

Police and Community:

An Evaluation of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in Ireland

A Report Prepared for the Garda Síochána by

Kieran McKeown

*Kieran McKeown Limited,
Social & Economic Research Consultants,
16 Hollybank Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 9.*

&

Michael Brosnan

*Garda Research Unit, Garda College,
Templemore, County Tipperary.*

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Table 1 Members of Steering Group for the Study, 1997-1998

Name	Organisation
Superintendent Bryan O'Higgins (Chair)*	Garda Community Relations
Inspector Maurice Walshe**	Garda Community Relations
Sergeant Denis Beakey	Garda Community Relations
Sergeant Patrick Conway	Garda Community Relations
Garret Byrne	Department of Justice***
Kieran O'Dwyer	Garda Research Unit
Pat Walsh	Chair, DNWRC****
Jim Quigley	President, Muintir na Tire
Mark Morgan	St. Patrick's College, Dublin

*Position formerly held by Superintendent Noel McLoughlin.

** Position formerly held by Inspector Simon O'Connor

***Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

**** Dublin Neighbourhood Watch Representative Committee.

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Introduction and Terms of Reference

The core and founding value of the Garda Síochána is to police with the consent and support of the community. This is reflected in the words of its first Commissioner, Michael Joseph Staines, who stated that “The Garda Síochána will succeed not by force of arms or numbers, but on their moral authority as servants of the people” (Quoted in Garda Síochána, 1993. p.3). The emergence of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in the mid-1980s represents a continuity in terms of policing with the consent of the community through the creation of new structures to support the Garda Síochána in policing the community.

The continuing priority accorded by the Garda Síochána to its relations with the community is evident in its five year Corporate Strategy Policy Document (Garda Síochána, 1993). In that document, it describes its mission in terms of working “with community support ... to encourage and advise the community on how best to protect their persons and property from criminal behaviour” (Ibid, p.6). The methods for implementing this mission statement include “maintaining dialogue with the community at large about mechanisms which reduce crime exposure and develop community-based crime prevention programmes” (Ibid, p.7) as well as “progressing the implementation of Community Policing in urban and rural areas” (Ibid, p.9). Clearly therefore Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are part of a broader aspiration to make the Garda Síochána more responsive to the needs of the community and develop a partnership approach to the prevention and detection of crime.

In 1998 there were nearly 3,500 Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert schemes throughout the country. Neighbourhood Watch made up about two thirds of these schemes and Community Alert one third. Just over half of all households in the country are in one or other scheme.

This report is the first national evaluation of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert and comes 14 years after the schemes were introduced in 1984. The terms of reference for the evaluation are set out in Table 1.

Table 1 Terms of Reference

<p><i>Overall Purpose</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to carry out an in-depth evaluation of the schemes as regards overall effectiveness and value for money. <p><i>Specific Purposes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to assess the degree to which schemes are active in all parts of the country and in different socio-economic groupings;• to assess the level of awareness, experience and satisfaction with the schemes of the general public, NW scheme co-ordinators, CA committees, community Gardaí and other Gardaí;• to assess the impact of the schemes on people’s behaviour (eg. acting on crime prevention advice, providing care for the elderly) and on their perception of crime and security;• to assess the impact of the schemes on crime levels and crime displacement and on criminal intelligence received by the Garda Síochána;
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- to estimate resource requirements of the schemes and implications for general policing duties;
- to identify practices which work well;
- to develop a profile of scheme co-ordinators / committees and liaison Gardaí and their needs;
- to develop a framework for monitoring and evaluating schemes;
- to develop guidelines for the successful operation of schemes;
- to review the effectiveness of Garda promotional material; and
- to make recommendations aimed at improving the effectiveness of schemes.

In order to meet these terms of reference, the report brings together a wide range of data sources and carefully analyses them to determine the impact and effectiveness of these schemes. The following are the key data sources used in the evaluation:

1. documents relating to the setting up of schemes, the number and cost of schemes as well as previous evaluations of schemes both in Ireland and elsewhere.
2. national survey of the general population in scheme and non-scheme areas to ascertain if there are differences between them in terms of the perception and fear of crime, the sense of safety, the level of victimisation, the adoption of security precautions and relations with the Garda Síochána.
3. national survey of all schemes to determine the socio-economic characteristics of scheme areas and their organisers, the operation and activities of schemes, contact with and support from the Garda Síochána, and the perceived effectiveness of schemes.
4. national survey of the Garda Síochána focusing particularly on their attitudes to community policing initiatives, the activities of Liaison Gardaí, and their perception of the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert.
5. case studies of six Neighbourhood Watch and six Community Alert schemes in different parts of the country to observe at first hand their operation and impact and to complement the more quantitatively oriented national surveys.
6. consultations with the Community Relations Section of the Garda Síochána, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, a selection of the Garda's Crime Prevention Officers throughout the country as well as members of the Dublin Neighbourhood Watch Representative Committee and Muintir na Tire.

The overall methodology was informed by the principle that extensive, nation-wide consultation should be held with all the key stakeholders involved in schemes notably scheme organisers, the Garda Síochána and the general public. In particular, we felt it was crucially important to know if persons living in scheme areas were experiencing any benefits - particularly benefits associated with the core objectives of the schemes - which were not enjoyed by those living outside the scheme areas. This, as we shall see, is crucial to determining the impact of the schemes.

We present our analyses of the different data sources in six chapters. Chapter One describes the context which led to the setting up of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert including an analysis of their growth, distribution and cost; the chapter also assesses the results of previous evaluations of similar schemes. Chapter Two provides a detailed description of the schemes and how their impact is perceived by those directly involved in running them. Chapter Three describes the attitudes and experiences of the Garda Síochána to these schemes and their assessment of impact and effectiveness. Chapter Four presents the

results of our twelve case studies and complements the preceding chapters by raising issues which are central to the operation and future development of the schemes. Chapter Five compares a nationally representative sample of people living in scheme and non-scheme areas using a number of key impact indicators and provides the basis for assessing the overall effectiveness of the schemes. Finally, Chapter Six draws together the main conclusions of the study and, on the strength of these, we make our recommendations for the future.

Chapter One

Context

1.1 Introduction

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert were introduced into Ireland in 1984 as crime prevention programmes in urban and rural areas respectively. Their introduction was shaped by two major concerns. The first was the escalating level of crime particularly in the first half of the 1980s and public and private concerns about safety and security. The second was concern about relations between the public and the police and fears within the Garda Síochána that their presence was becoming unacceptable in certain parts of Dublin and other large urban areas. We now discuss both of these factors (section 1.2 and 1.3) before proceeding to describe the operation (1.4), distribution (1.5) and cost (1.6) of the schemes as well as current proposals for their development (1.7). The chapter also reviews previous evaluations of these and similar schemes and draws lessons for the present study (1.8).

1.2 The Crime Context

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert were introduced after more than 20 years of uninterrupted growth in the number of indictable crimes in Ireland between 1961 and 1983. This growth is summarised in Table 1.2.1 and shows the total number of indictable crimes at five yearly intervals between 1961 and 1996. This shows a pattern of continuous increase until the early 1980s with a peak of 102,387 crimes recorded in 1983; there followed a period of decline and stabilisation before the level of crime began to rise again in the first half of the 1990s but this has started to fall again in 1996 and 1997.

Table 1.2.1 Total Number of Indictable Crimes Recorded by the Garda Síochána and the Detection Rate for those Crimes (%) At Five Yearly Intervals, 1961 - 1996

1961	1966	1971	1976	1981	1983	1986	1991	1996
14,818	19,029	37,781	54,382	89,400	102,387	86,574	94,406	100,785
66%	66%	46%	41%	37%	33%	32%	34%	41%

Source: Annual Reports of the Garda Síochána.

It may be useful to note in this context that the crime rate in Ireland, notwithstanding the generally upward trend over the past 35 years, is still consistently below that of Northern Ireland. According to one study, the recorded crime rate in Northern Ireland tends to be about 60% higher than the Republic of Ireland and this is a pattern which pre-dates the thirty year troubles between 1969 and 1998 (see Brewer, Lockhart and Rodgers, 1995, p.142). In turn, it is also worth noting that the crime rate in Northern Ireland is low by international standards and it had the lowest overall risk of victimisation among 14 participating countries in the 1989 International Crime Survey (Van Dijk, Mayhew, and Killias, 1990).

The rising level of crime in Ireland was also associated with parallel decline in the detection rate. Table 1.2.1 summarises the detection rate for all crimes at five yearly intervals over a thirty five year period between 1961 and 1996. This reveals that the detection rate declined continuously over a 25-year period beginning in 1961; in 1986 the detection rate was less

than half of what it was in 1961. However the detection rate has increased in each successive year between 1990 and 1997.

The official statistics - of rising crime and falling detection rates - pointed to growing criminality and an apparently decreasing capacity of the Garda Síochána to deal with it in the 20 years between 1966 and 1986. Public and private fears about crime also grew during this period although, curiously, these fears tended to be unrelated to official statistics on crime. Studies in Ireland (O'Connell and Whelan, 1996; O'Connell, Invernizzi and Fuller, 1998) and elsewhere (Bohm, 1987; Roberts, 1992) have shown that fears about crime among the general public are quite independent of official crime statistics. However they are related to media exposure to stories about crime and these stories - which tended to increase in Ireland during this period (Kerrigan and Shaw, 1985) - show a bias towards crimes which were serious and violent. One study has shown that the proportion of older people in Ireland who perceived crime as a problem grew between 1987 and 1993 (cited in Task Force on Security for the Elderly, 1996, p.8) while other studies of the elderly in Ireland indicated that media reports of crime were increasing their fears of victimisation (O'Connor, 1984; Grimes, et al, 1990). All of these circumstances conspired to bring the issue of law and order to the top of the political agenda and created a readiness to consider alternative policing strategies such as Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert.

The case for introducing schemes such as Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert was also aided by the belief that it could help to reduce crimes against property. Crime in Ireland, as recorded by the Garda Síochána, is classified into four groups as summarised in Table 1.2.2. This reveals that virtually all crimes fall into two of these groups - both involving property - in a pattern which is extremely stable from year to year. In other words, most crime is against property rather than against people although, of course, the victims of crime against property are always people. One group of researchers who have analysed crime trends in Ireland, north and south, since 1945 have observed: "Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the crime profile by major groups of offence is the very low number of offences of violence against people. Typically in England and Wales this group makes up around 6 per cent of notifiable offences compared to an average of 2.5 per cent in the Republic since 1976" (Brewer, Lockhart and Rodgers, 1996, p.144).

**Table 1.2.2 Average Composition of Recorded Crime in Ireland, 1996
(N=100,785)**

Group	Description	% Crimes
Group I	Offences against the person	2
Group II	Offences against property with violence	43
Group III	Larcenies, et cetera	55
Group IV	Other indictable offences	0
Total	All Crimes	100

Source: Annual Report of An Garda Síochána, 1996.

The overwhelming concentration of criminal activity on property has implications for crime prevention since measures which make property more secure against criminal attack will help to reduce crime. This insight was not lost on the creators of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert since, as we explain in the next section, one of its core objectives is to improve the security of property against criminal attack.

There is no doubt that, in introducing Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert, the Garda Síochána were strongly influenced by the rising trend in crime which their statistics revealed. Even if these statistics tend to underestimate the true level of crime in the society - partly due to under-reporting by the general public and partly due to Garda recording only the most serious offence in any given criminal incident (see Breen and Rottman, 1985; O'Mahony, 1996; O'Dwyer, 1996; Mirrlees-Black, Mayhew and Percy, 1996) - the scale of the increase was such as to call for some new approaches to the problem.

It is also worth noting in this context that crime in Ireland is heavily concentrated in Dublin. On average, Dublin accounts for about a third of the population of Ireland (depending on how its boundaries are defined) but accounts for between 50% and 60% of all crime recorded by the Garda Síochána. Expressed in terms of rates, the number of crimes per 1,000 population in Ireland in 1996 was 28 compared to 56 in the Dublin Metropolitan Area and 12 in the Western Region. In 1994, the ESRI estimated that 23% of people living in Dublin had been a victim of crime in the previous three years compared to 21% in other urban areas and 14% in Ireland generally (Murphy and Whelan, 1995; see also O'Connell and Whelan, 1994). Clearly therefore Dublin-based Neighbourhood Watch schemes operate in a very different context to rural-based Community Alert schemes and this needs to be taken into account in evaluating their impact and effectiveness.

1.3 Community Involvement in Policing

The introduction of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in 1984 also arose out of concerns about relations between the public and the police and fears within the Garda Síochána that their presence was becoming unacceptable in certain parts of Dublin and other large urban areas. At that time, the Garda Síochána like other police forces had replaced foot patrols with patrol cars and adopted other "high technology responses" to crime albeit with little obvious benefit in terms of reduced crime. Indeed the situation appeared to be getting worse, particularly in severely disadvantaged communities in Dublin. In 1983, for example, a vigilante group called Concerned Parents Against Drugs was formed and had a strong presence in many of the most disadvantaged communities in Dublin. Its mission was to stop drug pushing and to fulfil the role which, as they perceived it, the Gardaí were failing to do (Bennett, 1988).

In 1983, the Commissioner of the Garda Síochána, Lawrence Wren, acknowledged that relations between the public and the police were far from ideal. He pointed out that "in some large urban centres it is becoming clear that the Gardai need to start building bridges back to the community unless we are to find ourselves in trouble" (Wren, 1983, p.5). In July of that year, Dáil Éireann established a Select Committee on Crime, Lawlessness and Vandalism and in March 1984 this committee recommended "an early introduction of Neighbourhood Watch on a nation-wide basis" (Select Committee on Crime, Lawlessness and Vandalism, 1984, p.27). This recommendation was endorsed by the then Minister for Justice, Michael Noonan, in May 1984. In his address to the Dáil at that time, the Minister also emphasised the importance of getting the community "more closely involved with the police" through measures such as more Gardaí on the beat (Garda Review 1, 1984, p.16).

The main driving force behind the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch was the Garda Síochána; in rural areas, Community Alert was introduced as a joint effort between the Garda Síochána and Muintir na Tire. Senior Gardaí visited the US to examine how similar schemes had been implemented there where the concept had been invented in the mid-1960s as a community-based crime prevention initiative (Tarpey, 1987, Chapter Three). Much later, in 1982 Neighbourhood Watch was introduced into the United Kingdom (Carnell, 1994).

It is worth emphasising in this context that community involvement in policing - as exemplified by Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert - is not the same as community policing. The term community policing is widely used and, as with any term involving the word community, it has many differing meanings. In its most radical sense, community policing involves both police consultation with, and accountability to, the community served (See Scarman, 1982). Neither Neighbourhood Watch nor Community Alert imply a radical commitment to consultation or accountability by the Garda Síochána. Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are essentially ways of improving co-operation between police and community in the prevention and detection of crime. Such a view is clearly explicit in the documentation prepared by the Garda Síochána for dissemination to the public: "Neighbourhood Watch is a crime prevention programme which seeks to enlist the active participation of the community in co-operation with the Garda Síochána, by observing and reporting criminal activity. The underlying principal objective is to watch over each others property and personal well-being - BEING GOOD AND CARING NEIGHBOURS" (Garda Síochána 1, undated, p.14).

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are informed, inter alia, by a "situational approach" to crime which essentially believes that criminals choose to commit crimes - particularly crimes against property - in situations where the rewards are high and the risks are low (Hough, Clarke and Mayhew, 1980). This approach emphasises the importance of reducing opportunities for crime and is less concerned with addressing its underlying causes (Nee and Taylor, 1988, p.153; Newman, 1972). An important implication of this approach is that structures are needed within each community to enable residents take responsibility for crime prevention and to work more co-operatively with the police (Husain, 1990). Once these structures are in place and are being implemented by the community, it is expected that prospective criminals will be deterred because residents are more vigilant, their property is better protected and offences are properly and promptly reported. It is also expected that the overall effect of this will be to reduce the opportunity for crime while increasing the risk of detection when crime occurs (Clarke 1992). The thinking behind crime prevention schemes also suggests that secondary benefits will be created for those involved such as increased contact and interaction within the neighbourhood and improved community spirit and this, in turn, is expected to reduce the fear of victimisation. There is also an expectation that schemes will improve relationships between the community and the police (Brown 1992; Tarpey, 1987).

