can prove that information was handed over, the next step will be proving the gardai knew the gang were the final recipients.

Careless pub talk may form the basis for disciplinary action or minor criminal charges. But if it is proven that the gardai, one of whom works in Garda intelligence, were disclosing information to assist criminality, they may face the far more serious charge of assisting a criminal organisation.

One of the gardai has already been suspended and at least five searches have been carried out.

In terms of the Garda's public reputation, news of the investigation could not have come at a worse time. In the same week, several other gardai were arrested or suspended for various instances of alleged criminality or misconduct.

These include two gardai arrested and

questioned in relation to the alleged assault of a teenager in a north Dublin Garda station earlier in the year, and another who was suspended for allegedly leaking information to the media about Hutch's extradition.

In the south of the country, a garda was arrested on suspicion of sexually abusing his daughters over a number of years. In Dublin, investigators are carrying out a "scoping exercise" into allegations that two gardai stole money from a female food delivery rider they stopped on the street.

The flurry of suspensions and arrests followed another incident at the end of September, during which a garda allegedly used excessive force on a 14-year-old he arrested for unlawful use of a scrambler bike. The incident, which was caught on video and widely shared online, is being investigated by the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (Gsoc). The garda in question has since been suspended.

Meanwhile, in Limerick a seemingly endless investigation into the cancellation of penalty points and the transmission of intelligence to criminals has resulted in the suspension of 10 gardai and criminal charges against some of them.

### Pillar

Why is it that, seven years after the emergence of the Garda whistleblower scandal involving Maurice McCabe and three years into a massive reform programme, stories of garda wrongdoing are back in the headlines?

And what effect is this endless series of suspensions and arrests having on the 14,000-strong force?

Many of the recent developments can be

linked to the appointment of former PSNI second-in-command Drew Harris as Garda Commissioner in 2018. Since then, Harris has made fighting corruption and malpractice a pillar of his tenure.

He has been quick to deploy the NBICI, sometimes referred to as Ireland's equivalent of the FBI, to investigate offences, and in some cases, even disciplinary breaches. He has not hesitated to order the suspension of officers while investigations are ongoing, even if those investigations take years.

Since Harris was appointed, 105 gardai have been suspended for alleged misconduct or criminality. This reached a peak last year when 41 members were suspended. In the first 10 months of 2021, an additional 24 gardai were suspended.

Many of these suspensions have been welcomed by both rank-and-file and senior gardai, particularly when they related to corruption or criminality.

"If you're going to choose the nuclear option, you must be right. It's about the finding the balance," says Pat Leahy, who retired as assistant commissioner for the Dublin region last year. "But I don't think anyone will argue that if you have a guard who is breaking the law, you [don't] have to take the action that is required."

Nobody likes to hear of Garda corruption or suspensions, Leahy says. "But if it's true and the information is accurate, it has to be done."

Gardaí do not like when stories appear showing the organisation in a negative light, says security consultant and former detective Sheelagh Brady. "That's a pride thing. But there is more anger when corruption goes on and is not dealt with and is swept under the carpet."

"Personally speaking, I would have been more angry when I heard of cases that are not being dealt with in a hard-hitting way, or [are] dealt with internally. Most guards actually like when action is taken."

However, Harris has faced anger over many of his actions, particularly in relation to the Limerick penalty points investigation. This is not limited to lower ranks. Senior officers have privately expressed concerns that the commissioner has been overzealous at times, to the detriment of Garda morale.

Sources repeatedly raise the case of John Barrett, the civilian director of human resources in the Garda. In 2018, Bar-

rett was suspended by the commissioner relating to internal communications he sent to colleagues, which Garda lawyers alleged were "threatening, inappropriate and unprofessional", and relating to an alleged attempt to frustrate a separate disciplinary process against him.

Harris recommended that Barrett be fired (as a civil servant, Barrett can only be dismissed by the Minister for Justice). Barrett is currently fighting this in court.

Even the establishment of the anti-corruption unit by Harris last March has not been without controversy. It was set up on the back of a Garda Inspectorate report that identified a range of areas where the force was vulnerable to corruption.

These included drug use by gardai, which exposes them to blackmail and puts them in casual contact with criminal gangs, and improper relationships with intelligence sources.

### 'Touts'

Known officially as Covert Human Intelligence Sources (Chis) and less officially as "touts", these informants can be invaluable resources in fighting crime and preventing violence. However, the necessarily secretive nature of the Chis system means gardai are also at risk of developing improper relationships with their sources. These can include sexual relations or instances where the garda ends up working for the Chis rather than the other way around.

The inspectorate, in a 2020 report, noted that there was no framework within the Garda for how officers should manage professional boundaries with an informant outside of the formal interaction process.

"The Chis charter does not explicitly prohibit sexual or emotional relationships with Chis or the acceptance of gifts or hospitality from them," it says.

The launch of the anti-corruption unit and associated media coverage caused anger within the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors and the Garda Representative Association (GRA). "The GRA take exception at the unilateral attempt by Garda management to introduce policy change without consultation and agreement," it told its members.

The establishment of the unit also angered Gsoc, which complained it was not consulted and that the establishment of the unit "flies in the face of the... basic principle that gardai should not be investigating themselves without scrutiny".

But it is the Limerick investigation into "ticket squaring", or the cancellation of penalty points, that is causing most discontent within the Garda rank-and-file. The matter started as an investigation by the NBICI into allegations that gardai had tipped off a criminal gang about an upcoming raid by the Criminal Assets Bureau. This investigation has since resulted in a number of gardai being charged with corruption offences.

While gathering evidence in that investigation, detectives came across mobile phone messages suggesting that some gardai were also improperly cancelling penalty points for motorists.

That aspect of the investigation has

■ The Garda has faced a barrage of negative headlines relating to allegations of corruption, criminality and misconduct over the past fortnight. The most serious of these relate to allegations that sensitive Garda information was passed on to the Hutch organised crime group.

PHOTOGRAPH MONTAGE: PAUL SCOTT

since snowballed, with at least 100 gardai interviewed to date and 60 mobile phones seized.

The investigation and suspensions are seen by many gardai as wildly disproportionate to the alleged wrongdoing.

Last month, Fianna Fáil TD Cathal Crowe described the investigation as a "witch trial" and criticised Harris. "Drew Harris is a good man, but the model of policing he is seeking to replicate is that which operates in the six counties of Northern Ireland. It is quite a different model," he told the Dáil.

The GRA declined to comment on the matter, but sources within the organisation point to the principle of discretion, which allows gardai to, for example, cancel a speeding ticket if the recipient was driving his severely ill wife to hospital.

"This is something that is in the code of conduct," one says. "A couple of these guys have cancelled something like three tickets over a two-year period, and were instructed to do it by a superior who said that there was genuine reason for cancellation."

"The feeling among the Limerick division is this has been a witch hunt and that is going to blow up in [Garda management's] faces. Remember, there are people out on suspension for two years over this," the garda says.

"Morale is on the floor here," says another. "A big frustration is gardai who cancelled tickets for someone they don't know, on orders from a superior, are getting lumped in with guards who are actually corrupt and receiving money for favours."

### Trust

It might be reasonable to assume the recent steady stream of allegations against gardai has damaged the force's reputation among the general public. But previous trends suggest that might not be so.

In 2010, 77 per cent of people surveyed said they trusted the Garda, according to the polling company Ipsos, which tracks public trust in institutions.

Over the subsequent years this figure increased, despite a series of policing scandals that prompted the latest reform programme.

In 2015, after the McCabe controversy came to light, 79 per cent of people expressed trust. In March of this year, that figure had increased to 83 per cent, making gardai more trusted than judges, economists and civil servants.

"Trust has held up quite well in recent years, surprisingly," says Ipsos managing director Damian Loscher. "Whatever scandals there have been, whatever controversy, it has not penetrated to the public."

We will have to wait for Ipsos's next poll to find out if these latest controversies have changed the public's view.

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War in Europe

# Russia plans to 'significantly upgrade' Dublin embassy's spying capabilities

Claims Orwell Road site used for spying as calls grow for expulsion of ambassador

Thirty one staff at embassy, more than many other European country's Dublin embassies

CONOR GALLAGHER

Russian intelligence services are still planning to significantly upgrade its Irish embassy's espionage capabilities, security experts believe, despite the Irish Government's efforts to block its expansion.

The sprawling complex on Orwell Road in south Dublin has been used a major base for Russian intelligence for years, particularly in the area of communications interceptions.

A significant proportion of the Garda's Security and Intelligence unit is tasked with monitoring suspected Russian intelligence agents operating out of the embassy.

The Defence Forces intelligence division, known as J2,

also conducts limited work in the area, sometimes using the Army Ranger Wing to carry out surveillance activities.

Sources point to the relatively large number of diplomatic staff registered as working in the embassy as evidence of Russian espionage activities. There are currently 31 staff known to be working in the embassy. This is more than many other European country's Dublin embassies including the UK (22), Poland (10), Germany (12) and France (19).

Russia's embassy in London has a similar number of staff to its Irish operation. "Just take the numbers," a security source said. "Russia doesn't have huge trade links with Ireland. Or cultural links. There are probably

less than 9,000 Russians living here, far less than there are Poles. So why do they need so many staff?"

**'Filatovout'**

There have been increasing calls over the last week, including from Government TDs, for the expulsion of the ambassador, Yuri Filatov, in the wake of his country's invasion of Ukraine. On Sunday, hundreds of protesters gathered outside the ambassador's residence shouting "expel Russian spies" and "Filatov out".

The Government is expected, along with other EU countries, to order some of Russian diplomats to leave Ireland. However it will not expel Mr Filatov in order to keep diplomatic channels open, Taoiseach Micheál Martin said.

Gardaí began paying close attention to Russian espionage operations here about a decade ago and were surprised by the extent of their activities. These included the monitoring of Irish communications, the use of Ireland as a base to send agents to the UK and industrial

espionage operations. There have also been efforts to intercept EU-related communications concerning negotiations between member states.

"Due to the absence of a mature security culture and architecture in Ireland, we're also seen as a soft target in Europe

**Russia doesn't have huge trade links with Ireland. Or cultural links**

so we can be used as a training ground for new agents, or a logistics hub for other operations across the continent," a security source said.

The GRU, Russia's military intelligence branch, conducts the majority of espionage activity in Ireland while its foreign intelligence service, the SVR, has a more limited role.

Russian embassies are frequently used as espionage bases, said Ed Burke, associate professor in international relations at the University of Notting-

ham. "There is significant overlap between Russia's intelligence services. The SVR is relatively weaker than military intelligence. GRU is seen as the more active, more ruthless of the services and is closer to [Russian president Vladimir] Putin himself," he said.

**Intelligence operations**

In 2015, Russia announced plans to vastly expand its Dublin embassy, including by extending the main consular building and constructing a new three-storey external accommodation building which would be linked to the main premises. The move caused alarm in Irish security circles as experts believed the improvements were partly to allow for an expansion of Russian intelligence operations.

In 2018, the Government passed legislation allowing it to block planning applications on national security grounds. In April 2020, then minister for housing Eoghan Murphy used this legislation to block much of the planned expansion on the basis that it was "likely to be harm-

ful to the security and defence of the State and the State's relations with other states".

The embassy rejected the allegations and said there was nothing out of the ordinary about the planned expansion.

Planning documents show some building work continued in the aftermath of the decision. Over the last two years, there has been progress on several building projects which were not the subject of the blocking order, including on an underground carpark. "They're still working to increase the capabilities of the embassy and the number of people operating out of there. Some of those capabilities will be covert and not in the State's interests, I'll put it that way," said a security source.

Earlier this month, Mr Filatov appeared before an Oireachtas Committee to answer questions on Russian naval exercises off the Irish coast. He told the committee Russia was still in talks with the Government over expanding the main building.

The Russian embassy did not respond to request for comment yesterday.

# Cabinet to discuss Irish aspect of EU aid to Ukraine

PAT LEAHY  
Political Editor

Ministers will be briefed on Irish and EU aid to Ukraine at this morning's Cabinet meeting, while the Government has tabled a Dáil motion to express support for the "sovereignty and territorial integrity" of the country, to be discussed in the afternoon.

Ministers will discuss details of the Irish contribution to Ukraine from the EU, which decided over the weekend to send almost half a billion euro in military aid to the beleaguered country, the first time ever the bloc has directly intervened in this manner. Ireland has said that it will make a contribution to non-military aid.

Yesterday, the Green MEP Grace O'Sullivan said it would not be acceptable for the Irish contribution to be used for military purposes. "It's not for fuel that's going into army tanks," she told The Irish Times. "I would have a problem with that."

But a Green TD, who spoke on condition of anonymity, disagreed, pointing out that the UN Charter allows for countries to act in self-defence.

Ministers are also likely to hear a briefing today from Minister for Justice Helen McEntee on EU plans for dealing with the growing influx of refugees from Ukraine. Justice and home affairs ministers discussed the plans in Brussels on Sunday, but will return to the EU capital later this week to finalise a plan, it is understood.