These different considerations can be found in various documents and publicity materials about Neighbourhood Watch (Garda Síochána 1; Garda Síochána 2; Garda Síochána 3) and Community Alert (Muintir na Tire 1; Muintir na Tire 2; Community Alert News, 1992-1996; Quigley, 1995). For the purpose of this evaluation, we have summarised them schematically in Table 1.3.1 and, with the approval of the Community Relations Section at Garda Headquarters, we describe them as the aims and objectives of the schemes. A core task of

the evaluation therefore is to assess the extent to which these aims and objectives are being achieved by the different schemes throughout Ireland.

Table 1.3.1 Aims and Objectives of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert

Reducing crime in your area
Preventing crime in your area
Involving the community in crime prevention
Making people feel less isolated
Improving the flow of information from the community to the Garda
Raising awareness of crime in your area
Increasing home security
Being a self-help group
Making people feel safer
Raising awareness of vulnerable people within the scheme area
Supporting the victims of crime
Encouraging people to put identifying marks on their property
Displaying scheme stickers
Improving the quality of life

1.4 Operation of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in Ireland

1.4.1 Neighbourhood Watch

The first Neighbourhood Watch scheme in Ireland was piloted in the Finglas area of Dublin during 1984 (Select Committee on Crime, Lawlessness and Vandalism, 1984, p.4; Garda Review 2, 1984; Tarpey, 1987, p.32). Initial results of the scheme, as reported in the Garda Review, indicated that the main benefits were in the form of better relations between the police and the community and a greater willingness by people - traditionally suspicious of "informing" - to contact the Gardaí about suspicious happenings (Garda Review 2, 1984). In November 1994, the newly-appointed Chief Superintendent in the Community Relations Office, Tom O'Reilly, announced that "the experimental phase of Neighbourhood Watch is completed and 1985 will see the nation-wide introduction of the scheme" (Garda Review 3, 1984, p.7). A template for setting up and running Neighbourhood Watch schemes was drawn up by the Community Relations Office of the Garda Síochána (Garda Síochána 1). The main elements of this template are summarised in the Appendix to this chapter.

Within the Garda Síochána, each scheme is supported by a Garda Liaison Officer who keeps in regular contact with the scheme's Area Co-ordinator. Each of the 25 Garda Divisions has a Community Relations Inspector as well as a Crime Prevention Officer (mainly Sergeants) whose functions include supporting individual schemes through providing advice and literature. Each Garda Division - with the exception of Dublin - has a Garda Inspector to oversee all crime prevention programmes. The Community Relations Section is responsible for producing literature on Neighbourhood Watch as well as various aspects of crime prevention, including home and personal security. The Community Relations Section also maintains a computerised data base of all schemes - both Neighbourhood and Community Alert - which contains details on the schemes' name and location, number of households and the names of Co-ordinators and Garda Liaison Officers. Completed forms on each Neighbourhood Watch scheme (NW1, NW2, NW3, NW4) - including subsequent changes - are sent on a quarterly basis by the Garda Liaison Officer to the Community Relations

Section in order to keep the data base up to date; a similar but less structured arrangement is maintained for Community Alert Schemes. The Community Relations Section also organises an annual Chubb Ireland Awards competition - sponsored by Chubb Ireland Limited - for the best Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert schemes in the country; in addition, it organises an art competition in schools on the theme of crime prevention.

Structures to allow Co-ordinators from different schemes to meet vary considerably from one Garda District to another. At Garda District and Sub-District level, meetings of Co-ordinators often depend upon the initiative of the Garda Liaison Officer. In Dublin, a representative structure has emerged - called Dublin Neighbourhood Watch Representative Committee - which comprises a representative Co-ordinator from each Garda District in the Dublin Metropolitan Area (DMA) and an appointee of the Garda Commissioner for the DMA. A similar structure - called Cork City Neighbourhood Watch Association - has evolved in Cork.

1.4.2 Community Alert

The initiative to set up Community Alert came from Muintir na Tire following a series of violent attacks on elderly people in rural Ireland during 1984. Other rural-based organisations - Irish Farmers Association, Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association, Macra na Feirme, Irish Countrywomen's Association, Foroige - also called for action. The initiative of Muintir na Tire met with a ready response from the Minister for Justice and the Garda Síochána.

Muintir na Tire - which literally means people or community of the country - was founded in 1937 in Tipperary town by Canon John Hayes (1889 - 1957). It was and still is a community development movement. The organisation was based on Catholic social teaching with a strong emphasis on self-help and a belief, based on the principle of subsidiarity, that the State should only intervene to help where the people cannot help themselves. This explains why, until 1965, Muintir na Tire refused to apply for, or accept, any support from the State. Throughout rural Ireland, Muintir na Tire pioneered the building of community halls and centres and was associated with rural electrification and group water schemes. The membership of Muintir na Tire is made up of 117 Community Councils which are mainly parish-based and more than half of them (58%) are concentrated in the Munster counties (O'Connor, 1988; Devereux, 1988).

Community Alert is now one of the core activities of Muintir na Tire with 341 schemes affiliated to it in 1998, equivalent to 30% of all Community Alert Schemes (see Table 1.4.1). These are "associate members", unlike Community Councils which are "full members". The affiliation fee is IR£5.00 and it entitles the scheme to use Muintir na Tire's Charity Exemption Number. It should be emphasised however that Muintir na Tire offers support to all Community Alert schemes irrespective of affiliation. Table 1.4.1 reveals that Community Alert schemes which are affiliated to Muintir na Tire are strongly concentrated in three Garda Regions: Northern (39%), South Eastern (38%) and Southern (36%).

Table 1.4.1 Classification of Community Alert Schemes by Garda Region and by Affiliation to Muintir na Tire, 1998

Categories		Garda Regions						Total
		D	E	N	SE	S	W	
Affiliated	N	0	53	62	91	88	47	341
%		0	25	39	38	36	16	30
Non-Affiliated	N	0	155	95	149	154	247	800
%		0	75	61	62	64	84	70
Total	N	0	208	157	240	242	294	1,141
	%	0	100	100	100	100	100	100

D= Dublin Metropolitan Area; E= Eastern Region; N= Northern Region; SE= South Eastern Region;

S= Southern Region; W= Western Region.

Source: Muintir na Tire, Canon Hayes House, Tipperary, 1998. Note that the number of Community Alert schemes recorded by Muintir na Tire in early 1998 (1,141) is considerably higher than the number of Community Alert schemes recorded in the Community Relations data base at Garda Headquarters in 1997 (989). Unless otherwise specified, we have tended to use the higher figure of Muintir na Tire.

Muintir na Tire offers support to Community Alert schemes through its Development Officers whose work is funded by the Department of Health and Children and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Their main activities include meetings (as summarised in Table 1.4.2), the provision of information on grants and other entitlements, giving talks and radio interviews, and liaising with a wide range of voluntary and statutory bodies, including the Gardaí; in 1997 / 1998 they also distributed a newsletter.

Table 1.4.2 Number of Meetings Attended by Development Officers of Muintir na Tire in 1997 / 1998 Season

Garda Region	Formal Meetings	Informal Meetings
Northern	124	157
Western	115	190
Eastern	112	150
Southern	89	180
South Eastern	44	86
Total	484	763

Source: Muintir na Tire, Canon Hayes House, Tipperary, 1998.

The template for setting up and running Community Alert schemes is broadly similar to Neighbourhood Watch schemes and is summarised in the Appendix to this chapter. All the documentation for the scheme is prepared by Muintir na Tire and approved by the Community Relations Section at Garda Headquarters and bears the logo of both organisations; since 1992 the cost of producing the documentation is met through sponsorship from PMPA Insurance (see Muintir na Tire 1; Muintir na Tire 2; Community Alert News, 1992-1996; Quigley, 1995).

The main areas of difference between the templates for Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are that Community Alert is based on a committee rather than co-ordinators and does not require a survey of all households in the area. Community Alert

schemes receive support from Muintir na Tire's Development Officers and their overall orientation seems to have a more pronounced focus on the elderly, particularly older people living alone who might be vulnerable. In some counties, Community Alert committees have met together to form an association - such as Offaly Alert or the Laois Federation of Community Alert Schemes - for mutual support and the sharing of information.

1.5 Growth and Distribution of Schemes

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert have expanded considerably over the 13 years between 1984 and 1997. Expansion alone is no indication of success however; if it was, as McCullagh (1996, p.165) has commented, the schemes have been a success.

Table 1.5.1 summarises the number of schemes and their year of establishment as recorded in the Garda Síochána's data base. This shows that there were 2,320 Neighbourhood Watch and 989 Community Alert schemes at the end of 1997. On average, Neighbourhood Watch established 158 new schemes each year which is three times the rate of expansion of Community Alert which established 54 schemes each year.

Table 1.5.1 Number of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Watch Schemes Established in Each Year, 1985-1997

Year	Neighbourhood Watch N	Community Alert N
1985	60	5
1986	159	9
1987	160	8
1988	178	19
1989	124	36
1990	140	54
1991	217	101
1992	262	92
1993	206	105
1994	155	76
1995	117	31
1996	187	128
1997	93	40
Sub-Total	2,059	704
Year not known	259	275
Total	2,318	989
Average per year (1)	158	54

Source: Community Relations Data Base, Garda Headquarters.

(1) Based on the number of schemes (2,059 in Neighbourhood Watch and 704 in Community Alert) for which the year of establishment is known and excluding 1984 when only one scheme was established. Source: Muintir na Tire, Canon Hayes House, Tipperary, 1998. Note that the number of Community Alert schemes recorded by Muintir na Tire in early 1998 (1,141) is considerably higher than the number of Community Alert schemes recorded in the Community Relations data base at Garda Headquarters in 1997 (989). Unless otherwise specified, we have tended to use the higher figure of Muintir na Tire.

The geographical distribution of schemes by Garda Region is summarised in Table 1.5.2. In order to standardise the data to take account of regional variations in population and households, we calculated the number of schemes per 1000 households in each region. The global picture to emerge from this is that there are two Neighbourhood Watch schemes per 1,000 households compared to one Community Alert scheme per 1,000 households. In other words, Neighbourhood Watch covers twice as many households as Community Alert. Combining both schemes together reveals that there is an average of three schemes per 1,000 households throughout the country. This average is consistent across regions with the exception of the Northern Region which has an average of two schemes per 1,000 households.

Table 1.5.2 Regional Distribution of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert Schemes and Other Variables in 1996 / 1997

Categories	Garda Regions						Total
	D	E	N	SE	S	W	
1. NW Schemes	1,100	360	47	205	481	125	2,318
2. CA Schemes	0	208	157	240	242	294	1,141
3. NW+CA Schemes	1,100	568	204	445	723	419	3,459
4. Households per NW Scheme	189	123	302	126	112	159	158
5. Households per CA Scheme	0	178	239	208	271	220	222
6. Total No. Households (,000)	336	193	100	142	226	139	1,136
7. Total NW per 1000 households	3.3	1.9	0.5	1.4	2.1	0.9	2.0
8. Total CA per 1000 households	0	1.1	1.6	1.7	1.1	2.1	1.0
9. NW+CA per 1000 households	3.3	2.9	2.0	3.1	3.2	3.0	3.0
10. % Households in NW	62%	23%	15%	18%	24%	14%	32%
11. % Households in CA	0	20%	38%	35%	30%	46%	22%
12. % Households in NW+CA	62%	43%	53%	53%	54%	60%	54%
13. Crime rate	56.4	19.9	10.1	15.5	21.4	11.8	35.9
14. Detection rate	37%	48%	48%	49%	43%	48%	41%

D= Dublin Metropolitan Area; E= Eastern Region; N= Northern Region; SE= South Eastern Region; S= Southern Region; W= Western Region.

1, 4, 5. Source: Garda Community Relations data base.

2. Source: Muintir na Tire, 1988, p.4.

6. The number of households is estimated on the basis that the average number of persons per household is 3.1 (Census 96, 1997b, Volume 3, p.11). The population figures for each region are taken from the 1996 Annual Report of the Garda Síochána, pp.1-13.

10, 11. Estimated by multiplying the average number of households in each scheme by the number of schemes per 1,000 households, expressed as a percentage of the total number of households.

12. The % of households in both schemes is estimated by adding the percent of households in Neighbourhood Watch schemes and the percent of households in Community Alert schemes.

13. The crime rate is defined as the number of crimes per 1,000 population and is taken from the 1996 Annual Report of the Garda Síochána, pp.1-13.

14. The detection rate is defined as the percent of recorded crimes which are detected and is taken from the 1996 Annual Report of the Garda Síochána, pp.1-13.

Table 1.5.2 also describes the average size of scheme. This refers to the number of members in a scheme and is not an unambiguous concept since it may mean little more than a household's original approval for setting up the scheme. Bearing this limitation in mind, the data in Table 1.5.2 reveals that the average Neighbourhood Watch scheme has 158 households; this average is very volatile however with schemes in the Northern Region

averaging 302 households and schemes in the Southern Region averaging 112 households. The average Community Alert scheme has 222 households and this is reasonably uniform throughout the country. Many Community Alert schemes are linked to all or part of the parish in which they are located; however it is not possible to estimate how many parishes have a Community Alert scheme; the approximate number of Catholic parishes in Ireland in 1997 was 2,350 (Irish Catholic Directory, 1997, pp.418-428).

We estimate in Table 1.5.1 that about one third (32%) of all households in Ireland are in a Neighbourhood Watch scheme; this is equivalent to 58% of all urban households. In the Dublin Metropolitan Area, about two thirds (62%) of all households are in a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme. We also estimate that about a fifth (22%) of all households are in a Community Alert scheme; this is equivalent to 42% of all rural households. In the Western Region, nearly half (46%) of households are in a Community Alert scheme. Overall, we calculate that more than half (54%) of all households in Ireland are in one or other scheme, with the Dublin (62%) and Western (60%) Regions having the strongest concentration of households in schemes.

1.6 Cost of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert

The cost of running Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert comprises three main components as follows:

1. the cost to the Garda Síochána in terms of personnel and overheads
2. the cost of support materials such as leaflets, stickers, signs, videos, competitions and other publicity materials.
3. the cost of development supports - which applies to Community Alert only - incurred by Muintir na Tire in developing the schemes.

In addition to these costs, all of the schemes depend for their vitality on the inputs of unpaid volunteers through co-ordinators and committees; some schemes also benefit from FÁS's Community Employment programme. We have treated these as free inputs not because they are not valuable but because valuing it in terms of their opportunity cost would be an extremely difficult exercise and maybe not very useful.

Before proceeding to estimate separately the costs of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert, we estimate here the global cost of the Garda input to the schemes. We then apportion this to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert according to their respective sizes; as shown above, Neighbourhood Watch comprises 67% of all schemes and Community Alert comprises the remaining 33%.

The estimated input by the Garda Síochána to these schemes is summarised in Table 1.6.1. The estimate covers the average cost of Garda time (including PRSI, overtime and pension) and takes into account the overhead costs associated with each station such as heat, light, phones, travel, et cetera. We focus only on the inputs of the three main categories of personnel - Liaison Gardaí, Crime Prevention Officers, and staff in the Community Relations Section - although other ranks will also be involved from time to time. Thus our estimates are only intended to be indicative of the broad scale of Garda input to the schemes.

In global terms, the estimated cost to the Garda Síochána of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in 1997 was IR£3.8 million. This is equivalent to less than 1% of the total

cost of the Garda Síochána in that year (IR£497 million). In relative terms therefore, Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are extremely small items of expenditure. Almost all of the cost of the Garda input is generated by the Liaison Gardaí (88%) and the Crime Prevention Officers (12%) which is to be expected in a community-based initiative such as this.

Table 1.6.1 Estimated Cost of Input by the Garda Síochána to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in 1997

Category	N	IR£	%
1. Liaison Gardaí	1,447	3,395,469	88
<i>Garda rank</i>	<i>1,267</i>	<i>2,927,910</i>	<i>76</i>
<i>Sergeant rank</i>	<i>180</i>	<i>467,559</i>	<i>12</i>
2. Crime Prevention Officers	26	450,240	12
3. Community Relations Section	4	5,654	0.2
Total	1,477	3,851,363	100

1. The number of Liaison Gardaí, according to a survey of all Crime Prevention Officers which we carried out for this study is 1,447 comprising 1,267 at the rank of Garda and 180 at the rank of Sergeant. The proportion of working time spent by Liaison Gardaí on supporting Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert, according to our survey of the Gardaí involved in this work, averages 12 hours per month, equivalent to 7.5% of their time (see Chapter Three, Table 3.4.2). The gross annual average salary of a Garda, including PRSI, overtime, pension, and overheads was estimated by the Garda Síochána's Organisational Development Unit in May 1998 to be IR£30,812. The corresponding salary for a Sergeant is IR£34,634.