The UN has estimated the war could displace as many as four million refugees. Ministers indicated yesterday the Russian ambassador to Ireland, Yuri Filatov, who repeatedly claimed Russia had no plans to invade Ukraine, would not be expelled. Senior Government sources did not rule out diplomatic action against Russian embassies, but said it would be done in concert with other EU members. Many Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael TDs have called for Mr Filatov's expulsion.

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**Ambassador**  
Taoiseach Micheál Martin said, "I can understand the anger of people, and of our public representatives towards Russia and towards Russian representatives in Ireland, personified in the person of the ambassador. "[Mr Filatov's] public presentations have not been good ...," he said, citing the ambassador's contradictory statements on Russian's intention to invade.

"On balance we want to retain a capacity to help Irish citizens be in Russia or be elsewhere in Ukraine who may need assistance from us urgently. In times of conflict, it is important to keep [diplomatic] channels open and also to have very fresh and up-to-date insights about what is happening on the ground in given locations."

He said that was why expelling diplomats was always the last resort, inferring the Russians would retaliate by expelling Irish diplomats if the Government pursued that action. Government sources pointed to concerns for Irish citizens in Russia, many of whom worked in businesses that would be affected by the sanctions imposed on Russia by the West.

# Ukrainian workers in Cork meat plant intend returning home to join fight against invaders

Fourteen men plan to leave soon while others are struggling to get their families out of war zone

HANNAH QUINN MULLIGAN  
in Timoleague

Ukrainian workers at Stauntons Foods in Timoleague, west Cork, huddled together yesterday afternoon as their shift ended to exchange the latest news from home.

Fourteen of them working at the meat plant are planning to leave soon and return home to fight against the Russians, while others are struggling to get their families out of a war zone.

Three workers, Vladimir, Serhi and Andriy – they asked not to be identified fully – have family at home. "My wife called me three days ago crying and I could hear the bombs falling," said Vladimir.

"She can't physically leave because she is in west Ukraine about 80km from Kyiv and everywhere is dangerous. Russian soldiers now kill everyone; man, woman or child."

He wants to go home to fight, but fears that he will be unable to cross the border.

Since Russian president Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine, the workers in Stauntons pig factory try and support each other.

Factory management are also working with them to try to get their families to the Republic now that the visa requirement for Ukrainians has been lifted.

Up to 100 Ukrainians are working in meat factories countrywide, providing a vital ser-



Ukrainian nationals Volodimir Galyant and colleagues Serhii and Andriy at their workplace Stauntons Foods near Timoleague, Co Cork.

PHOTOGRAPH: MICHAEL MAC SWEENEY/PROVISION

vice in a trade struggling to recruit workers. Their absence, if they return to fight, will be keenly felt.

Stauntons have said that supporting workers at this time is "the human thing to do" and the Independent Workers Un-

ion said it hoped other factories would show the same compassion.

**Medical student**

Andriy had just received word that his 14-year-old son has managed to cross the border into Poland.

"It took three days waiting in the line to get to Poland because the line is very long and moves very slowly," he said. "My older son is 22 years old and a medical student in his final year. . . he has stayed to volunteer in a hospital and help with the wounded."

Fear is the overriding feeling for the small Ukrainian community in west Cork, who are often dependent on patchy internet signal and messages from their families.

Serhi has been working for Stauntons for 18 months and has a wife and two children here in west Ukraine, near Poland.

"We are all scared but our Ukrainian team in this factory support each other," said Serhi. "The war is not just fighting, but an information war. . . Some of our colleagues only just got family out and now we sleep better. My wife works

**My wife called me three days ago crying and I could hear the bombs falling**

as a volunteer in a hospital and does not want to leave her work, she wants to help.

**Refugees**

"There are refugees from east Ukraine, they've seen dead soldiers and there are wounded soldiers. . . I am not going to fight, I do not know how to use a gun

but I do know how to make money and send it home to my family and the Ukrainian army. It is a big dream of mine that the fighting will stop," he added.

All of them worry about what lies ahead. They have heard stories from home that food is becoming increasingly hard to get.

A larger scale war is inevitable, said Vladimir.

"If Putin conquers the Ukraine, he will not stop there. He will go to Poland, Latvia and Estonia. They all understand this. . . Now is the time to fight."

# Protesters at embassy call for intervention from China

RONAN MCGREEVY

The Euromaidan protests began in November 2013 in the main square in Kyiv, and lasted through that winter and into the following spring.

The protesters gathered every night, often in sub-zero temperatures and the biting cold of an eastern European winter. They wanted their country to reorient away from Russia and towards the European Union. To keep warm they regularly jumped up and down and chanted in Ukrainian "He who is not jumping is a Muscovite" – the latter being Ukrainian slang for a Russian.

The crowd who gathered outside the Chinese embassy in Dublin yesterday was smaller than the number who participated in the Euromaidan protests, and the weather for the latest protest was a lot more clement, but they repeated the same chant, all jumping up and down at the same time. The embassy is on Ailesbury Road, the

centre of Dublin's embassy belt. The protesters want China to use its leverage over Russia to stop the fighting in Ukraine. China abstained during a vote at the UN Security Council at the weekend condemning the Russian invasion.

**Family concerns**

Artem Nedostup, who led chants calling on China to intervene, has not heard from his Ukrainian family in three days. They are from the southern city of Tokmak, which has seen very heavy fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces. All the mobile phone masts have been destroyed. "I would love to bring them to Ireland to safety. I would like to do that now, but it is impossible," he said. "It all depends on the outcome of the coming days. We really hope we can reach peace in Ukraine."

Among the protesters at the embassy were Aksentia Syniavska from Luhansk and Sergey Koloskov from Donetsk, the

two breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine controlled by Russian-backed separatists.

Russian president Vladimir Putin has claimed the Russian-speaking majority in both provinces were being persecuted and that he was intervening in the region to stop a genocide, allegations dismissed by western powers as baseless propaganda.

Ms Syniavska said the claims of persecution were "the bulls\*\*t of Russian propaganda" and that many in the West had fallen for it. "They are not Russians. They are Russian-speaking. They speak Russian for the same reason that Irish people speak English," she said. "[Ukraine] is Russian-speaking because of the occupation in the 20th century. There is no discrimination whatsoever. Language has never been an issue. It's an excuse. Russia wants to occupy the whole country and other European countries. That's the real reason for the invasion."

# Irish Red Cross urges public not to send goods to Ukraine

RONAN MCGREEVY  
and BRIAN HUTTON

The Irish Red Cross has advised people against sending emergency goods to Ukraine as it can be difficult to get them into the country, the charity said, and distribute them to the right people.

The organisation has raised more than €1.25 million in just two days to help the people of Ukraine. The money will be used to repair vital infrastructure, support health facilities with medicines and equipment, and support families with food and hygiene items.

While it praised Irish people for their generosity, the charity said "with airports closed and transportation systems under pressure, sending physical goods is likely to add more stress to the situation on the ground".

Making cash donations to organisations like the Red Cross or other organisations responding to the crisis in

Ukraine allows for "standardised emergency relief goods" to be sourced locally, it said.

Many organisations around the country have been involved in providing aid for Ukrainian people affected by the war. Las Tapas de Lola restaurant in Dublin will donate all its proceeds for the week to the Irish Red Cross. Its manager Roman Khakimovis Ukrainian. Homeless charity Depaul Ireland is working with its sister charity Depaul Ukraine and has asked people to help those who will be displaced by the bombing by donating online at <https://int.depaulcharity.org>.

**Royal Moscow Ballet**

Meanwhile, the Royal Moscow Ballet has been forced to abandon the rest of its annual Irish tour. The troupe was due to perform this week in Derry, Limerick, Galway, Waterford and Mayo.

Derry's Millennium Forum said it had "taken the difficult

decision" to cancel ballet company's production of Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake, due to be performed tomorrow evening.

In Limerick the University Concert Hall abandoned its scheduled performance of Swan Lake for Thursday. Galway's Town Hall Theatre said it was cancelling with "great sorrow and deep regret" two shows due to take place on Saturday because of the "tragic events in Ukraine".

Ticketmaster said sales for the group's performance at Royal Theatre, Castlebar, Co Mayo on Friday "have stopped" as the "event has been cancelled". Waterford's Theatre Royal, which was to run matinee and evening performances on Sunday, was still advertising tickets but blocked purchases with a message stating "sales disabled".

The cancellations follow similar actions by the Helix in Dublin, the National Opera House in Wexford and the Cork Opera House.

# War unlikely to leave Ireland's neutrality untouched



**Pat Leahy Analysis**

EU moving towards meaningful common defence policy for a long time

The war in Ukraine is changing the certainties of the established international order with dizzying speed. It is unlikely to leave Ireland's sacred cow of neutrality untouched.

In recent days the EU has dramatically remade its security policy, promising almost half a billion euro in military aid for Ukraine, the first time the bloc has ever taken such a step.

Germany has performed a colossal U-turn, turning away from decades of a soft-pedalling to Moscow by pledging direct military aid. The western consensus has been reformed – for now anyway – and is acting with boldness and purpose, persuading even neutral Switzerland to join the financial sanctions against Russia. For its part Russia is facing international isolation on a scale hardly even matched by the height of the Cold War.

The chances of Ireland's traditional policy of military neutrality emerging unscathed from this abrupt redrawing of the lines seem remote. Senior officials, politicians and close observers see imminent pressures on Irish neutrality that could be difficult to withstand.

One of the great qualities of the Irish version of neutrality is that it has been sufficiently elastic that it can be stretched to encompass any reality. Throughout the Cold War Ireland lived effectively under the nuclear-armed umbrella of Nato, while never actually joining the alliance. When the Dáil voted in 2003 to facilitate US troops travelling through Shannon to prepare for George Bush's war in Iraq, they were assured it did not violate Ireland's neutrality.

**Difficult choices**

But even the most powerful elastic has its breaking point.

The lurch in EU foreign and security policy prompted by Russia's actions in Ukraine will present Ireland with difficult choices that many senior officials and diplomats expect to be undodgeable, and unforgeable. One senior official predicts that it will come down to a simple question: "Are we committed to a common European defence – yes or no?"

The answer to that deceptively simple question in the past has been "yes, but..." or "yes, as long it doesn't interfere with our traditional policy of military neutrality..."

That dodging of the question has been frowned at but tolerated by Ireland's EU partners, who have accepted, if not quite understood, Ireland's approach to these policy questions. But that time may now be passing.

The truth is that the EU has been moving steadily towards a meaningful common defence policy for a long time. That move has been accelerated, gradually first by Donald Trump's US presidency, then more rapidly by Afghanistan. It will now, many sources involved in the process expect, be turbo-charged by the invasion of Ukraine.

Some officials expect the informal EU Council meeting at Versailles next week, hosted by French president Emmanuel Macron, to be dominated

**The lurch in EU foreign and security policy ... will present Ireland with difficult choices**

by the question not just of Ukraine, but of the EU's future defence and foreign policy role. Macron has been pushing for a greater EU defence capability and authority since he came into office.

Ireland, of course, cannot be forced to enter any military arrangements that it finds uncongenial or politically impossible. That is not how the EU works. But nor will it be able to block a move that now seems inevitable. And staying out, or dragging our heels, comes with consequences. The choices, in other words, are narrowing.

"We will be wholly marginalised in the EU if we choose to be left behind," says Ben Tonra, professor of international relations at UC and a specialist on EU foreign and security policy. "People may be happy with that, and that's fine. But it will politically put us to the margins of the EU."

# Weekend Review



## Online harassment

How BBC journalist Aileen Moynagh endured a stranger's horrific threats Page 3



Saturday, May 21, 2022 Editor Damian Cullen Phone 01-6758000 email weekend@irishtimes.com



### Violence in Dublin

# 'THERE'S AN EDGE. YOU CAN FEEL IT'

As people return to Dublin city after the pandemic, many have noticed assaults and report an increasing sense of unease



**Conor Gallagher**  
Crime Correspondent

In September last year, a group of writers, academics and journalists gathered in New York for the weekly meet-up of the Coffee House Club, a social club where, according to its website, "members are expected to talk about their individual pursuits and interests".

That week it was Mary's turn. She was living in Dublin, but had planned to give a walking tour, via Zoom, of Georgian Dublin to the American audience.

Mary's husband walked beside her holding an umbrella to shelter her from the rain as she used her mobile phone to show her audience the homes of the luminaries who had lived in the area through the years.

At around 11pm, Mary, who asked that her real name not be printed, had just finished showing the childhood home of Oscar Wilde and was walking over to Sweny's Pharmacy on Lincoln Place in

Dublin 2 (near Merrion Square), where she planned to conclude the tour.

She was in the middle of talking about how Leopold Bloom bought lemon soap for his wife in the chemist in James Joyce's *Ulysses* when a man wearing a black face mask approached them brandishing a large kitchen knife.