2. The number of Crime Prevention Officers, according to the Community Relations Section of the Garda Síochána, is 26. The proportion of working time spent by Crime Prevention Officers on supporting Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert, according to the Community Relations Section of the Garda Síochána, averages 50%. The gross annual salary of a Crime Prevention Officer, calculated at Sergeant grade, is IR£34,634.

3. The number of persons in the Community Relations Section who support Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert activities is four: two Garda Sergeants, one Garda and a Clerical Assistant. These staff, who form the Community Relations Office, liaise with groups, communities and the general public on all aspects of crime prevention policy and practice. The proportion of working time spent by them on Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert, in their own estimation, averages 5%. The annual salary of the Clerical Assistant is IR£13,000.

1.6.1 Cost of Neighbourhood Watch

The cost of Neighbourhood Watch has two main components. The first is the cost of the input by the Garda Síochána. We estimate that this is IR£2,580,413. This is 67% of the cost of the total Garda input to all schemes since 67% of all schemes are in Neighbourhood Watch. The second component is the cost of support materials such as leaflets, stickers, videos, reference manual, competitions. These are estimated to be IR£41,000 and are almost entirely supported by subventions from the private sector.

The estimated annual average cost of running Neighbourhood Watch in 1997, according to Table 1.6.2, was IR£2.6 million. This is equivalent to IR£1,136 per scheme. The Garda input accounts for 98% of all costs.

Table 1.6.2 Estimated Annual Average Amount of Subventions to Neighbourhood Watch in 1997

Category	IR£	%
1. Cost of Garda input	2,580,413	98
2. Cost of support materials	41,000	2
Total	2,621,413	100
3. Cost per scheme	1,136	-

1. The cost of the Garda input is estimated at 67% of the total cost of the Garda input to all schemes.
2. The three commercial sponsors of Neighbourhood Watch are AMEV Insurance, Chubb Ireland Limited and Noonan Cleaners. AMEV Insurance sponsored all the costs (IR£35,000) of producing a video, a reference manual, a primary schools colouring competition, a poster competition, and a Christmas card competition; they also sponsored half the costs of producing a leaflet (IR£2,500), the other half being covered by the Community Relations Section of the Garda Síochána (IR£2,500). The estimated annual subvention from AMEV Insurance in 1997 was IR£37,500. Chubb Ireland Limited sponsor an annual competition for both Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. However since there have been no awards granted for this competition in 1996 and 1997, we estimate their subvention for those years to be zero. Noonan Cleaners sponsor the cost of hiring a conference venue for the annual general meeting of the Dublin Neighbourhood Watch Representative Committee at an annual average cost of IR£3,500.
3. The number of Neighbourhood Watch schemes is estimated to be 2,318.

1.6.2 Cost of Community Alert

The cost of Community Alert has three main components. The first is the cost of the input by the Garda Síochána. We estimate that this is IR£1.3 million. This is 33% of the cost of the total Garda input to all schemes since 33% of all schemes are in Community Alert. The second component is the cost of support materials such as leaflets, stickers, videos, reference manual, competitions. These are estimated to be IR£25,000 and are entirely supported by subventions from the private sector. The third component is the cost of development supports supplied by Muintir na Tire and these were IR£156,000 in 1997.

The estimated annual average cost of running Community Alert in 1997, according to Table 1.6.3, was IR£1.5 million. This is equivalent to IR£1,273 per scheme. The Garda input accounts for 88% of all costs.

Table 1.6.3 Estimated Annual Average Cost of Community Alert in 1997

Category	IR£	%
1. Cost of Garda input	1,270,950	88
2. Cost of support materials	25,000	2
3. Cost of development supports	156,000	10
Total	1,451,950	100
4. Cost per scheme	1,273	-

1. The cost of the Garda input is estimated at 33% of the total cost of the Garda input to all schemes.
2. These have been funded by PMPA Insurance for a number of years although the exact amount of the subvention has never been disclosed; this is Muintir na Tire's estimate of the annual cost.
3. The cost of development supports is incurred by Muintir na Tire and has two elements. The first is Muintir na Tire's head office staff (including overheads) which are estimated to be IR£51,000, equivalent to 60% of its annual expenditure for 1997 (IR£85,000). The second is Muintir na Tire's Development Officers (including travel expenses) which are estimated to be IR£105,000; these were funded in 1997 by grants from the Department of Health and Children (IR£40,000) and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (IR£65,000). All of the data on development supports was supplied directly by Muintir na Tire, Canon Hayes House, Tipperary.
4. The number of Community Alert schemes is estimated to be 1,141.

It is interesting to note that the average cost of a Community Alert scheme is 12% higher than the cost of a Neighbourhood Watch scheme. All of this variation is attributable to the fact that Community Alert have development supports in place through Muintir na Tire while Neighbourhood Watch does not.

1.7 Development Proposals for Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert

1.7.1 Development Proposals for Neighbourhood Watch

In November 1997, Dublin Neighbourhood Watch Representative Committee, in association with the Community Relations Section of the Garda Síochána, proposed a new national support structure for Neighbourhood Watch called The National Neighbourhood Watch Council (NNWC). This proposal was prepared following extensive consultations with schemes in all six regions of the Garda Síochána.

The aims and objectives of the proposed National Neighbourhood Watch Council are summarised as follows: “The National Neighbourhood Watch Council will be established to govern all matters relating to the promotion and development of Neighbourhood Watch. It will also serve the interests of Neighbourhood Watch members. It will be responsible for the collation and dissemination of best practices throughout the country. The NNWC will be responsible for the co-ordination of all Neighbourhood Watch policies and the promotion of Neighbourhood Watch on a structured basis” (Neighbourhood Watch Review Committee, 1997, p.7). The proposed National Neighbourhood Watch Council would comprise a representative of Co-ordinators from each of the six Garda Regions, two representatives from the Garda Síochána, a representative from Community Alert and a chief executive.

The support structure proposed by the Neighbourhood Watch Review Committee is not dissimilar to the role which Muintir na Tire plays in supporting Community Alert. There are however some differences. First, the remit of the proposed National Neighbourhood Watch Council would be dedicated totally to Neighbourhood Watch; Muintir na Tire is a much older organisation with a 60 year history of involvement in community development in Ireland and regards Community Alert as only one - albeit the most important - of its community development activities. Second, Muintir na Tire does not represent - nor does it claim to represent - Community Alert schemes whereas the proposed National Neighbourhood Watch Council will have a representative function. Third, the proposed National Neighbourhood Watch Council envisages a staffing complement comprising a chief executive and a secretary; Muintir na Tire has four headquarters staff and five development officers whose function is to support the establishment and growth of Community Alert schemes in each of the five Garda Regions outside Dublin. In the medium term, the proposed National Neighbourhood Watch Council would consider the option of employing development officers. Fourth, the proposed National Neighbourhood Watch Council would be a representative structure drawing elected Co-ordinators from each of the six Garda Regions; this is quite different from Muintir na Tire whose Board does not contain any representatives from Community Alert schemes.

The annual cost of the proposed National Neighbourhood Watch Council, as summarised in Table 1.7.1, would be IR£226,000; the cost during the first year, due to start-up costs, would be IR£296,000. The annual cost of Muintir na Tire’s support for Community Alert in 1997, as summarised in Table 1.6.3 above, was IR£181,000; however this would rise to

IR£387,000 per annum if its proposals for the development of Community Alert were implemented (see Table 1.7.2 below).

Table 1.7.1 Estimated Annual and Start-up Cost of the Proposed National Neighbourhood Watch Council, 1997 Prices

Category	IR£
Staff Costs (civilian chief executive plus secretary)	60,000
Establishment costs (rent&rates, heat&light, repairs&renewals)	22,000
Advertising and Competitions to promote Neighbourhood Watch	61,000
Education and Training for Co-ordinators	23,000
Travel and subsistence associated with education and training	12,000
Other (printing&stationery, phone, insurance)	48,000
Sub-Total for annual running costs	226,000
Capital equipment (computers, phones, faxes, furniture&fittings)	30,000
Research and development costs	40,000
Sub-Total for start-up costs	70,000
Total (1)	296,000

Source: Neighbourhood Watch Review Committee, 1997, pp.16-17.

(1) It is hoped to source this income through a government grant (IR£320,000) and private sponsorship (IR£60,000).

1.7.2 Development Proposals for Community Alert

In order to secure the future development of Community Alert, Muintir na Tire estimate that one Development Officer for every two counties is required plus an administrator and a researcher (see Muintir na Tire, 1988, p.14). The budget required for this and for publicity materials is summarised in Table 1.7.2. This indicates an annual funding requirement of IR£387,400 which is more than double the existing budget. There are three main reasons why the proposed budget is double the existing budget: first, it is proposed to increase the number of Development Officers from 5 to 13; second, travel expenses are directly related to the number of Development Officers since high mileage costs are an indispensable part of support costs in rural Ireland; third, the salaries for Development Officers are calculated on the basis of IR£20,000 per annum which is substantially in excess of the salary of IR£12,000 per annum paid to Development Officers in 1997 and 1998.

Table 1.7.2 Estimated Cost of Proposed Muintir na Tire's Proposals for the Development of Community Alert. Based on 1998 Prices.

Category	IR£
13 Development Officers @ IR£20,000 each per annum	260,000
1 Administrator @ IR£20,000 each per annum	20,000
1 Administrator @ IR£20,000 each per annum	20,000
Travel expenses for 208,000 miles @ IR£0.30 per mile (1)	62,400
Sub-Total for staff and overheads	362,400
Cost of leaflets, stickers and video	25,000
Sub-Total for leaflets, stickers and video	25,000
Total	387,400

Source: Muintir na Tire, Canon Hayes House, Tipperary.

(1) The number of miles is calculated on the assumption that each Development Officer travels 400 miles per week over a period of 40 weeks (400x40x13=208,000).

We have not heard of any proposals - analogous to those advanced for a National Neighbourhood Watch Representative Committee - for a nationally representative body for all Community Alert schemes. In Chapter Six below, we comment on the development proposals of both Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in the light of our assessment of their impact and effectiveness.

1.8 Evaluations of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert

Neighbourhood Watch was piloted in one area for about a year before it was introduced in Ireland in 1984, although there was no systematic evaluation of that pilot. Community Alert was also introduced in the same year without any piloting or evaluation. Since then, three evaluations have been carried, all based on a small number of schemes. The first was undertaken in 1987 and was based on two Neighbourhood Watch schemes in Dublin, one in Finglas and one in Foxrock (Tarpey, 1987). The second was undertaken in 1995 and was based on 15 rural Community Alert schemes (Community Relations Section, 1995). The third was undertaken in one Neighbourhood Watch scheme in the Glasnevin / Drumcondra area of Dublin (Beakey, 1997). We now examine these evaluations.

Tarpey's study compared the impact of Neighbourhood Watch in the working class area of Finglas and the upper middle class area of Foxrock (1987). Both areas are similar in size with about 100 houses each, most of the houses are owner-occupied and have well-established residents associations. However the two areas differed in their implementation of the scheme as follows:

1. Participation in the scheme was higher in Foxrock (83% of residents) compared to Finglas (54% of residents).
2. Foxrock had three times as many Street Co-ordinators as Finglas (9 compared to 3).
3. A higher proportion of households in Foxrock received an information pack on crime prevention (94% compared to 73%) and a higher proportion of Foxrock residents introduced security improvements as a result of this information (44% compared to 35%).
4. Foxrock residents were more likely to display stickers than Finglas residents (88% compared to 36%).

In general, Foxrock residents were more enthusiastic about the benefits of the scheme compared to Finglas residents as indeed were the Gardaí serving in those areas. In Foxrock, the most frequently mentioned benefit was a greater sense of security (cited by 70%) while in Finglas the most frequently mentioned benefit was reducing the opportunity for crime (cited by 47%). The survey also reported a perception - shared by 57% of Foxrock residents and 51% of Finglas residents - that relations between the Gardaí and the community had improved since the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch (Ibid, p.148). At the same time, Finglas residents were much more likely to be dissatisfied (33%) with the Gardaí's response to calls for help than Foxrock residents (8%). Evidence on the extent of victimisation among residents - before and after the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch - proved to be inconclusive because the main change was in the composition rather than in the overall size of victim crimes. Clearly therefore, as Tarpey points out, "one cannot be conclusive and state that crime has been reduced since the launch of Neighbourhood Watch in the two localities under study" (Tarpey, 1987, p.219). It would appear from this study that Neighbourhood Watch tends to be more effective in middle class areas in terms of helping to

improve the sense of security and community and improving relations between the community and the Gardaí.

In 1995, an evaluation of 15 Community Alert schemes was carried out in three Garda Divisions: Roscommon/Galway East, Cork West and Wexford. The evaluation was carried out by the Community Relations Section of the Garda Síochána at the behest of the Department of Justice. The study involved a 17-item questionnaire which was sent to: (1) the Liaison Garda in each scheme and (2) the Muintir na Tire representative in each scheme. The questionnaire sent to the Liaison Garda contained one additional question dealing with the number of crimes committed - attacks on the elderly, burglary, other crimes - in the three years before and the three years after the scheme was established.

The results of the survey showed that all but one of the fifteen schemes were still operational and, on average, held between two and four meetings annually. However the main focus of the report involved comparing changes in the three categories of crime before and after the introduction of Community Alert. Only aggregate figures are presented so that it is impossible to establish the degree of variation from one scheme to another; this is a curious omission in a report whose *raison d'être* is to identify which schemes are most effective. The results for each of the three categories of crime in the 15 scheme areas combined are summarised in Table 1.8.1 along with some national data, all taken from the report. This reveals that each category of crime decreased in the scheme areas although the decline in attacks on the elderly is negligible (from seven to six). Of particular significance is the fact that nationally the number of attacks on the elderly declined by 84%. This leads one to the conclusion - when account is taken of the fact that the national figure includes both scheme and non-scheme areas - and the fact that the decline in attacks on the elderly in the sample schemes was negligible - that the national decline in attacks on the elderly cannot, on the basis of the evidence presented, be attributed to Community Alert. Accordingly, the report's reference to the "success" (Community Relations Section, 1995, p.7) of Community Alert in reducing attacks on the elderly is not supported by the evidence presented. Moreover the findings of this report have been used in a variety of settings to prove - albeit without foundation - that Community Alert is effective in reducing attacks on the elderly; for example it was used at a European Police Conference (Behan, 1994), an International Police Conference (Quigley, 1995), in the report of the Task Force on Security for the Elderly (1996), in an official discussion paper on crime (Department of Justice, 1997), and in radio programmes.

**Table 1.8.1 Impact of Community Alert on
Selected Categories of Crime Compared to National Data**

Community Alert	Based on 15 Community Alert Schemes in Roscommon/Galway East; Cork West; Wexford			Based on National Data
Before & After	Elderly Attacks* N	Burglary N	Other Crimes N	Elderly Attacks* N
1. Before Scheme	7	140	101	432 (1)
2. After Scheme	6	105	81	69 (2)
Change N	-1	-35	-20	-363
Change %	-17	-25	-21	-84

Source: Community Relations Section of the Garda Síochána, 1995.

*Elderly attacks were defined as attacks on persons over the age of 65 in their own home.

(1) Based on 1984 data. (2) Based on 1994 data.

In 1997, a third evaluation, this time involving Neighbourhood Watch, was carried out in the Glasnevin / Drumcondra area of Dublin (Beakey, 1997). The analysis was based on completed questionnaires from a sample of households in the scheme. A number of personal interviews were taken with persons in the scheme, including the local Liaison Gardaí. The study found that 74% of respondents had reported some suspicious activity in the scheme area. Over 78% had heard of property marking but only 44% had actually done anything about it. Of those interviewed, 64% felt that the crime rate had been reduced in the scheme area since the establishment of the scheme and 54% said that the area was now safer to reside in. Sixty percent felt that crime was still a problem in the area. The attitude of those interviewed was also positive in relation to crime prevention measures advocated by the scheme.