"It was like the type you would use to carve up meat," Mary said. "He says 'I want some action, give me your wallets or I'll stab you.' I just thought, 'Oh, my god, we're going to end up stabbed to death outside of Sweny's chemist.'"

Mary's New York audience watched the whole episode. Some shouted at her to run. One man, who had yet to realise what was going on, complained that Mary hadn't answered his question, "When was the height of the Georgian Regency period?" Mary's husband reacted by pointing the umbrella at their assailant, and saying, "No, I'm going to stab you." This took the mugger by surprise and gave the couple a chance to flee. They ran up towards Leinster House hoping to encounter a Garda or security guard. "But there was not a soul, not a guard, no one."

Eventually, they were able to flag down a taxi and get away.

Mary is from New York and has been mugged "many times", she says. "But I never thought this would happen in Dublin. I kind of thought I had left a dangerous place for a much, much safer place so it was a real, real shock."

Since then, her relationship with the

city has been fundamentally changed. "I certainly have not gone out walking like that in the evening since. I'm now much, much more cautious. I stick to the main streets. I don't take any chances and I look to see who's in front of me and who's behind me."

For Kevin Byrne, who heads the South Georgian Core Residents Association committee, the incident is a prime example of worsening public safety in the centre of Dublin and an increasing sense of unease among residents, workers, shoppers and tourists.

"That's the type of thing that would never have happened before in the city centre. That's the type of escalation we're talking about," said Byrne, speaking on the corner of Suffolk Street by the Molly Malone statue on another rainy Friday night. "And unfortunately, we just don't feel we see a police response that's discouraging that," he added, pointing out that he had not seen a single garda during the last half-hour.

This feeling of unease has been expressed by others who spoke to *The Irish Times*, including homeless people, members of the LGBT community and business owners. "There is an edge to the city. You can feel it when you are walking around," said Adrian Cummins, head of the Restaurants Association of Ireland.

"Unfortunately, this is becoming a fact of life and Dublin city centre is becoming an increasingly dangerous place in which to circulate, particularly in the early hours," Judge Melanie Greally said in February as she sentenced a man for an unprovoked attack on two Brazilian nationals near Capel Street. It is a trend which has been noticed by the Garda and the Government, although neither seem quite sure what is behind it.

**Hutch-Kinahan feud**  
Chief Supt Michael McElgunn, who oversees policing in south Dublin city, is keen to stress that most areas of street crime are down when compared to pre-pandemic figures. "Public order, drunkenness, theft from the person are all down," he notes as he sits in his office in the newly-built Kevin Street Garda station, scanning the latest crime statistics.

But assaults have increased when compared with the first four months of 2019. McElgunn says they're up about 11 per cent in the south of the city, adding that the statistics are provisional. "So, you know, it's a relatively modest increase, but it does go against the overall trend."

His counterpart for the north inner city, Chief Supt Patrick McMenamin, said the trends are roughly the same in his area. He suggests one reason for the increase is that in 2019, gardai were still dealing with the tail-end of the Hutch-Kinahan feud which terrorised the area. The withdrawal of some gardai after the end of the feud may have caused certain categories of street crime to tick up.

McElgunn says gardai are seeing an increase in assaults at night-time and on the weekend. "Some of the locations wouldn't be of any surprise," he says. "They'd be in proximity to the night-time economy."

### Video Public safety in the centre of Dublin irishtimes.com

The northside has less of a night-time economy, McMenamin says, and mainly sees assaults relating to the "overflow" of people coming from the southside. "Our assaults probably would be predominantly around the boardwalk area."

While the rise in assaults since 2019 has been relatively modest, the increase compared to last year is more dramatic. According to figures provided to the Dublin City Joint Policing Committee, in the first two months of 2022 serious assaults the south of the city increased by 132 per cent compared to the first two months of 2021 (from 25 to 58). More minor assaults increased by 167 per cent (from 49 to 131). However, the country was in lockdown at the start of last year and the night-time economy was virtually nonexistent. As the chief superintendents point out, making comparisons with this period is of limited use.

Byrne worries that the statistics are not capturing the full picture. "Maybe it's a case that they're returning to a previous average. But it's important to note that a lot of minor assaults and thefts aren't reported, and certainly most cases of intimidation are not reported. It's that low-level intimidation that's really affecting people's experiences and decisions."

He says he encourages members of his residents' group to report all incidents



**Our engagements with people certainly do indicate that there are some people who are expressing that concern to us, and we're not deaf to that**  
- Chief Supt Michael McElgunn

"because resources follow statistics". "But the practical reality is a lot of cases that are making people less likely to come into the city and socialise or shop are not cases that can be reported. I think if gardai were on the beat themselves, they will see what we're talking about and would more clearly understand that the stats aren't telling the full story."

One senior garda suggested much of the increased fear can be attributed to a recent series of high-profile assaults in the city which received a large amount of media attention. These include a young tourist from England who was left with serious brain injuries last month when he was allegedly struck in the head by another male on D'Olier Street (a man is before the courts on the matter).

**Homophobic attack**  
On the same weekend, Evan Somers, a gay man, was badly beaten by a group of men on Dame Street in what gardai believe was a homophobic attack. Some of the men are suspected of being involved in an attack on an Italian man on the same street earlier that night.

"Last night a stranger called me a f\*\*\*\* before beating the sh\*t out of me. He left me with a fractured eye socket, two fractures in my ankle, a dislocation in my ankle & some other minor injuries," Somers tweeted from his hospital bed.

The incident, along with the murder of two gay men in Sligo around the same time, have made many members of the LGBT community question how safe they are on the streets.

"Whether things have actually gotten worse for gay people, it's impossible to say," says a gay man from Dublin who asked that his name not be used. "But there is a sense things have gotten worse. People are nervous and worried. Part of it might be due to increased press attention and part of it is a feeling that streets are less safe for everyone."

David Delahunty, a gay man who lives in Kilmainham, says at night there is a "feeling of uneasiness with people" in the city centre. "I've always looked over my shoulder. But definitely in the last year or so the city has very much gone downhill in my mind."

Delahunty, who is 40, says there are "definitely more comments from groups. It's a lot of teenage boy behaviour, they'll make a comment and laugh. I'm not afraid, but my boyfriend is from Brazil and he's really scared of these gangs."

A lack of taxis in the city centre as a result of the rise in fuel prices has contributed to the sense of unease, he believes. "I remember being at Pride in Vicar Street in 2018 or 2019 and I just walked the 10 minutes home. I wouldn't do that now."

Ray McAdam, a Fine Gael councillor for the north inner city, says from talking to constituents he has noticed an increase in assaults, "particularly a lot of homophobic attacks on the gay community, certainly in the Dublin 7 area, compared to pre-pandemic."

**An increasing feeling of unease in Dublin city centre has been expressed by homeless people, members of the LGBT community and business owners.**  
Inset: Green Party councillor for the north inner city Janet Horner is not aware of an increase in assaults, but says people find the city intimidating after spending the pandemic away from it. MAIN PHOTOGRAPH: OLEKSANDR SEMENKOV

edge" to the city which was not present before.

"It just felt threatening. Angry. Grim," says Patsey Murphy, describing a recent visit to the Abbey Theatre. "These observations come from an old middle-class woman in from the 'burbs but throughout the pandemic and now for sure there are new levels of desperation around Henry Street, Talbot Street, Abbey Street, the Quays," she said via email.

Others described more minor issues which contribute to a sense of unease. Grace O'Keeffe, who teaches in the city centre, spoke about the rubbish on the street, the buildings left to deteriorate "and a sense that there are no consequences for any actions. The city centre is dirty and that permeates into general thinking and attitude."

Green Party councillor for the north inner city Janet Horner said she is not aware of an increase in assaults. "But I've certainly heard people say post-Covid, having not being in the city for a long time, that they do find it now more intimidating or a little bit more scary."

Richard Guiney, the chief executive of Dublin Town, which represents Dublin city businesses, was one of the few people *The Irish Times* spoke to who said the problem had improved somewhat since last year. "But perception is an important consideration. And it is a fact that our perceptions of safety are nowhere near where they need to be. From a business perspective, that's not welcome news."

Chief Supt McElgunn conceded that, regardless of the statistics, people feel more afraid. "It certainly is a narrative there and the narrative in and of itself will lead to concerns. Our engagements with people certainly do indicate that there are some people who are expressing that concern to us, and we're not deaf to that."

According to another senior garda, at least part of it is down to the fact that many incidents are filmed on mobile phones and shared on social media, "which can make the problem seem worse than it perhaps is".

The issue of groups of young people hanging around town and engaging in anti-social behaviour comes up repeatedly. The matter was raised in the Dáil in late April when Fianna Fáil TD Jim O'Callaghan spoke of gangs of youths prowling Dublin city at night looking for people to attack while believing they are "immune to apprehension".

# WIDOW OF SHOT IRISH MAN SEEKS ANSWERS

Oisín Osborn was shot dead at his home in Hamburg by police, 10 days after becoming a father. Three years on, his wife Nicole still doesn't know why her emergency call ended as it did



**Derek Scally**  
in Hamburg

The last trace of Martin Osborn's third birthday party is a small, half-eaten cake sitting on the kitchen table, topped with a "3" candle.

Martin is in kindergarten and, before his mother Nicole collects him, she is hurrying to make coffee.

We're in a south Hamburg suburb that ticks all the boxes: large semidetached red-brick houses, quiet streets lined with apple blossom trees and abandoned bobby cars and scooters scattered in driveways.

Nicole is a 34-year-old single mother – and a widow. Three years ago, on May 22nd, 2019, her husband Oisín was shot dead, 10 days after he became a father.

Three years on, Nicole still doesn't know why her emergency call ended as it did. Armed police officers in protective gear burst into their home, raced up the stairs and shot the 34-year-old man dead on the landing. "We live in a peaceful area, not a warzone, so I simply don't understand why this happened," says Nicole, a woman with long blonde hair and a strong, mournful gaze. "May 22nd is with me every day of the year."

After a lonely period of mourning in the pandemic, the school teacher says she is beginning to accept her new life with her son. She fears it could all fall apart again, though, but doesn't know when. Three years have passed, but the state prosecutor in Hamburg, Germany's second-largest city, is still investigating, leaving Nicole and Oisín's family in limbo.

Nicole laughs as she tells the story of how she met Oisín in 2008 – two language and travels nerds with online profiles. "It was a couch-surfing platform," she says, eyes shining.

## This chatty, multilingual man

Intrigued by his profile, she arranged to meet him and Nicole found herself completely at ease with this chatty, multilingual man: English father, Irish mother, raised in Spain and France, a promising career in engineering. "He was extremely open, friendly, a person you would like to be with, he had so many traditions and could see life as a French person, Spanish, British and Irish, of course," says Nicole, recalling the Irish songs he sang for her.

"It felt like we were on the same wave, like two pieces of a puzzle. He said that everything just felt easy with me, that we could go down the road hand-in-hand."

A quiet wedding came in 2013 and, in 2019, their first baby. After a difficult birth, baby Martin spent a week in intensive care with an infection before going home with his exhausted parents.

Through a fog of fatigue, Nicole remembers Oisín was increasingly agitated, but put it down to a painful allergic reaction he had suffered to hospital hand disinfectant. As the days at home passed, the happy father-to-be who had painted a big rainbow on the nursery wall – as his father had done for him – was gone. Instead, another Oisín paced the house, covered up mirrors and, Nicole remembers, promised to protect her and Martin "from everything and everyone, even evil spirits".

On the morning of May 22nd, something snapped.

Nicole woke up to find Oisín in a frantic state, running up and down the stairs. He had brought up kitchen appliances to the



bedroom: laid on the bed she saw every knife in the house, including steak knives.

That triggered a protective instinct in the young mother. She dialled 112 and the operator, hearing "knife", put her through to police.

Minutes later, shortly after 10am, Nicole remembers hearing sirens and voices outside. The last time she saw her husband alive, half-dressed and deeply distressed, he was wearing a saucerpan on his head. "He said it was for protection," remembers Nicole, scratching beneath her nose and slowing down. "I said I loved him and he stepped out of the room. Then I heard what I thought were fireworks."

What happened next is the subject of an ongoing investigation by Hamburg's state prosecutor and cannot be reported in detail. After a large number of police officers in full riot gear surrounded the Osborn house, Nicole thinks they gained entry through the patio door at the rear of the house, and moved straight ahead to the ground floor hall and staircase to the right of the front door.

A police statement at the time said officers were confronted on the stairs with an man carrying "what appeared to be a knife" – a matter of close investigation now – and opened fire. Nicole says she heard at least four bangs, possibly six.

We leave the kitchen for the hallway, where Nicole shows me the narrow, enclosed stairwell to the first floor. Even in the daytime it is a gloomy space; to get upstairs you need to make a right turn – twice.