Beakey's evaluation also examined statistics on crime recorded by the Garda Síochána before and after the introduction of the scheme. This revealed that burglaries increased initially after the scheme was set up but decreased significantly during its second year. Larcenies from unattended vehicles increased continuously with no discernible impact following the introduction of the scheme. Interestingly, Beakey (1997) suggests that the increase in the number of recorded larcenies may be due to improved reporting to the Gardaí although this would be very difficult to prove.

Our review of the three evaluations which have been carried out in Ireland - two on Neighbourhood Watch and one on Community Alert - suggests that the main impacts of the scheme are primarily in terms of changing feelings and attitudes. In general, the schemes help people to feel more secure and part of a community, but they also have the effect of promoting positive attitudes towards the Gardaí. In the case of Neighbourhood Watch, these benefits seem to be felt most strongly in more middle class areas where relations with the Gardaí are already good and where there may already be a strong sense of security. None of the studies were able to show that the overall level of crime in the area had declined as a result of the schemes.

Outside Ireland, there have been numerous evaluations in other countries of schemes like Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert which use a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods. All of them face similar methodological difficulties but all of them come up with broadly similar results. These results indicate that the main areas of impact tend to be an improved sense of security and community as well as improved relations with police; it is very rare to find indisputable evidence in these studies which links the schemes to an overall reduction in the level of crime. As one commentator observed following a review of nearly 60 such studies in Britain and the US: "it is almost impossible to arrive at an overall conclusion about the effectiveness of NW [Neighbourhood Watch] in preventing crime" (Bennett, 1990, p.45). In other words, global statements that these schemes are effective or ineffective cannot be sustained by the research evidence. The reasons for this are due not solely to the fact that different studies produce different results but because many of the studies have serious methodological flaws.

The following are some of the main flaws that have afflicted previous research on these schemes.

1. Many of the studies - possibly because they were carried out by police - have assessed the impact of schemes on crime by using police recorded crime only which, as we have seen

above, is an incomplete indicator of crime unless supplemented by crime victimisation data.

2. Many of the studies were based on small geographical areas which had relatively small numbers of crime to begin with. We also found this in our own case studies of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert as described in Chapter Four below. These small numbers make it virtually impossible to draw any general conclusions about impact of the schemes on crime.
3. Many of the studies assessed scheme impact by comparing the situation before and after the introduction of the schemes. This is sensible as far as it goes but it does not go far enough. In order to draw conclusions about impact from before-and-after comparisons, it is necessary to show - by using matched or randomly selected areas where schemes have not been operating - that the impact occurred only where the schemes have been in place. None of the studies have gone to this length so that the impact attributed to the schemes is in fact assumed rather than proven.
4. Many of the studies provide vague or incomplete descriptions of the schemes which were being evaluated. In some cases, the schemes were operating in parallel with other police and community-based initiatives and the evaluation was not always sufficiently clear about what exactly was being evaluated.

In this evaluation, we have been mindful of these pitfalls and, within the resources available, have endeavoured to avoid them. A central plank of the evaluation, as described in Chapter Five, involves comparing a nationally representative sample of people living in scheme and non-scheme areas and controlling for the effects of a range of demographic and socio-economic variables. We assume a basic similarity between all Neighbourhood Watch schemes and all Community Alert schemes although we know that there is considerable variation between them; this needs to be borne in mind when reading the results. We also detail the experiences of Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators and Community Alert Committees in Chapter Two and examine the factors associated with differential impact. We believe that the impact of these schemes is influenced by the attitudes and behaviour of the Garda Síochána and we put this belief to the test using the survey results of a large sample of Gardaí in Chapter Three.

Our review of the literature has indicated that multiple data sources should be used as much as possible. Official crime statistics have numerous limitations and should rarely be used alone. In this study, we have tended to use official crime statistics only as a way of showing their limits from the point of view of evaluation. Instead, we have relied on extensive interviews with the co-ordinators, committees and Gardaí involved in the schemes and have supplemented these with case studies and a survey of the general population. In this way, we have created a broad data base which will allow us to make prudent but assured judgements about the overall impacts of both Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert.

1.9 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has set the scene for the evaluation of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert by describing various aspect of the schemes and their operation. We now present the key findings of the chapter in summary form.

We have seen that Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert were introduced in 1984 in the context of a rapid increase in the number of officially recorded crimes and amidst growing fears about crime and victimisation. A substantial proportion of crime at that time - as in the 1990s - was generated by drug use and there was growing concern in the Garda Síochána about its deteriorating relations with the public, particularly in more disadvantaged urban communities. In rural areas there was alarm at the growing number of attacks on the elderly.

In March 1984, the Dáil Select Committee on Crime, Lawlessness and Vandalism recommended “an early introduction of Neighbourhood Watch on a nation-wide basis” and this was endorsed by the then Minister for Justice. The Community Relations Section of the Garda Síochána were also enthusiastic supporters of the initiative having observed at first hand the operation of such schemes in the United States where they had been operating since the 1960s. Neighbourhood Watch schemes were only introduced in Britain in the early 1980s.

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert - like similar schemes elsewhere - are informed by a theoretical approach which believes that criminals choose to commit crimes - particularly crimes against property - in situations where the rewards are high and the risks are low. Accordingly, this approach emphasises the importance of reducing opportunities for crime and is less concerned with addressing its underlying causes.

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert have broadly similar structures involving a joint initiative by the community and the Garda Síochána to raise awareness of the need for greater security in the home, more vigilance for suspicious activities and improved reporting of information to the Gardaí. Each scheme is publicised through leaflets, stickers and signs, and meetings are held at which Gardaí usually give an update on crime trends in the area. A crucial difference between Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert is that many individual schemes in Community Alert are supported by Muintir na Tire through its five development officers. However there are well-developed proposals to develop a somewhat similar support structure for Neighbourhood Watch.

Our estimate is that the cost to the Garda Síochána of running the schemes in 1997 was IR£3.8 million which is less than 1% of its total budget in that year. The estimated annual cost of running each Neighbourhood Watch scheme in 1997 (IR£1,136) was less than the cost of running each Community Alert scheme (IR£1,273) due to the employment of development officers to support the Community Alert schemes.

Between 1985 and 1997, an average of 158 new Neighbourhood Watch schemes was established each year; this is three times the rate of expansion of Community Alert which established 54 schemes per year over the same period. Overall, we calculate that more than half (54%) of all households are in one or other scheme, with the Dublin (62%) and Western (60%) Regions having the strongest concentration of households in schemes.

We reviewed three evaluations which have been carried out in Ireland - two on Neighbourhood Watch and one on Community Alert - and these suggest that the main impacts of the schemes are primarily in terms of helping people to feel more secure and part of a community and promoting positive attitudes towards the Gardaí. None of the Irish studies were able to show that the overall level of crime in the area had declined as a result of the schemes. Our review of studies from elsewhere indicates that global statements which claim that these schemes are either effective or ineffective cannot be sustained by the research evidence. As one commentator observed following a review of nearly 60 such studies in Britain and the US, "it is almost impossible to arrive at an overall conclusion about the effectiveness of NW [Neighbourhood Watch] in preventing crime" (Bennett, 1990, p.45). The reasons for this are due not solely to the fact that different studies produce different results but because many of the studies have serious methodological flaws.

Against this background, we proceed to assess the impact of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. We begin by reporting on the results of our survey of scheme organisers in Chapter Two followed by our survey of Gardaí in Chapter Three. This is supplemented by 12 case studies which are detailed in Chapter Four. Our assessment of impact, based on a national survey of scheme participants and non-participants, is presented in Chapter Five. On the strength of this analysis, we draw our conclusions and make our recommendations in Chapter Six.

Appendix to Chapter One

A1.1 Template for Neighbourhood Watch

1. If the initiative for the scheme comes from the community, the District Officer [Superintendent] should arrange a meeting with interested persons. The District Officer or his deputy should attend this meeting; others such as the Juvenile Liaison Officer, an Inspector, Sergeant and one or two Gardaí could also attend.
2. If the initiative for the scheme does not come from the community, the District Officer should contact officials in the residents association or other community organisation to arrange a meeting of interested persons. As above, the District Officer or his deputy should attend this meeting; others such as the Juvenile Liaison Officer, an Inspector, Sergeant and one or two Gardaí could also attend.
3. The agenda for the meeting should include a presentation by the District Officer on crime trends and ways in which residents could help the Gardaí through the scheme. A full discussion of the principles of Neighbourhood Watch should take place. The District Officer or his deputy should attend this meeting; others such as the Juvenile Liaison Officer, an Inspector, Sergeant and one or two Gardaí could also attend.
4. If those present agree to set up a scheme, they must carry out a survey of all households in the community to determine the level of support. The District Officer supplies the standard one-page questionnaire which is distributed to each household and collected by the committee. If there is sufficient support for the scheme - which should be at least 50% of all households - the District Officer supports the scheme subject to the approval of his Divisional Officer.
5. The committee appoints its officers - none of which can be a member of the Garda Síochána - particularly the Area Co-ordinator and the Street Co-ordinators.
6. The scheme is launched at a public meeting where the appointment of Co-ordinators is finalised. The principles of Neighbourhood Watch are explained in full. The District Officer or his deputy should attend this meeting; others such as the Juvenile Liaison Officer, an Inspector, Sergeant and one or two Gardaí could also attend. The Garda or Sergeant nominated to be the Liaison Garda for the scheme will also attend.
7. Early on in the scheme, a meeting should be arranged for the co-ordinators and training given to them on their duties as well as on how to describe vehicles and people, what are suspicious circumstances, et cetera.
8. The Liaison Garda for the scheme will maintain weekly contact with the committee through its secretary and the Area Co-ordinator.
9. The committee, through its co-ordinators will implement projects such as the property marking scheme, victim support, school poster competition, or produce a newsletter.
10. Each resident who joins will be given an information pack on the scheme and a Garda contact number if they wish to report something.
11. Signs and stickers to denote the scheme are displayed in the area.
12. The District Officer will meet with the committee on a regular basis.

A1.2 Template for Community Alert

1. The initiative to set up a scheme may come from the community, Muintir na Tire or the Gardaí. The first step involves calling a public meeting. In addition to the public, this meeting will be attended by the Gardaí, typically the Superintendent or Sergeant and the Crime Prevention Officer. In general, the meeting will also be attended by one of the Development Officers from Muintir na Tire.

2. The scheme is explained and, if there is agreement to setting up a scheme, a committee is appointed including officers to the positions of Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and Public Relations.
3. The main remit of the committee, which is expected to meet monthly, is to draw up a list of people in the community who are at risk, typically elderly persons living alone. Many committees work from a list which has been prepared by either the Health Board or the Garda Síochána. The committee will also select the most appropriate and acceptable neighbours to visit the persons who are listed as vulnerable. Persons at risk will be visited regularly and given advice on security as well as contact phone numbers in case of emergency. In some areas, the Gardaí also have a policy of visiting all vulnerable elderly persons on a regular basis.
4. The committee may arrange for the purchase of Community Alert signs by organising fund-raising events. It must also apply for and obtain planning permission from the Local Authority to erect these signs.
5. The committee may take an active role in applying for grants to improve the home security of vulnerable older people. These grants are available under the Scheme of Community Support for Older People through the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. In 1996, the budget for this scheme was IR£2.5 million and was distributed between 14,944 beneficiaries; in 1997, the budget was increased to IR£5 million. Muintir na Tire has been active in helping Community Alert Committees to access these funds.
6. The committee may carry out studies of the elderly to determine their needs in areas such as health, housing, income support, social services, meals-on-wheels, et cetera.
7. The committee may use the parish bulletin, the local newspaper or publish a separate newsletter to disseminate information about the scheme and its activities.
8. The committee should hold an annual general meeting to review progress.

Chapter Two

Perspectives of Scheme Organisers

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert from the perspective of scheme organisers. Our description is based on a postal survey of scheme organisers throughout the country. In Neighbourhood Watch, the scheme organiser is called the area co-ordinator who, together with the street co-ordinators form the overall committee for the scheme; in Community Alert, the scheme organiser is the chairperson of the committee (see Chapter One for a more detailed description of the organisation of each scheme).

The size of the survey relative to the total population of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert schemes is summarised in Table 2.1.1. This reveals that 827 schemes participated in the survey, equivalent to 24% of the total. The response rate from Community Alert organisers (33%) was considerably higher than from Neighbourhood Watch organisers (20%) and may be the result of a public awareness campaign conducted by Muintir na Tire to encourage the participation of Community Alert schemes in the evaluation. We believe that the response rate may have been adversely affected by gaps in the data base for these schemes which is maintained by the Community Relations Section of the Garda Síochána which resulted in some questionnaires being sent to addresses where the person had ceased to be a scheme organiser. We also believe that the response rate may be a reflection of apathy and inactivity in many schemes since the results of our national survey of scheme participants and non-participants revealed that two thirds of all schemes, in the opinion of scheme participants, were inactive (see Chapter Five, Table 5.3.9 below). Accordingly, the survey results probably reflect the reality of the more active and energetic schemes and may be representative of little more than a third of all schemes.

Table 2.1.1 Characteristics of the Sample of Scheme Organisers

Category	NW	CA	Total
Number of schemes in Ireland	2,318	1,141	3,459
Number of schemes in sample	455	372	827
Response Rate (%)	20	33	24

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). Note that the number of Community Alert schemes recorded by Muintir na Tire in early 1998 (1,141) is considerably higher than the number of Community Alert schemes recorded in the Community Relations data base at Garda Headquarters in 1997 (989). Unless otherwise specified, we have tended to use the higher figure of Muintir na Tire. NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

It is worth pointing out that the response rate to postal surveys is highly volatile and can vary from as low as 5% to as high as 40% depending on factors such as the length of the questionnaire, the topic, the characteristics of respondents, the correctness of addresses, the availability of an incentive for completing the questionnaire, the time of year the survey is carried out - to name some of the more significant factors. In view of these considerations, a response rate of 24% is acceptable and an absolute number of 827 completed questionnaires provides a solid basis for drawing a profile of scheme organisers.

Our analysis of the data begins with a description of the characteristics of scheme organisers (2.2), scheme areas (section 2.3) and the schemes themselves (section 2.4). This is followed by a description of scheme activities (section 2.5) and scheme meetings (section 2.6). Relations between schemes and Gardaí are analysed (section 2.7) and assessed (2.8) as are linkages between schemes and other bodies (section 2.9). The vitality and effectiveness of schemes are assessed by scheme organisers in sections 2.10 and 2.11 respectively. Finally, the summary and conclusion to the chapter is presented in section 2.12.

2.2 Characteristics of Scheme Organisers

The characteristics of scheme organisers are summarised in Table 2.2.1. The picture which emerges is that scheme organisers are older than the adult population generally. Two out of every three scheme organisers are men and a much higher proportion are married compared to the adult population in Ireland. Most live with another person in the house, have been living in the same area for over ten years and have been an organiser in the scheme for three years or more. Scheme organisers differ from the rest of the adult population in Ireland in that they are more likely to own their own home, to be middle class and to be involved in either the world of paid work or retired; very few are unemployed. This profile is remarkably consistent across both Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert.

Table 2.2.1 Characteristics of Scheme Organisers (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Aged 35 years and over	94	92	93
Men	68	70	69
Married or ever married	91	83	88
Living with others	91	89	90
Living in same area for more than 10 years	73	85	78
Home owner	95	97	96
Employed	44	52	48
Retired	31	17	24
Middle class (ABC1)	68	58	63
Scheme organiser for three years or more	88	80	84
Total (%)*	-	-	-

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

*The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

2.3 Characteristics of Scheme Areas

2.3.1 Extent of Home Ownership in Scheme Area

Scheme areas are not unlike scheme organisers in the extent of home ownership. Table 2.3.1 indicates that the vast majority (94%) of scheme areas are described by their organisers as mainly owner occupied. However it is difficult to be sure from this if the private and local authority sectors are under-represented since areas that are “mainly owner occupied” may also include housing from these other sectors.

Table 2.3.1 Extent of Home Ownership in Scheme Areas (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Mainly owner occupied	92	97	94
Mainly private rented	1	1	1
Mainly local authority rented	7	2	5
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.3.2 Schemes by Urban-Rural Characteristics

As might be expected, scheme organisers for Neighbourhood Watch described their areas as urban while those for Community Alert described them as rural (Table 2.3.2). Most of the Community Alert schemes (73%) are in areas described as “rural” rather than “villages” or “remote rural”.