Upstairs, she points out the spot on the ground where she saw Oisín lying, tucked up in a baby position. Escorted past, she saw no blood and didn't realise he was dead until later, outside in a police car, when an officer referred to Oisín in the past tense.

David and Katrina Osborn had been worried about their son since Martin's birth because of his mood swings, from

euphoric to agitated. When David tried to call Oisín on May 22nd, an unfamiliar voice – a family friend – answered the phone.

"He said, 'I am sorry, your son is dead,' that's how I heard," says David Osborn, on a phone call with his wife from France, where they live.

The couple hurried to Hamburg and were met by an Irish embassy official and a Garda sergeant based in the Hague, before being questioned separately by the police.

As weeks turned into months, they grew frustrated by what they viewed as stonewalling from Hamburg and hired a German criminal lawyer.

Like Nicole, Katrina and David Osborn are anxious to remember Oisín as the bright, capable man he was – fluent in five languages, an inventive engineer who was going places in his career at Airbus and excited about being a father. He had no criminal record, no history of mental illness or domestic assault. Yet, one call from his anxious wife ended with him dead in their home.

## Under extreme pressure

The autopsy revealed no alcohol, drugs or other stimulants in his blood. Apart from that, his mother Katrina says, they have few answers, just guesses. "It's not uncommon for people under extreme pressure to have an anxiety attack," says Katrina, who was born in Abbeyleix, but grew up in Castletroy, Co Limerick.

Three years on, Oisín's parents want to know why police shot their son multiple times, and why no non-fatal means were tried to control him. "We have no explanation for why the Hamburg police acted like something out of a US Swat team," says David.

A Hamburg police spokesman told The Irish Times he was unable to comment on the ongoing investigation. A spokeswoman for the state prosecutor said that the case was in its final stages

after a complex investigation which had required time. "In such cases, this is not unusual and is the basis of a correct processing of a case," the spokeswoman added.

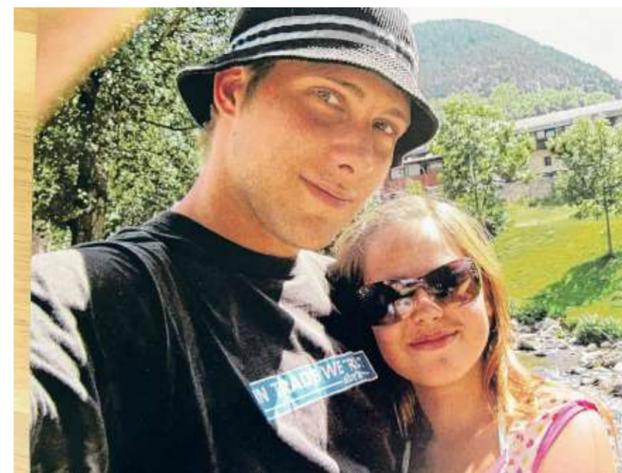
Nicole Osborn's lawyer, Claudia Krüger, says the case has been complicated, requiring reports from various experts. "But even I am unhappy with the pace of the investigation and would have expected it to proceed much quicker," she said.



**"I said I loved him and he stepped out of the room. Then I heard what I thought were fireworks"**

In his high-ceilinged Berlin office, Elvis Jochmann – a criminal lawyer engaged by David and Katrina Osborn – says that three years is an unusually long time for a criminal investigation in Germany. Every few months he contacts the Hamburg prosecutor for an update, but gets an identical letter in response.

The Osborn family and their lawyers know the odds are stacked against them ever finding out what happened to Oisín. In Germany, 54.8 per cent of criminal investigations do not proceed to trial, according to a study from 2015. If the main suspect is a police officer, that number rises to 97.7 per cent. Even if a case against



■ Clockwise from main: Nicole holding a picture of Oisín, her late husband; Oisín and Nicole. "It felt like we were on the same wave, like two pieces of a puzzle," Nicole says of her late husband; David Osborn, Oisín's father, with all the letters from the Hamburg prosecutor in the last three years. There is still no resolution in sight; Below inset: Oisín Osborn suffered mood swings, from euphoric to agitated, following the birth of his son

a police officer goes to trial, only a tiny number end in prosecution.

For Claudia Krüger, these numbers reflect the nature of police work, in particular how often officers find themselves in dangerous situations where they have to make quick decisions and act in self-defence. Like anyone else, she says, police officers are presumed innocent unless proven otherwise. But fellow lawyer Elvis Jochmann says the numbers also reflect a system that favours police officers.

"The problem is that they know how a case is investigated and also what is expected when they testify," said Mr Jochmann. "They know how to frame their actions as self-defence, regardless."

## Criminal complaint

He is not alone in his concern. A major study of German police violence, to be presented in September, estimates that, for every criminal complaint against a German police officer for violent behaviour, five more go unreported.

Even if a complaint is made, German criminologist Tobias Singelstein, the study's lead researcher, says "structural flaws" in the criminal justice system make it very unlikely the complaint will go anywhere.

Unlike other countries, German federal states have no separate bodies for investigating complaints against police officers. Instead, the criminal police investigate such cases themselves, even questioning colleagues who are suspects, before the case is passed to the state prosecutor.

Prof Singelstein, professor for criminal law at Frankfurt's Goethe University, says this creates a problem in practice because police are part of the criminal justice system and state prosecutors work with them every day and depend on them. "For state prosecutors, police officers are not normal suspects,"

he said, "and, perhaps unconsciously, they take a different approach with them".

Sometimes in such cases, it falls to German courts to correct prosecutors. In 2018, a Berlin police officer was investigated for shooting dead an Iraqi man he claimed had threatened him with a knife. The prosecutor moved to drop the case, the dead man's family took legal action and a Berlin court forced the case to be reopened, saying "the circumstances that led to the use of gun, and what could have justified it, have not been adequately explained".

Hamburg police say they have just three cases of police using their service weapons in the last five years: 2017, 2019 and 2021. Hamburg's state prosecutor says it has examined "numerous" complaints alleging police violence in the past decade and "isolated" cases where people died, but adds: "Statistics about this are not kept at the state prosecutor's office."

In her Hamburg home, Nicole Osborn heads down the stairs, past photographs on the wall of her – alone – with her growing son. When Martin sees pictures of Oisín now, he doesn't understand that this is the father he had for just 10 days.

"It's painful for me to see how Martin runs to his friends' fathers, hangs out of them and calls them 'papa'," she says.

In the living room she points out the new dining table and chairs they bought, the new wooden floor Oisín laid, and the green and yellow walls they painted together. It was part of a "bright new life" they planned, she says, before it was snuffed out in a hail of bullets.