Table 2.3.2 Urban-Rural Characteristics of Scheme Areas (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Dublin (inner city)	3	0	1
Dublin (inner suburb)	14	0	8
Dublin (outer suburb)	31	0	17
Large towns (over 10,000 people)	35	0	19
Small towns (under 10,000 people)	11	6	9
Village	6	17	11
Rural	0	73	33
Remote rural (about 40 miles from a town)	0	4	2
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.3.3 Extent of Community Organisations in Scheme Area

Table 2.3.3 indicates that the majority (69%) of scheme areas have a residents association or community council and seven out of ten of these tend to be active. Neighbourhood Watch areas are more likely to have a residents association or community organisation than Community Alert areas.

Table 2.3.3 Extent of Community Organisations in Scheme Areas (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Area has residents / community association	79	57	69
<i>it is very active</i>	30	30	30
<i>it is active</i>	41	49	44
<i>it is not very active</i>	23	17	21
<i>it is not active at all</i>	6	4	5
Area has no residents / community association	21	43	31
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.3.4 Perception of Crime in Scheme Area

Table 2.3.4 reveals that the vast majority of scheme organisers believe that crime is a minor problem (62%) in their area or not a problem at all (29%). Within this context, the crime problem is seen as even more minor in Community Alert areas than in Neighbourhood Watch areas and this is consistent with the objective distribution of recorded crime between urban and rural areas. We are in no position to judge from this data if the perception of crime is related to scheme membership - or if the perception of crime was different prior to the establishment of the scheme - although we present some relevant data on this issue in Chapter Five (section 5.4).

Table 2.3.4 Perception of Crime in Scheme Area (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Serious problem	13	3	9
Minor problem	69	53	62
Not a problem	18	44	29
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.3.5 Common Problems in Scheme Area

Table 2.3.5 summarises the type of problems which, in the opinion of scheme organisers, are fairly common or very common in their area. This reveals that the three main problems are rubbish and litter lying about (40%), teenagers hanging around streets (39%) and under age drinking (39%). In every case, scheme organisers from Neighbourhood Watch areas mentioned problems more frequently than organisers in Community Alert Areas.

Table 2.3.5 Common Problems in Scheme Area (%)

Very Common or Fairly Common Problems	NW	CA	Total
Rubbish and litter lying about	44	36	40
Teenagers hanging around streets	50	24	39
Under age drinking	42	36	39
People loitering / strange cars	21	13	18
Annoying neighbours	24	9	17
Drug use	22	8	16
Graffiti on walls or buildings	23	3	14
People being drunk in public	16	4	11
Nuisance telephone calls	7	12	9
Homes and gardens in bad condition	7	5	6
Total (%)*	-	-	-

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

*The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

2.3.6 Summary

The analysis in this section has shown the heavy concentration of schemes in areas with a high level of home ownership. Seven out of ten scheme areas also have a community

organisation such as a residents association or community association - particularly in Neighbourhood Watch areas - and these tend to be active. Crime is not a problem in the scheme areas, according to the organisers although four in ten of them - particularly in Neighbourhood Watch areas - indicated that there were problems with rubbish, loitering teenagers and under age drinking.

2.4 Characteristics of Schemes

2.4.1 Schemes in Continuous Existence

It is well known that some schemes are more active than others and some of the less active ones can fall into abeyance over the years and have to be re-launched as a way of regenerating enthusiasm and commitment. In order to capture this, we asked organisers if their scheme had a continuous existence since its original launch date. The results in Table 2.4.1 show that most schemes in the sample (86%) have never been re-launched. This may be due to the fact that the schemes in our sample are the more active ones in the population although it may also mean that schemes continue to exist but at a low level of activity.

Table 2.4.1 Has the Scheme had a Continuous Existence since its Original Launch Date? (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Scheme has had a continuous existence	82	91	86
Scheme has not had a continuous existence	15	8	12
Don't know	3	1	2
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.4.2 Source of Initiative for Scheme

Table 2.4.2 shows that approximately seven out of ten schemes, in the opinion of organisers, were set up at the initiative of the community while about a quarter were set up on the initiative of the Gardaí. In general, Neighbourhood Watch schemes seem more likely to be set up on the initiative of the community while Community Alert schemes seem more likely to be set up on the initiative of the Gardaí. Muintir na Tire were responsible for setting up 5% of the Community Alert schemes in the sample.

Table 2.4.2 Source of Initiative for Establishing the Scheme (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Local Gardaí	21	33	27
Scheme organiser or predecessor	34	20	28
Local community	17	23	20
Residents Association / Community Council	23	10	16
ICA	0	3	2
Muintir na Tire	0	5	2
Other	2	4	3
Don't know	3	2	2
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.4.3 Size of Scheme

The size of a scheme refers to the number of members. However the concept of membership is often loosely defined and may indicate little more than a household's original approval for setting up the scheme. Moreover the membership list may not be updated regularly. Accordingly, the number of members in a scheme should be treated as no more than an estimate. Our analysis in Chapter One revealed that, on average, each Neighbourhood Watch scheme comprises 158 households and each Community Alert scheme comprises 222 households; it also showed that all schemes varied considerably around this average. The data in Table 2.4.3 also show wide variation in the size of schemes to such an extent that estimating the average would be meaningless. Of particular note is the fact that more than half of all the schemes have less than 100 households which suggests that a higher response rate was received from smaller schemes. In turn, this may be due to the fact that smaller schemes may be more active which, as suggested above, seems to be a characteristic of this sample.

Table 2.4.3 Number of Households in Schemes* (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Less than 50	31	43	36
From 50 to 100	23	17	21
Between 101 and 200	22	16	19
Between 201 and 300	11	11	10
More than 300	13	13	14
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

*On average, each scheme comprises 95% of all households in its area.

2.4.4 Summary

Our analysis in this section suggests that the vast majority of schemes in the sample (86%) have continued to operate since they were originally launched. According to scheme organisers, three quarters of the schemes were launched at the initiative of the community; the remainder at the initiative of the Gardaí. The schemes in this sample seem to be smaller

than the estimated average in Ireland and we surmise that this may be due to the fact that smaller schemes are also those which are more active.

2.5 Main Activities of the Schemes

The main activities of schemes are summarised in Table 2.5.1.

Table 2.5.1 Main Activities of Schemes (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Report incidents to the Gardaí	81	86	83
Watch each others' property	82	80	81
NW / CA stickers displayed at home	79	71	75
Erect signs in the streets / roads	62	89	74
Record suspicious incidents	61	65	63
Keep details of members' names and addresses	50	68	58
Visit / help / contact elderly within the scheme	46	72	57
Move paper / milk / check on property during holidays	54	31	44
Discount purchase of locks / alarms / insurance, etc	25	65	43
Increased door security such as door chains	37	55	45
Fund-raising activities for the scheme	19	58	36
Circulate information through church magazine	22	43	32
Move wheelie bins / dustbins during holidays	38	20	30
Help Gardaí look for stolen vehicles / suspicious persons	29	30	30
Support victims of crime within the scheme	29	28	28
Purchase or borrow engraving / etching kit	31	19	26
Produce a newsletter for the scheme	29	15	22
Scheme-based social activities / outings	14	13	14
Circulate information through free newspapers	12	11	12
Total (%)*	-	-	-

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes); 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

*The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

This reveals that about three quarters of all schemes do certain core activities such as reporting incidents to the Gardaí, watching each other's property, displaying stickers at home and erecting scheme signs in the area. About two thirds of all schemes disseminate information about the scheme through the church magazine (32%), their own newsletter (22%) or through free newspapers (12%). More than half also record suspicious incidents, keep members names and addresses and keep in contact with the elderly. Some activities are more popular in Community Alert such as erecting signs and raising the funds to do so as well as visiting the elderly and discount purchasing of locks, alarms and insurance. Although some of the scheme activities are occasional (such as erecting signs and displaying stickers), many seem to be continuous (such as reporting incidents to the Gardaí, watching each other's property, visiting the elderly, disseminating information) and this suggests that these schemes are quite active. The data in Table 2.5.1 also reveals that the activities are in line with the original objectives of the schemes as described in Chapter One.

2.6 Scheme Meetings

This section describes various aspects of scheme meetings. Two types of meetings are distinguished: meetings of scheme members (which includes everyone in the community who has agreed to participate in the scheme) and meetings of scheme organisers (which comprise the area and street co-ordinators in Neighbourhood Watch areas and the local committee in Community Alert areas). We look at the frequency of these meetings as well as the attendance of Gardaí at them.

2.6.1 Meetings of Scheme Members

Table 2.6.1 indicates the number of times scheme members meet each year. This reveals a wide variation between schemes and significant differences between Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. In global terms, around a fifth of schemes never meet but a similar proportion meet six times a year or more. Community Alert schemes tend to meet more frequently than Neighbourhood Watch schemes; indeed Neighbourhood Watch schemes are three times more likely to never meet than Community Alert schemes (27% compared to 8%) but are only half as likely to meet six times a year or more (15% compared to 33%). We do not know how many scheme members attend these meetings.

Table 2.6.1 Number of Meetings of Scheme Members Each Year (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Never	27	8	18
Once	24	12	19
Two or three times	20	23	21
Four or five times	14	24	19
Six times or more	15	33	23
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes); 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.6.2 Meetings of Scheme Organisers

Table 2.6.2 reveals that two out of every three scheme organisers never have meetings which are separate from the meetings of all scheme members. This is particularly the case with Community Alert where the committee rarely meets separately from meetings of all members. In the case of Neighbourhood Watch, the area and street co-ordinators meet separately in only half the schemes. The frequency of these meetings varies but is usually around 2-4 times a year. Thus it would appear that meetings of all the members - as distinct from meetings of scheme organisers - is accorded much greater importance in both types of schemes but especially in Community Alert schemes.

Table 2.6.2 Frequency of Meetings of Scheme Organisers Each Year (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
None	48	86	65
Monthly	11	3	7
About every 3-6 months	21	5	14
Every six months or less	20	6	14
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.6.3 Summary

As elsewhere in this chapter, we find that schemes differ considerably from each other in the pattern of their meetings. About a fifth of schemes never have meetings of members while a similar proportion meet about six times a year. Two thirds of scheme organisers never have separate meetings from the meeting of all the members. Community Alert schemes meet more frequently than Neighbourhood Watch schemes although we do not know how many attend these meetings. In this sense, it is difficult to speak of a standard scheme, at least from the perspective of meetings and there is no statistical norm regarding the frequency of meetings. This needs to be borne in mind when assessing the overall impact of the schemes since the variation between them in different localities leads one to wonder if Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are so diverse in their local manifestations that their impact is likely to reflect the local manifestation of each rather than the scheme as a whole. This is an issue to which we shall return in Chapter Five.

2.7 Relations between Schemes and Gardaí

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are designed to build a bridge between the Gardaí and the community. Accordingly, relations between the schemes and the Gardaí are crucially important in measuring their success. This section describes various aspects of how the schemes and Gardaí relate to each other including whether the scheme organiser knows the Liaison Garda by name, Gardaí attendance at scheme meetings, and the types of communication received from the Gardaí in the past year. We now describe these contacts, leaving the evaluation of them to the next section.

2.7.1 Knowing the Garda by Name

The vast majority of the scheme organisers (89%) know the name of the Garda assigned to their scheme, according to Table 2.7.1. This is a good indication that the Gardaí are involved in the schemes and that scheme organisers are able to “put a face and a name” on the force, as was originally intended by the schemes.

Table 2.7.1 Do you know the name of the Garda assigned to your scheme? (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Yes	87	92	89
No	13	8	11
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.7.2 When last Heard from Garda assigned to Scheme

The data in Table 2.7.2 shows that Gardaí maintain a substantial amount of contact with the scheme organisers. Four out of ten Gardaí were in contact with scheme organisers during the past week, two out of ten in the past month and a further two out of ten in the past three months. Only a minority (5%) had not heard from the Liaison Garda within the past year. It is also clear from Table 2.7.2 that Gardaí maintain more frequent contact with scheme organisers in Community Alert than in Neighbourhood Watch.

Table 2.7.2 When did you last hear from the Garda assigned to your scheme? (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Last week	32	47	39
Last month	20	25	22
Last three months	21	14	18
Last year	14	9	12
More than a year ago	8	3	5
Never	2	1	2
Don't know	3	1	2
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.7.3 Garda Attendance at Scheme Meetings

Table 2.7.3 reveals that Gardaí are regular attenders at meetings of scheme members. More than three quarters of scheme meetings (78%) are always or usually attended by a Garda. They are more frequent attenders of Community Alert meetings than at Neighbourhood Watch meetings. This may be due to the fact that Gardaí in at least some Neighbourhood Watch areas - particularly in the larger urban areas - may have other competing obligations which make it difficult to attend scheme meetings. Conversely, the lower attendance of Gardaí at Neighbourhood Watch meetings may itself contribute to the reduced frequency of meetings in these schemes because their absence may give the impression that the meeting is not very important. In any case, given that the level of crime and the risk of victimisation is considerably higher in larger urban areas compared to rural areas, the reduced attendance of Gardaí at Neighbourhood Watch meetings appears to be inconsistent with supporting community involvement in crime prevention.

Table 2.7.3 Frequency of Attendance of Gardaí at Meetings of Scheme Members Each Year (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Always	49	58	53
Usually	23	24	23
Occasionally	15	12	14
Rarely	5	3	5
Never	6	2	4
Don't know	2	1	1
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

Garda attendance at meetings of scheme organisers is less frequent than at meetings of scheme members. Indeed, as Table 2.7.4 shows, about one third (30%) of the scheme organisers never meet the Gardaí separately. There is a huge variation in the frequency of meetings between scheme organisers and Gardaí: some organisers (20%) meet the Gardaí six times a year or more while other organisers (26%) meet them only once or twice.

Table 2.7.4 Number of Meetings of Scheme Organisers With Gardaí Each Year (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Never	31	29	30
Once or twice	29	21	26
Three, four or five times	21	27	24
Six times or more	19	23	20
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.7.4 Communications from the Gardaí

One of the key roles of the Gardaí assigned to schemes is to make presentations at meetings of members. Table 2.7.5 shows that nearly three quarters (72%) of the schemes have had such a presentation in the past year. An even higher proportion (79%) have received literature from the Gardaí. Once more we see that Community Alert seems to receive a better service from the Gardaí in terms of literature and presentations than Neighbourhood Watch.

Table 2.7.5 Types of Communication from Gardaí to Scheme in Past Year (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Literature	79	79	79
Presentations	66	80	72
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.7.5 Summary

The results presented in this section show a high level of contact between scheme organisers and Gardaí. Most scheme organisers - about nine out of ten - know their Liaison Garda by name and six out of ten have heard from the Liaison Garda at least once in the previous three months. Gardaí are regular attenders at scheme meetings - particularly meetings of members as distinct from meetings of scheme organisers - and usually make a presentation at those meetings. Gardaí seem to stay in more regular contact with Community Alert schemes than with Neighbourhood Watch schemes. Our analysis in Chapter Three suggests that this may be due to the fact that Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí tend to have a larger number of schemes than Community Alert Gardaí and, even though the former spend slightly more time on schemes than the latter, the overall effect seems to be a lesser Garda input per scheme for Neighbourhood Watch than for Community Alert.

2.8 Assessing Garda Input to the Schemes

In this section we assess the Garda input to the schemes using a number of indicators. We asked scheme organisers about the Garda response to information provided and their assessment of presentations made by Gardaí at scheme meetings. We also asked scheme organisers to evaluate the Garda commitment to the schemes at local and national level, whether the schemes could be, or should be, run without the Gardaí and whether they are satisfied with the overall input of the Gardaí to the scheme. Finally, in this section we also asked if there were ways in which the Garda input to the schemes could be improved.

2.8.1 Garda Response to Information on Suspicious Activities

As indicated above (Table 2.5.1), most scheme organisers (83%) provided information on suspicious activities to the Gardaí within the past twelve months. Most of these (86%) got the impression that the Gardaí found this information useful, as Table 2.8.1 reveals. Just over half (58%) of the scheme organisers received direct feedback from the Gardaí on the information supplied, as Table 2.8.2 indicates, and most (76%) were satisfied with that feedback. Again we notice that feedback was more likely to be given to scheme organisers in Community Alert than in Neighbourhood Watch. Most of these were satisfied with the feedback. In nine out of ten cases where there was no feedback, scheme organisers indicated that they would like to receive such feedback in the future. Interestingly, a higher proportion of scheme organisers in Neighbourhood Watch areas indicated that they would welcome more feedback from the Gardaí.

Table 2.8.1 Gardaí Gave Impression that Information was Useful (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Useful	84	90	86
Not particularly useful	12	9	11
Waste of time	4	1	3
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

Table 2.8.2 Satisfaction with Feedback Received from Gardaí (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Feedback received	53	65	58
<i>satisfied</i>	70	85	76
<i>neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</i>	17	11	15
<i>dissatisfied</i>	13	4	9
No feedback received and	47	35	42
<i>would have liked feedback</i>	92	84	89
<i>would not have liked feedback</i>	7	16	11
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes); 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.8.2 Usefulness of Garda Presentations at Scheme Meetings

We have already seen that Gardaí are regular attenders at scheme meetings and typically make a presentation at those meetings. Table 2.8.3 shows that virtually all (97%) of the scheme organisers found the Garda presentations at scheme meetings to be useful or very useful. This suggests that scheme organisers regard the Garda input to these meetings as very important. This is also confirmed by our case studies which showed that the Garda presentation was the centre-piece of most scheme meetings (see Chapter Four). Scheme organisers in Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert equally appreciated the presentations made by the Gardaí.

Table 2.8.3 Usefulness of Presentation by Gardaí to Scheme in Past Year (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Presentation was very useful	66	76	71
Presentation was useful	29	23	26
Presentation was not useful	5	1	3
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes); 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.8.3 Are Gardaí Committed to the Schemes?

The behaviour of Gardaí towards the schemes creates an impression about their overall commitment to the schemes. We believe that schemes organisers are well placed to read the signals communicated by the behaviour of Gardaí - both locally and nationally - towards the schemes. Accordingly, we first asked them for their impression of the local Garda commitment to the schemes. Their responses, which are summarised in Table 2.8.4, reveal that nearly eight out of ten (79%) believe that the local Gardaí are committed or very committed to the schemes. This is a strong endorsement of the Gardaí's work with the schemes. However there is a striking difference in Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in this regard: more than half (53%) the Community Alert organisers believe the Gardaí are "very committed" compared to only a quarter (23%) of Neighbourhood Watch organisers. As already suggested, this probably reflects the fact that Gardaí in Community Alert areas attend more scheme meetings and give more feedback on information supplied by scheme organisers.

Table 2.8.4 Are Gardaí Committed to the Schemes at Local Level? (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Very committed	23	53	43
Committed	46	30	36
Unsure	26	10	14
Not committed / Definitely not committed	5	7	7
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

We asked a similar question about the commitment of Gardaí to the schemes at national level. The responses, which are summarised in Table 2.8.5 reveals that the majority (72%) of scheme organisers believe that there is a national commitment to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. However scheme organisers are less convinced about Garda commitment at national level than they are at local level and those in Neighbourhood Watch are less convinced than those in Community Alert. Scheme organisers believe therefore that the commitment of the local Gardaí to their schemes is not always matched by a similar commitment at national level. This suggests, in turn, that the way in which the schemes are projected nationally is an important factor in shaping how people respond to them, particularly the response of scheme organisers who, by definition, are the most committed to them.

Table 2.8.5 Are Gardaí Committed to the Schemes at National Level? (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Very committed	23	36	29
Committed	46	41	43
Unsure	26	19	23
Not committed / Definitely not committed	5	4	5
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.8.4 Could Schemes be Run without the Gardaí and Should They?

Table 2.8.6 reveals that, in the opinion of most scheme organisers (80%), Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert could not be run without the input of the Gardaí. Interestingly - in view of the lesser input which Gardaí seem to make in Neighbourhood Watch schemes - it is these scheme organisers who believe most strongly that its schemes could not be run without the input of the Gardaí. Moreover, virtually all scheme organisers (97%) believe that these schemes should not be run without an input from the Gardaí. This clearly suggests that the schemes are perceived as an extension of the Gardaí's work into the community rather than something separate from the Gardaí.

Table 2.8.6 Could or Should the Schemes be Run Without the Gardaí? (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Schemes could not be run without Gardaí	86	74	80
Schemes should not be run without Gardaí	96	97	96
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.8.5 Satisfaction with the Garda Service to the Scheme

Scheme organisers expressed a high level of satisfaction with the input of Gardaí to their scheme. Table 2.8.7 shows that more than eight out of ten (83%) of the scheme organisers were satisfied with the service supplied by their Liaison Garda. Community Alert organisers expressed a higher level of satisfaction than their Neighbourhood Watch counterparts which is consistent with the lesser input which Gardaí seem to make to Neighbourhood Watch schemes.

Table 2.8.7 Satisfaction with Garda Service to Scheme (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Very satisfied	53	71	61
Satisfied	25	18	22
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	13	7	10
Dissatisfied / Very dissatisfied	9	4	7
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

2.8.6 Sources of Garda Help to Improve Schemes

Scheme organisers were asked about various forms of assistance from the Gardaí which would be useful in improving their scheme. Table 2.8.8 shows widespread support among scheme organisers for a greater role by Gardaí in assisting these schemes.

Table 2.8.8 Types of Useful Assistance from Gardaí to Help Schemes (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Feedback on reports of suspicious activities	79	68	74
Local crime statistics	68	50	59
Instruction manual	55	58	56
Videos	50	56	53
Training	54	49	52
Resource pack	51	52	51
Improvements in establishing schemes	44	42	43
Improvements in maintaining schemes	51	50	50
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

Improved feedback on reports of suspicious activities is a top priority for all scheme organisers. In addition, more than half expressed the view that an instruction manual, a resource pack, a video as well as training would be of help to the schemes. It is clear from this that the majority of scheme organisers - both in Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert - would like to see a greater input from the Gardaí in supporting these schemes.

2.8.7 Summary

This section used a wide range of indicators to assess the Garda input into Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. Overall, the scheme organisers in the sample were very positive about the contribution of the Gardaí to their scheme. Most scheme organisers have supplied information on suspicious activities to the Gardaí and the Gardaí seem to have found this useful. Garda feedback is invariably appreciated by scheme organisers but in four out of ten cases no feedback was given; all scheme organisers would appreciate feedback on the information which they provide. Garda presentations are often the centre piece of scheme meetings and these are seen by most scheme organisers as useful. Scheme organisers believe that the Gardaí are committed to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert, particularly at local level but are less sure about the national commitment. The central role of the Gardaí in supporting the schemes is underlined by the belief - shared by the vast majority of scheme organisers - that the schemes could not, and should not, be run without the Gardaí. In this regard, eight out of ten scheme organisers - particularly those in Community Alert areas - expressed satisfaction with the Garda input to the schemes. Finally, there is widespread support for a more active role by the Gardaí in supporting schemes through improved information about crime and more feedback on suspicious activities as well as more resource materials such as an instruction manual, video and training.

The picture emerging from this section is of Gardaí and the community working closely together to support the schemes. We have already suggested that the schemes in this sample are, almost by definition, likely to be the more active ones and there is little doubt this is attributable to the joint efforts of Gardaí and the scheme organisers. In the previous section it was noted that the Garda input to Neighbourhood Watch seemed to be less than to Community Alert and this is reflected in a slightly lower satisfaction rate for Gardaí among Neighbourhood Watch organisers. It is not possible to infer from this alone that Neighbourhood Watch schemes are less active than Community Alert schemes although the significantly lower response rate from Neighbourhood Watch schemes in this study suggests that these schemes may indeed be less active. This is something that merits further reflection in the light of the overall results of the study.

2.9 Linkages of Schemes with other Bodies

Table 2.9.1 indicates that more than one scheme in three (39%) has links with other schemes. Community Alert schemes (47%) have more contact and links with other schemes compared to Neighbourhood Watch schemes (32%). Both sets of schemes also have links with networks of schemes in about four out of ten (41%) cases; a similar proportion of schemes also have links with local authorities although the nature of those links was not disclosed. It is particularly interesting to note that two thirds (68%) of all Community Alert schemes in the sample - equivalent to 254 schemes - are registered with Muintir na Tire; in Chapter One, we saw that 341 Community Alert schemes are affiliated to Muintir na Tire which means that three quarters of these are in the sample and this in turn is a tribute to the efforts of

Muintir na Tire to encourage a high response rate to the survey. Table 2.9.1 also reveals that all of the Community Alert schemes affiliated to Muintir na Tire know the name of their development officer.

Table 2.9.1 Does your scheme have links with other schemes or bodies? (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Links with other schemes	32	47	39
Links with a local or regional network	39	43	41
Links with the local authority	34	44	38
Affiliated to Muintir na Tire	NA	68	NA
Know Muintir na Tire Development Officer	NA	70	NA
Total (%)*	-	-	-

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; NA= Not applicable.

*The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

All schemes are also linked indirectly to their commercial sponsors who subsidise the cost of literature, videos and competitions. As explained in Chapter One, the main commercial sponsors of Neighbourhood Watch are AMEV and Chubb Alarms while the main commercial sponsors of Community Alert are PMPA and Chubb Alarms. In view of this we asked scheme organisers if they knew the names of the commercial sponsors for each set of schemes. The results, which are summarised in Table 2.9.2, show that around a third knew the names of the sponsors. Given, as we have suggested throughout this chapter, that these schemes are likely to be among the more active and aware, the relatively low proportion of scheme organisers who know the names of commercial sponsors is a little surprising.

Table 2.9.2 Do you know the commercial sponsors of your scheme? (%)

Category	NW	CA	Total
Know commercial sponsors of scheme	34	36	35
Do not know commercial sponsors of scheme	66	64	65
Total (%)*	-	-	-

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

*The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

2.10 Assessing Vitality of Scheme

Some of the information already presented in this chapter - particularly on the characteristics of scheme meetings and contacts between schemes and Gardaí - give an indication of the vitality of schemes and, in general, the results were quite positive. We also measured vitality by asking scheme organisers to rate their own interest, enthusiasm and knowledge for the scheme as well as that of their committee and community. The results are summarised in Table 2.10.1 and shows that interest, enthusiasm and knowledge is rated highest among scheme organisers, lowest among the community with the scheme committees holding an intermediate position. More than half (54%) of the scheme organisers rate themselves as having a high level of enthusiasm for the schemes and this is considerably higher among

Community Alert (61%) than among Neighbourhood Watch (49%). About a third (35%) of the committees are rated as having a high level of enthusiasm for the schemes compared to a fifth (22%) of the communities. Clearly the level of enthusiasm among the scheme organisers is quite high but possibly no higher than would be expected in fairly active schemes.

Table 2.10.1 How do you rate the interest, enthusiasm and knowledge for the scheme?

Category	NW			CA			Total		
	H	M	L	H	M	L	H	M	L
Scheme organiser	49	41	10	61	37	2	54	39	7
Scheme committees	27	47	26	45	44	11	35	46	19
Community	19	49	32	27	50	23	22	50	28
Total (%)*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes).

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; H= High; M= Medium; L= Low

*The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

2.11 Assessing Effectiveness of Scheme

The data in 2.11.1 shows that around nine out of ten scheme organisers believe that the schemes are very effective in the following areas: feeling safer and less isolated, greater home security as well as increased awareness of vulnerable people in the community, reducing and preventing crime, and display of stickers. In general, belief in the effectiveness of the schemes is higher among Community Alert than among Neighbourhood Watch particularly on issues such as reducing fear and isolation and promoting awareness of vulnerable people. This result is consistent with other studies which show a strong belief in the efficacy of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert both among the general population and among those living in scheme areas (Murphy and Whelan, 1995a, p.15) as well as among advocates of the schemes (see for example, Behan, 1994; Quigley, 1995; Muintir na Tire, 1988).

Table 2.11.1 How do you rate the effectiveness of the scheme in terms of each of its objectives? (%)

Effective or very effective in achieving this objective	NW	CA	Total
Feeling safer	85	94	98
Home security	91	94	93
Crime awareness	90	94	92
Feel less isolated	87	96	91
Reducing crime	89	92	90
Display stickers	93	86	90
Preventing crime	86	91	89
Informing Gardaí	87	93	89
Aware of vulnerable	83	95	88
Community involved	81	88	84
Improve quality of life	79	88	83
Marking property	76	68	73
Self-help	52	66	59
Helping crime victims	53	59	56
Total (%)*	-	-	-

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

*The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

Belief in the effectiveness of the schemes is not the same as being effective however. As our analysis in Chapter Five shows, scheme participants do not feel noticeably safer than non-scheme participants and even when they take home security precautions these are often taken at their own initiative rather than at the prompting of the scheme. This is worth recalling here in order to place beliefs about effectiveness in the larger and firmer picture of measured objective differences between scheme participants and non-participants.

2.12 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter described the operation of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert from the perspective of 827 scheme organisers. The chapter is based on a postal survey of all schemes which yielded a response rate of 24%. When all the factors affecting postal surveys are taken into account, this is an acceptable response rate and the absolute number of 827 completed questionnaires provides a solid basis for describing some of the core characteristics of scheme organisers and their schemes, even if these are the more active ones.

2.12.1 Main Results

Our survey showed that scheme organisers tend to be older and are more likely to be married than the adult population generally. Two out of every three scheme organisers are men and have been living in their area for over ten years. Scheme organisers differ from the rest of the adult population in Ireland in that they are much more likely to own their own homes, to be middle class and to be involved in either the world of paid work or retired; very few are unemployed. Schemes themselves tend to be located in areas of high home ownership.

Most schemes, according to the organisers, are active and have continued to be active since they were first launched. Three quarters were launched at the initiative of the community; the remainder at the initiative of the Gardaí. We estimate that the schemes in our sample are smaller than the average scheme in Ireland and surmise that this may be due to the fact that smaller schemes may be the more active ones.

Seven out of ten scheme areas have an active community organisation such as a residents group or community association. Crime is not perceived as a problem in the scheme areas. Nuisances such as rubbish, loitering teenagers and under age drinking are seen as problems by about four out of ten scheme organisers, particularly in Neighbourhood Watch areas.

Most schemes do the same basic activities. Some of these are occasional (such as erecting signs and displaying stickers) but others are continuous (such as reporting incidents to the Gardaí, watching each other's property, visiting the elderly, disseminating information). Our survey presented a positive picture of the schemes' links with the community by showing that two thirds of them disseminated information about the scheme through the church magazine (32%), their own newsletter (22%) or through free newspapers (12%).

The frequency of meetings is a matter of considerable variation between schemes. About a fifth of schemes never have general meetings of members while a similar proportion meet about six times a year. Two thirds of scheme organisers never have separate meetings from the meeting of all members. Community Alert schemes meet more frequently than Neighbourhood Watch schemes although we do not know how many attend these meetings.

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are designed to build a bridge between the Gardaí and the community and scheme organisers believe that they are effective in this regard. Most scheme organisers - about nine out of ten - know their Liaison Garda by name and six out of ten have heard from the Liaison Garda at least once in the previous three months. Gardaí are regular attenders at scheme meetings - particularly meetings of members as distinct from meetings of scheme organisers - and usually make a presentation at those meetings. However it is important to record that Gardaí seem to stay in more regular contact with Community Alert schemes than with Neighbourhood Watch schemes. We do not know if this reflects a lack of commitment by the Gardaí or by the schemes. However it may affect the overall vitality of the schemes as well as relations between the schemes and the Gardaí.

The Garda input to the schemes was highly rated by the scheme organisers in the sample although some weaknesses were also identified. Most scheme organisers have supplied information on suspicious activities to the Gardaí and feel appreciated for doing so. Garda feedback is invariably appreciated by scheme organisers but no feedback was given in four out of ten cases. The Garda presentation is often the centre piece of scheme meetings and is seen by most scheme organisers as useful. Scheme organisers believe that the Gardaí are committed to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert, particularly at local level but are less sure about the national commitment. The central role of the Gardaí in supporting the schemes is underlined by the belief - shared by the vast majority of scheme organisers - that the schemes could not, and should not, be run without the Gardaí. In this regard, eight out of ten scheme organisers - particularly those in Community Alert areas - expressed satisfaction with the Garda input to the schemes. At the same time there was also widespread support for a more active role by the Gardaí in supporting schemes through improved information about

crime and more feedback on suspicious activities as well as more resource materials such as an instruction manual, video and training.