Nicole says she has run through in her head every angle – even the police officers' perspective called to a unfamiliar house with minimal information. Packing her bag to collect her son from the kindergarten, Nicole says quietly: "Oisín wasn't himself that day. But it is normal, in a peaceful society, to use methods like that?"

## 'I would certainly be more wary now if out late'

From page 1

The TD said these gangs are "misogynistic towards women, homophobic towards gay people" and in particular are seeking to target young men on their own.

Until very recently, Jimmy McNichol was a rough sleeper in Dublin. He recalls an incident where a group of teens "got me to the ground and kicked the sh\*t out of me".

"My girlfriend took a few slaps to give me the time to get up onto my feet," he says as he shelters from the rain on Dawson Street. "They just did it because they could."

Elizabeth Banks says her older brother, who is homeless, was recently attacked by a group of males with iron bars. "His phone and money were stolen. This was at 3am [in Dublin]. He was concussed and then managed to crawl up to James's [Hospital], where he was admitted. So yeah, I would certainly be more wary now if I were out late."

Groups of "young lads" are acting with impunity in the city centre, McNichol says. "They'll be throwing eggs at the buses or out of the buses at people. They'd be in groups, just bullying people," he added.

"The issue of gangs of young teenagers coming into the city just to cause trouble, that's new," says Byrne of the South Georgian Core Residents Association. He said his group would like to see gardai intervene to break up these groups earlier in the evening, before any trouble starts. "We'd much rather see early intervention

than late night triage after an assault has happened."

One Dublin social worker, who asked not to be named, expressed concern that young people are being unfairly scapegoated for a "much broader, much more complex problem".

However, she also said she is aware of many young people who disengaged from youth services that were forced to temporarily close during the pandemic. "With some young people, once you lose them it can be very hard to get them back."

Chief Supt McMenamin said there is "maybe a very, very small element" of young people causing trouble. "But you have to bear in mind that young people took the brunt of the impact to their lifestyles during the pandemic."

Again, it's a matter of perception, he says. "Young people are gathering with their peers as young people do and sometimes because of the perception that's out there, that may seem a threat to some other people. I can understand that."

He said gardai dealt with lots of young people gathering during the Covid restrictions. "And you know, they weren't doing anything wrong. They were doing what young people do."

Some young people "don't stand a chance coming up", McMenamin says. "Is the criminal justice system the only answer we can give those young people? I don't think it is and I don't think it serves them very well."

McElgunn says gardai "are not blind to the fact" that some people have experienced issues with groups of young people.



■ Garda Chief Superintendent Patrick McMenamin of North Central Division, Dublin, and Adrian Cummins, chief executive of the Restaurants Association of Ireland.

PHOTOGRAPHS: BRYAN O BRIEN; GARETH CHANEY

**"Is the criminal justice system the only answer we can give those young people? I don't think it is"**

– Chief Supt Patrick McMenamin

"We have put operations in place to target specifically incidents where young people are congregating for the purposes of street fights. We had some of that around Creighton Street [in the Grand Canal Dock area], we had some of it up around Dublin 8." These operations were of "relatively short durations" and seemed to address the problem, he said.

Both officers stressed the need for the Garda to have a good relationship with



young people. "That's important because they're citizens too. They have rights as citizens and we just can't unilaterally prevent their movements in the city," says McElgunn.

Another issue which was repeatedly raised was open drug-taking and dealing, particularly heroin and crack cocaine, on city streets. "My perception is there has been a substantial increase in drug dealing and the availability of drugs. That always leads on to the potential for an increase in violence or anti-social behaviour," says McAdam.

"We surrendered the streets to drug dealers during the pandemic and they haven't been reclaimed," says Byrne, noting recent reports he had received of people shooting up heroin in the open, including opposite the Department of Health.

The area around Merchants Quay, which houses drug treatment services, is a

"very dangerous part of the city in terms of drug dealing," says Cummins of the Restaurants Association, who works nearby. "I wouldn't be advising anybody to go there, especially in the night-time."

## 'Over-concentration'

Byrne believes there has been an "over-concentration" of drug treatment services within the canals. "And that plays a factor that has to be recognised as well." He says there needs to be a "pause" before locating more services in a city centre which also serves as the country's main tourist and business district.

Byrne reflects one side in a debate which has been ongoing on for almost a decade regarding whether a facility should be opened on the quays to allow addicts to inject drugs in a supervised setting. The charity Merchant's Quay Ireland, which runs the drug treatment services in the area, has been seeking planning permission for the centre for the last five years. Permission was initially refused by Dublin City Council. That decision was overturned by An Bord Pleanála, which granted permission, and that decision was then itself overturned by the High Court. The matter is back with An Bord Pleanála, which is expected to rule next month.

Merchant's Quay Ireland has said the injection centre will save lives and hopefully make the surrounding streets safer by offering addicts a sheltered location to inject drugs. About 100 objections have been lodged with the council against the facility, including from the nearby St Audoen's National School and various businesses and pubs.

Gardai are conscious of the issue of open drug-dealing and injection, McElgunn says. "And then there are issues around a concentration of service users in the city centre, and there's probably wider considerations needed in that context." But the problem cannot be dealt with

through policing alone, gardai believe. "We're dealing with pretty vulnerable people who have fairly chaotic lifestyles," McElgunn says. "You could pick those people up three or four times a day and they'll be back there again tomorrow. I can assure you. So we need to think of a longer-term solution there."

So what can the Garda do to make the city safer, or at least make it feel safer?

Part of its response is Operation Citizen, which launched in October 2021 and is aimed at, according to the Garda website, "reassuring the public, residents, visitors, businesses and workers that Dublin city centre is a positive, safe environment, notwithstanding the wide range of complex social and professional dynamics which are to be found in Dublin city, the same as any other large urban environment."

McElgunn produces statistics showing there have been 616 "proactive patrols" conducted by gardai in his area in the first 17 weeks of this year, up from 236 in the same period in 2021. There are also short, more targeted operations aimed at tackling hotspots of anti-social behaviour as they arise, he says. More gardai are being moved into frontline policing roles and there are plans to open a new station on O'Connell Street.

For people like Byrne, it's not enough. He says there is an urgent need for more uniformed foot patrols which "create a zone of good behaviour" around them. "We don't want arrests or imprisonments. We want proactive measures."

There are limits on what the Garda can do, McElgunn says. "There are more resources out there... that does not mean we have a guard on every street corner, nor do we have the resources as an organisation under our structures to do that."

➔ **'How safe are the streets of Cork City?' Read Barry Roche's report in The Irish Times on Monday**