Our survey also revealed that two out of every three schemes tend to operate in relative isolation without contacting other schemes or networks of schemes; Neighbourhood Watch schemes tend to have even less contact than Community Alert schemes. About 350 Community Alert schemes are affiliated to Muintir na Tire and it appears that about two thirds of these participated in the postal survey.

We have suggested throughout this chapter that the schemes in our sample are probably the more active ones; our analysis of scheme meetings and contacts between schemes and Gardaí would seem to suggest this. Scheme organisers too have a high level of interest and enthusiasm for the scheme. They are also strong believers in the effectiveness of the schemes particularly in areas such as home security, display of stickers, creating awareness of vulnerable people in the community, and helping people to feel less isolated and more safe. In general, belief in the effectiveness of the schemes is much higher among Community Alert than among Neighbourhood Watch particularly on issues such as reducing fear, isolation and insecurity in the home. Belief in the effectiveness of the schemes is not the same as actual effectiveness however.

These results raise three core issues about Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. The first concerns targeting of the schemes. The second concerns the purpose of schemes and the third concerns differences in the Garda input to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. Each of these will now be addressed in turn.

2.12.2 Targeting of Schemes

The introduction of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in the mid-1980s was prompted, *inter alia*, by two relatively different sets of problems. Community Alert was introduced as a way of countering the fear experienced by many elderly people in isolated rural areas following a spate of violent attacks at that time. The scheme has remained relatively close to this founding ethos and, like many community organisations in rural Ireland, it tends to be run by men who are either farmers or professionals. These scheme organisers are strongly committed to Community Alert and are well supported in that by the Gardaí. The situation with regard to Neighbourhood Watch however is quite different.

In urban areas, Neighbourhood Watch was seen as a way for the Gardaí to build bridges back into disadvantaged urban communities where drug use and related crime were causing growing alienation between the Gardaí and the community. We now know that Neighbourhood Watch was never introduced into those areas - and is still regarded with suspicion if not stigma in many of these communities - and the problems of drugs and drug-related crime have, if anything, got worse since then. Instead, Neighbourhood Watch found richer soil in middle class areas which had a pre-existing community infrastructure and a leadership capacity among predominantly middle class scheme organisers, even in areas where there is a higher proportion of local authority residents. As we have seen, crime is not usually a serious problem in these areas although there are nuisances, as perceived by schemes organisers, such as rubbish, teenagers hanging around and under-age drinking.

None of this implies a criticism of Neighbourhood Watch but it is a reminder that the scheme was designed as a solution to a very different and possibly more serious set of problems than

the ones confronting the typical Neighbourhood Watch area. This raises two related issues. First, what is to be done about community policing in the most disadvantaged urban areas where Neighbourhood Watch is clearly not an appropriate solution? The answer to that question is outside the remit of this study but is no less important because of that. We assert only that any form of community policing in these areas must be built on solid principles of community development such as partnership, participation, community enhancement and capacity building. Second, how might Neighbourhood Watch - and Community Alert - be developed further in those areas where it already has a strong foothold so that it can become a more effective instrument of community policing for those areas? We know that these schemes are most suited to stable communities with good community infrastructure and leadership where crime per se is not a serious problem; it is less clear what exactly their brief should be. That is the issue which we now address.

2.12.3 Purpose of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert, as we saw in Chapter One, has many objectives. This has the advantage of creating a broad agenda of action which can be tailored by each scheme according to local circumstances. However it can also be a dangerous starting point since the core problem which the schemes are designed to address is left vague and undefined. For example, we know that the first two objectives of the schemes are to reduce and prevent crime but we also know from our postal survey of scheme organisers that crime is not perceived as a serious problem in scheme areas. We also know this from our national survey of the population described in Chapter Five. This therefore raises a doubt as to whether it is appropriate to formulate the purpose of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in terms of these objectives.

The data presented in this chapter suggests that what most scheme organisers want from these schemes is better contact and communication with the Gardaí. We have seen that Gardaí are good attenders at scheme meetings and their presentations at those meetings were seen as useful. Most scheme organisers have also reported suspicious activities to the Gardaí and are always appreciative of feedback when it is given; in four out of ten cases, however there is no feedback and virtually every scheme organiser would like this rectified. Scheme organisers were also clear in calling for a greater Garda input to the schemes in the form of more information on crime statistics and suspicious activities as well as more resource materials such as an instruction manual, a video and training.

These pieces of evidence suggest that scheme organisers have a view of community policing which requires a greater willingness by the Gardaí to share information and to be more open and supportive. In this regard, the views of scheme organisers are probably not very different to those which people generally have about State services. In all areas of public service delivery there is a growing expectation that the service will be as open and accountable as possible - within the limits of operational effectiveness, client confidentiality, and resources - and will take account of the needs of the client and customer.

We know from its five year Corporate Strategy Policy Document (Garda Síochána, 1993) that community policing is a core element in the Garda Síochána's vision of its work. In that document, it describes its mission in terms of working "with community support ... to encourage and advise the community on how best to protect their persons and property from criminal behaviour" (Ibid, p.6). The methods for implementing this mission statement include "maintaining dialogue with the community at large about mechanisms which reduce

crime exposure and develop community-based crime prevention programmes” (Ibid, p.7) as well as “progressing the implementation of Community Policing in urban and rural areas” (Ibid, p.9).

We also know that the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has expressed a commitment to community involvement in tackling crime through its Discussion Paper - Tackling Crime - published in May 1997 (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1997). This commitment is based on respect for local knowledge and experience and an awareness of the need for partnership between the Gardaí and the community. According to the Discussion Paper, “probably the most valuable product of effective consultation and involvement is that it creates a sense that, with broadly-based co-operation, something can actually be done about crime. The battle against crime will remain an uphill struggle for as long as it is seen as the task only of Gardaí, Courts and Prisons - ‘someone else’s job’” (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1997, p.141).

We see a need to articulate this vision more clearly in the context of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert so that these schemes become part of a broader strategy of making the Garda Síochána more responsive to the needs of the community and ensuring a partnership approach to the prevention and detection of crime. As things stand at present, it is our impression, despite the palpable goodwill and effort which the Gardaí show towards the schemes, that there is a tendency to place responsibility for this partnership on the community rather than on the Gardaí. Clearly the skills and resources of both parties in this arrangement are quite unequal and it is our view that the Gardaí could be - and should be - more proactive in building a partnership with the communities it serves. We believe that there is scope for the Gardaí to take the initiative in creating a more vibrant partnership with the community and to show a more explicit sense of obligation to the local community regarding its right to be kept informed - and to be heard - about all aspects of crime and safety in their area. This vision of community policing is already embryonic within the schemes but it has never been developed or resourced effectively; its time may now be due.

2.12.4 Differences between Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert have the same broad objectives but slightly different local structures, as explained in Chapter One. In addition, Community Alert schemes have the benefit of a national support structure through Muintir na Tire’s five development officers. As explained in Chapter One, there are proposals to develop a national representative support structure for all Neighbourhood Watch schemes.

Against this background it is interesting to note some significant differences between the two sets of schemes as a result of our survey. For example, we found that Gardaí made less contact with scheme organisers in Neighbourhood Watch areas, they were less frequent attenders at Neighbourhood Watch meetings, they made fewer presentations at those meetings, and they gave less feedback to scheme organisers who had supplied information on suspicious activities. In view of this, it is not wholly surprising that Neighbourhood Watch organisers were less positive about the input of the Gardaí to their scheme than their Community Alert counterparts. Neighbourhood Watch schemes were also less active in terms of the frequency of their meetings and this may account for the significantly lower response rate from Neighbourhood Watch schemes in this study. It is not possible to infer from this alone that Neighbourhood Watch schemes are less active because of the lower level of Garda input but it would merit further investigation. Moreover it is consistent with the findings

reported in Chapter Three that Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí tend to be assigned a larger number of schemes than Community Alert Gardaí and, even though the former spend longer hours on schemes, the overall input per scheme seems to be less in Neighbourhood Watch than Community Alert.

The systematic differences in attitudes and perceptions of schemes organisers in Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are also found among Gardaí assigned to those schemes. In both cases it is difficult to know if the differences are attributable to the schemes themselves or to the different crime, policing and community contexts which prevail in urban and rural Ireland. Whichever is the case, it would be worth examining this matter further to determine if different support arrangements are appropriate for Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. Accordingly, we see a need for the Garda Síochána to look more closely at how the force supports Neighbourhood Watch and to examine its commitment to these schemes in the light of a more fully developed model of community policing.

Chapter Three

Perspectives of Gardaí

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert from the perspective of the Garda Síochána. It is based on a postal survey of 1,400 Gardaí which yielded 734 completed questionnaires; this is a response rate of 52% and is equivalent to about 7% of the entire force. Accordingly, this is a strong sample in terms of response rate and absolute numbers and provides a solid basis for understanding the Garda perspective on Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert.

We begin the analysis by describing the composition of the sample (section 3.2) and its characteristics (section 3.3). The Garda input to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert is described in section 3.4. We then report on how the Gardaí perceive the effectiveness of these schemes (section 3.5), their assessment of the role of Muintir na Tire (section 3.6) and their overall attitudes to the schemes (section 3.7). We also explore individual and corporate attitudes to community policing within the Garda Síochána (section 3.8). Finally, the main findings and conclusions to emerge from the chapter are drawn together in section 3.9.

3.2 Composition of the Sample

The size and composition of the sample are summarised in Table 3.2.1. The sample distinguishes between two basic categories of Gardaí: Liaison Gardaí and Non-Liaison Gardaí. Liaison Gardaí are defined as those who have ever liaised with a Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert scheme or been involved in community relations work (which comprise 60% of the total) while Non-Liaison Gardaí are defined as those who have never been involved with schemes or with community relations work (which comprise 40% of the total). The sample also distinguishes between Liaison Gardaí who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch (23%), those who liaise with Community Alert (29%) and those who liaise with neither but are, or have been, involved in community relations work (14%); our sample included a small number of Liaison Gardaí (63) who liaised with both schemes and we recoded these into Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert according to the largest number of schemes with which they liaised.

Table 3.2.1 Characteristics of the Sample of Garda Síochána (%)

Category	Liaison Gardaí (LG)				NLG	All
	NW	CA	Othr	Total	Total	Total
Number of Gardaí sampled	-	-	-	700	700	1,400
No of completed questionnaires	169	174	101	444	290	734
Response rate (%)	-	-	-	63	41	52
% questionnaires in each category	23	23	14	60	40	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes; Othr= Gardaí (101) who liaise with neither Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert schemes but are, or have been, involved in community relations work; LG= Liaison Gardaí; NLG= Not Liaison Gardaí.

We propose to use this classification of the sample throughout the chapter in order to see if Gardaí in these different positions have different attitudes to the schemes and to community policing in general. We now look at other characteristics of the sample by describing the age, sex, rank, region and years of service of the Gardaí in each category.

3.3 Characteristics of the Sample

Table 3.3.1 summarises the main characteristics of Gardaí in each category of the sample. This reveals that Liaison Gardaí are slightly older than Non-Liaison Gardaí and this is accounted for by the fact that Gardaí liaising with Community Alert schemes are markedly older than Gardaí liaising with Neighbourhood Watch schemes. Nine out of ten Gardaí in the sample are men but there is a higher proportion of women Gardaí involved in Neighbourhood Watch than Community Alert. Eight out of ten members in the sample are Garda rank, similar to the proportion in the entire force. Gardaí liaising with Community Alert are more likely to be sergeants than Gardaí liaising with Neighbourhood Watch. The Dublin Metropolitan Area, while having the highest proportion of Gardaí (23%) in the sample, is significantly under-represented by comparison with the proportion of the force in this region (37%). All other regions have a higher proportion of Gardaí in the sample than their corresponding proportion in the force; nevertheless the sample contains a good regional dispersal of Gardaí throughout the country. Liaison Gardaí tend to have slightly more years of service than Non-Liaison Gardaí while Community Alert Gardaí tend to have considerably more years of service than Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí.

Table 3.3.1 Main Characteristics of the Sample of Garda Síochána (%)

Category	Liaison Gardaí (LG)				NLG	All
	NW	CA	Othr	Total	Total	Total
Aged thirty five and over	65	80	71	72	65	69
Men	92	98	91	94	89	92
Rank of Garda	90	79	67	81	77	79
Rank of Sergeant	9	20	31	18	22	20
Dublin (DMA) Region	25	1	33	17	31	23
Average per each other Region	19	19	13	17	14	19
Ten years service and over	71	88	80	80	73	77
Total (%)*	-	-	-	-	-	-

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes; Othr= Gardaí (101) who liaise with neither Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert schemes but are, or have been, involved in community relations work; LG= Liaison Gardaí; NLG= Not Liaison Gardaí.

*The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

3.4 Garda Input to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert

This section describes the Garda input to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert - as reported by Liaison Gardaí - in terms of number of schemes assigned, number of hours spent on scheme activities per month, activities involved in liaising with schemes as well as other community activities of the Gardaí which are not directly related to the schemes.

3.4.1 Number of Schemes Assigned to Each Garda

Table 3.4.1 summarises the number of schemes assigned to each Garda. From this it emerges that Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí tend to be assigned more schemes than Community Alert Gardaí. A fifth (20%) of Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí have responsibility for four or more schemes compared to one twentieth (5%) of Community Alert Gardaí; similarly, six out of ten (62%) Community Alert Gardaí have responsibility for one scheme each compared to five out of ten (48%) Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí.

Table 3.4.1 Number of Schemes Assigned to Each Garda (%)

Category	NW	CA
One	48	62
Two	13	22
Three	5	8
Four or more	20	5
Not stated	14	3
Total (%)	100	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes.

3.4.2 Number of Hours Spent on Scheme Activities in Past Month

Table 3.4.2 summarises the number of hours spent by Gardaí on schemes in the past month; since the data was collected in February and March 1998, the “past month” refers to December 1997 and January 1998. The questionnaire invited Gardaí to estimate the total amount of time spent on a range of scheme-related activities. This is not the most reliable method for estimating how time is spent - time sheets completed on a daily or weekly basis would be much more reliable - but is used here only as an approximate estimate of how much time is spent on the schemes. It is also noteworthy that the “means” or “averages” in Table 3.4.2 are based on a distribution that varies widely and this suggests caution in extrapolating from the data.

Table 3.4.2 Distribution of Garda Hours Between Scheme Activities (%)

Category	NW (Hours)		CA (Hours)		Total (Hours)	
	Mean	%	Mean	%	Mean	%
Visiting elderly	3.6	28	5.0	45	4.3	36
Meeting scheme organisers	3.3	26	3.5	31	3.4	28
Correspondence re scheme	1.4	11	0.9	8	1.2	10
Promotions	1.2	9	0.6	5	0.9	8
Distributing leaflets	0.7	6	0.3	3	0.5	4
Other	2.6	20	0.9	8	1.7	14
Total (%)	12.8	100	11.2	100	12.0	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes.

Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí spend slightly longer on scheme activities (12.8 hours per month, equivalent to 8% of their time) compared to Community Alert Gardaí (11.2 hours per month, equivalent to 7% of their time) and this is probably related to the fact, as revealed in the previous sub-section, that Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí tend to have a larger number of schemes than Community Alert schemes. This in turn may help to explain the finding, reported in Chapter Two, that the overall Garda input per scheme - as perceived by scheme organisers - tends to be less in Neighbourhood Watch than in Community Alert.

3.4.3 Attendance at Scheme Meetings

Table 3.4.3 summarises the frequency of attending all scheme meetings by Gardaí. This reveals that most Gardaí always or usually attend all scheme meetings. Community Alert Gardaí are more likely than Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí to attend scheme meetings “always”. This should be seen in the context, revealed in Chapter Two, that Community Alert schemes hold more meetings than Neighbourhood Watch schemes.

Table 3.4.3 Frequency of Attending All Scheme Meetings (%)

Category	NW	CA
Always	36	57
Usually	44	30
Occasionally	9	10
Rarely	5	1
Never	6	1
Don't know	0	1
Total (%)	100	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes.

3.4.4 Involvement in Other Community Activity

Table 3.4.4 describes the involvement of Gardaí in other community activity; for those Gardaí assigned to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert, this involves activities - most notably sports clubs, youth clubs and schools - which are unrelated to these schemes. The picture which emerges shows that Liaison Gardaí tend to be significantly more involved in community activities (63%) compared to Non-Liaison Gardaí (35%). Community Alert Gardaí are the most involved in community activities (69%) followed closely by Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí (62%).

Table 3.4.4 Garda Involvement in Other Community Activity (%)

Category	Liaison Gardaí (LG)				NLG	All
	NW	CA	Othr	Total	Total	Total
Gardaí involved	62	69	56	63	35	52
Gardaí not involved	38	31	44	37	65	48
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes; Othr= Gardaí (101) who liaise with neither Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert schemes but are, or have been, involved in community relations work; LG= Liaison Gardaí; NLG= Not Liaison Gardaí.

3.5 Garda Assessment of Scheme Effectiveness

We now present the Garda assessment of the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. We first asked them to rate the effectiveness of the schemes in achieving each of their objectives and then asked about the benefits to the Gardaí in terms of improved information on suspicious or criminal activities. We present the results in each of the following sub-sections.

Table 3.5.1 summarises the views of Gardaí on the effectiveness of schemes in achieving their objectives. The results show that Gardaí believe strongly in the effectiveness of these schemes. Between eight and nine out of ten believe that the schemes are effective in

achieving their core objectives such as feeling less isolated (89%), improved home security (88%), increased awareness of crime and of vulnerable people (87%), feeling safer (86%) as well as more community involvement in the prevention of crime (80%). A similar level of belief in the effectiveness of the schemes was displayed by scheme organisers (see Chapter Two). There is relatively little variation between Gardaí in the different categories although Community Alert Gardaí are more convinced about the effectiveness of the schemes than Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí.

Table 3.5.1 Effectiveness of Schemes in Achieving Their Objectives (%)

Schemes Effective or Very Effective in Achieving These Objectives	Liaison Gardaí (LG)				NLG	All
	NW	CA	Othr	Total	Total	Total
Feel less isolated	88	96	91	92	84	89
Home security	89	92	87	90	86	88
Aware of vulnerable	87	92	85	88	85	87
Crime awareness	87	94	80	88	85	87
Feeling safer	83	94	84	90	81	86
Community involved	84	89	85	86	81	80
Preventing crime	83	85	81	83	75	80
Display stickers	82	77	86	80	76	79
Reducing crime	79	82	80	80	74	78
Informing Gardaí	83	70	78	81	72	78
Marking property	76	70	67	72	66	69
Improve quality of life	68	80	60	71	56	65
Self-help	47	57	56	53	50	52
Helping crime victims	57	61	52	57	44	52
Total (%)*	-	-	-	-	-	-

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes; Othr= Gardaí (101) who liaise with neither Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert schemes but are, or have been, involved in community relations work; LG= Liaison Gardaí; NLG= Not Liaison Gardaí. *The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

3.5.2 Impact of Schemes on Quantity of Garda Information

Table 3.5.2 summarises the views of Gardaí on information produced by the schemes. About six out of ten Gardaí believe that schemes increase “by a little” their information on suspicious activities while a third believe that it increases “by a lot”; very few Gardaí (6%) believe that schemes produce no increase in Garda information. Liaison and Non-Liaison Gardaí are very similar in their views on this matter.

Table 3.5.2 Do Schemes Increase Garda Information on Suspicious Activities? (%)

Do schemes increase Garda information on suspicious activities?	Liaison Gardaí (LG)				NLG	All
	NW	CA	Othr	Total	Total	Total
A lot	38	42	38	39	26	34
A little	55	52	59	55	66	59
None	6	9	3	5	6	6
Don't know	1	0	0	1	2	1
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes; Othr= Gardaí (101) who liaise with neither Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert schemes but are, or have been, involved in community relations work; LG= Liaison Gardaí; NLG= Not Liaison Gardaí.

3.5.3 Impact of Schemes on Quality of Garda Information

Table 3.5.3 summarises the views of Gardaí on the quality of information produced by the schemes. The pattern of response is very similar to the previous sub-section and shows that six out of ten Gardaí believe that the information yielded by schemes is useful while one third believes that it is not particularly useful. Liaison and Non-Liaison Gardaí share similar views in this regard. It is worth noting that “information” and “intelligence” are quite different from the perspective of Gardaí and, as our case studies revealed, schemes rarely produce “intelligence” which would lead to a conviction in court (see Chapter Four).

Table 3.5.3 Quality of Garda Information Produced by Schemes (%)

Quality of Information on Suspicious Activities	Liaison Gardaí (LG)				NLG	All
	NW	CA	Othr	Total	Total	Total
Useful	67	66	62	66	57	62
Not particularly useful	29	32	35	32	38	34
Useless	4	2	3	3	5	4
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes; Othr= Gardaí (101) who liaise with neither Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert schemes but are, or have been, involved in community relations work; LG= Liaison Gardaí; NLG= Not Liaison Gardaí.

3.6 Garda Assessment of Muintir na Tire Role

As already indicated, Muintir na Tire has a special role in promoting and developing Community Alert schemes through its five development officers. In this section, we present the views of those Gardaí who are involved with Community Alert schemes on Muintir na Tire's role in establishing and supporting those schemes.

3.6.1 Assessing Muintir na Tire's Role in Establishing Schemes

Table 3.6.1 summarises the views of Community Alert Gardaí on the present role of Muintir na Tire in establishing schemes. This reveals that six out of ten Gardaí see Muintir na Tire as

playing a helpful role in establishing schemes. If the “don’t knows” are excluded, this rises to seven out of ten.

Table 3.6.1 Role of Muintir na Tire in Establishing Schemes (%)

Helpful or Irrelevant?	CA
Mostly helpful	34
Helpful	25
Mostly irrelevant	24
Don’t know	17
Total (%)	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes.

We also asked Community Alert Gardaí about the role which they would see for Muintir na Tire in the future regarding the setting up of schemes. Their responses, as summarised in Table 3.6.2, shows that six out of ten Gardaí would like Muintir na Tire to play an increased role in establishing schemes. Only one in ten Gardaí would like Muintir na Tire to play a reduced role or no role at all.

Table 3.6.2 Future Role Envisaged for Muintir na Tire in Establishing Schemes (%)

Helpful or Irrelevant?	CA
Increased role	58
Unchanged role	33
Reduced role	3
No role	6
Total (%)	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí. CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes.

3.6.2 Assessing Muintir na Tire’s Role in Supporting Schemes

Table 3.6.3 summarises the views of Community Alert Gardaí on the present role of Muintir na Tire in supporting schemes. The picture is similar to the previous sub-section with six out of ten seeing their role as helpful. If the “don’t knows” are excluded, this rises to seven out of ten.

Table 3.6.3 Role of Muintir na Tire in Supporting Schemes (%)

Helpful or Irrelevant?	CA
Mostly helpful	28
Helpful	31
Mostly irrelevant	26
Don’t know	15
Total (%)	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes.

In line with this, more than six out of ten Community Alert Gardaí would like to see an increased role for Muintir na Tire in supporting schemes. Three in ten would like to see its present role continued unchanged.

Table 3.6.4 Future Role Envisaged for Muintir na Tire in Supporting Schemes (%)

Helpful or Irrelevant?	CA
Increased role	65
Unchanged role	29
Reduced role	1
No role	6
Total (%)	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes.

3.6.3 Comparative Effectiveness of Schemes Assisted by Muintir na Tire

Gardaí were also asked if, in their experience, Community Alert schemes which had the involvement of Muintir na Tire were more effective than Community Alert schemes which had no such involvement. Their answers, which are summarised in Table 3.6.5, indicate that schemes tend to be more effective if they have an involvement from Muintir na Tire; in fact, six out of ten Gardaí believe that Community Alert schemes are more effective if they have Muintir na Tire involvement.

Table 3.6.5 Effectiveness of Schemes Assisted by Muintir na Tire Compared to Other Schemes (%)

Helpful or Irrelevant?	CA
More effective	58
As effective	37
Less effective	5
Total (%)	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes.

3.6.4 Summary

This section has shown that six out of ten Gardaí see Muintir na Tire as playing a helpful role in establishing and supporting schemes and would like to see this role increased in the future. A similar proportion believe that Community Alert schemes are more effective if they have Muintir na Tire involvement.

3.7 Garda Attitudes to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert

This section uses two core indicators of attitude to the schemes. The first is whether the Garda's attitude is positive, negative or indifferent. The second measures the Garda's responses to a set of typical statements about the schemes. We also ask Gardaí about their

attitudes to civilian patrolling within scheme areas. We present the results in each of the following sub-sections.

3.7.1 General Disposition Towards Schemes

Table 3.7.1 summarises the general disposition of Gardaí to the schemes. This shows that there is a positive attitude to the schemes among three quarters of the force. The positive attitude is stronger among Liaison Gardaí (80%) than Non-Liaison Gardaí (64%). It is also higher among Community Alert Gardaí (85%) than among Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí (76%). It is noteworthy however that a third (34%) of Non-Liaison Gardaí appear to be indifferent to the schemes.

Table 3.7.1 What is your Attitude to the Schemes? (%)

Attitude to Schemes	Liaison Gardaí (LG)				NLG	All
	NW	CA	Othr	Total	Total	Total
Positive attitude to schemes	76	85	78	80	64	74
Indifferent attitude to schemes	23	13	19	18	34	24
Negative attitude to schemes	1	2	3	2	2	2
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes; Othr= Gardaí (101) who liaise with neither Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert schemes but are, or have been, involved in community relations work; LG= Liaison Gardaí; NLG= Not Liaison Gardaí.

3.7.2 Garda Attitudes Towards Schemes

Garda attitudes to the schemes were also measured by presenting them with 12 attitude statements and inviting them to agree or disagree on a scale from one to five. The responses were factor analysed and this produced two core attitudes as summarised in Table 3.7.2 (see Table A3.1 in the appendix to this chapter for the level of agreement with each attitude statement and Table A3.2 for the factor loadings associated with each attitude statement). This analysis is based on the assumption that an attitude is a multi-dimensional entity involving a cluster of beliefs. These clusters are represented by the 12 attitude statements and the purpose of factor analysis is to measure the degree of statistical association between the 12 attitude statements and the underlying attitude. The degree of association is measured by the size of the factor loading which varies from plus to minus one; the closer the factor loading to plus or minus one on each attitude statement, the stronger its statistical association with the underlying attitude factor. Once the level of statistical association for each attitude statement has been established, the percent supporting each "attitude cluster" is calculated by averaging the support for each individual statement in that "attitude cluster". This is done in Table 3.7.2 and reveals that three quarters of all Gardaí are positive about community-based policing schemes. In practice, this means that these Gardaí believe the schemes are a good idea and require more manpower at local level; they also believe that the community has to take more responsibility for policing and that young people would not commit crime if they had something better to do. This attitude cluster indicates both a commitment to community policing schemes and an implication that it is not being fully implemented in practice. A much smaller proportion of Gardaí (18%) seem to be opposed to community-based policing

schemes essentially because they see crime detection and prevention as the business of the Gardaí and not the community.

Table 3.7.2 General Attitude of Gardaí to Schemes (%)

Category	Liaison Gardaí (LG)				NLG	All
	NW	CA	Othr	Total	Total	Total
Pro community-based policing schemes	75	76	78	75	71	74
Anti community-based policing schemes	19	14	16	16	20	18
Total (%)*	-	-	-	-	-	-

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes; Othr= Gardaí (101) who liaise with neither Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert schemes but are, or have been, involved in community relations work; LG= Liaison Gardaí; NLG= Not Liaison Gardaí. *The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

3.7.3 Attitude to Civilian Patrolling by Schemes

Table 3.7.3 summarises the attitudes of Gardaí to civilian patrolling by schemes. This shows that approximately six out of every ten Gardaí - both Liaison and Non-Liaison - are definitely opposed to civilian patrolling by schemes. About a third of the total would consider it under certain circumstances - with the consent of, or after training by, the Gardaí - but Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert Gardaí are least enthusiastic about this.

Table 3.7.3 Garda Attitudes to Civilian Patrolling by Schemes

Should NW and CA residents patrol their area?	Liaison Gardaí (LG)				NLG	All
	NW	CA	Othr	Total	Total	Total
Definitely not	60	62	59	61	54	58
Yes, with the consent of the Gardaí	13	15	18	15	17	16
Perhaps, after training by the Gardaí	17	16	21	18	23	20
Yes, should be a routine activity	10	7	2	7	6	6
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes; Othr= Gardaí (101) who liaise with neither Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert schemes but are, or have been, involved in community relations work; LG= Liaison Gardaí; NLG= Not Liaison Gardaí.

We also asked this question of scheme organisers and the results are summarised in Table 3.7.4. This shows that they too share very similar views to the Gardaí in being opposed to civilian patrols in their area.

Table 3.7.4 Attitudes of Scheme Organisers to Civilian Patrolling by Schemes (%)

Should NW and CA residents patrol their area?	NW	CA	Total
Definitely not	57	54	56
Yes, with the consent of the Gardaí	14	19	16
Perhaps, after training by the Gardaí	23	24	23
Yes, should be a routine activity	6	3	5
Total (%)	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of all (3,459) scheme organisers in November and December 1997 which yielded a response from 827 schemes (24% of all schemes): 455 of these were NW (20% of such schemes) and 372 were CA (33% of such schemes). NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

3.7.4 Summary

Our analysis in this section has shown that there is a widespread positive attitude to the schemes among at least three quarters of the sample with higher support among Community Alert Gardaí (85%) than among Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí (76%). Our analysis also found, following a factor analysis of 12 attitude statements, that three quarters of all Gardaí are in favour of community-based policing schemes; they believe the schemes are a good idea and require more manpower at local level but they also believe that the community has to take more responsibility for policing and that young people would not commit crime if they had something better to do. This attitude cluster indicates both a commitment to community-based policing schemes and an implication that it is not being fully implemented in practice. Approximately six out of every ten Gardaí - both Liaison and Non-Liaison - are definitely opposed to civilian patrolling by schemes while a third would consider it if it was done with the consent of, or after training by, the Gardaí; scheme organisers have very similar views on this issue.

3.8 Garda Attitudes to Community Policing

We know from our review of literature in Chapter One that the success of community policing is determined in part by the attitudes of Gardaí to this type of work and its status vis à vis other types of police work. In view of this we asked Gardaí to rate a number of different police activities from the perspective of their own understanding of policing as well as their relative importance within the Garda Síochána generally. We also asked about the impact of community policing on a Garda's promotional prospects. The results of these inquiries are summarised in the following subsections.

3.8.1 Individual and "Corporate" Attitudes to Different Police Activities

Table 3.8.1 summarises the views of Gardaí on the relative importance which they attribute as individuals to different police activities. This shows that virtually all Gardaí believe that the most important police activities are the detection and prevention of crime (98%) followed closely by public order policing (96%). Community policing is a priority for nine out of ten Gardaí and is seen as more important than traffic policing. There is a striking consistency and uniformity among Gardaí in terms of the relative importance of different police activities.

Table 3.8.1 Importance of Different Police Activities as Seen by Gardaí (%)

Important or Very Important	Liaison Gardaí (LG)				NLG	All
Police Activities	NW	CA	Othr	Total	Total	Total
Detection of crime	99	99	98	99	98	98
Prevention of crime	99	98	99	99	98	98
Public order policing	98	96	98	97	94	96
Community policing	90	91	92	91	85	89
Traffic policing	88	88	88	88	86	87
Total (%)*	-	-	-	-	-	-

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes; Othr= Gardaí (101) who liaise with neither Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert schemes but are, or have been, involved in community relations work; LG= Liaison Gardaí; NLG= Not Liaison Gardaí. *The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

Each Garda was also asked to estimate how these different activities were perceived corporately within the force, taking into account their understanding of Garda Síochána policy. The results, which are summarised in Table 3.8.2, show a striking contrast between the policing priorities of individual Gardaí and their perception of corporate policing priorities within the Garda Síochána. Overall, individual Gardaí believe that the force as a corporate entity gives much less priority to community policing relative to other policing activities than they do themselves as individual Gardaí. Gardaí believe that community policing has the lowest corporate priority within the force and is separated by a wide gap in importance from other policing activities. Indeed the perception of Gardaí is that the force gives slightly greater corporate priority to traffic policing over public order policing and crime prevention and much greater priority over community policing. This does not imply that the perceptions of Gardaí are correct regarding the corporate priorities of the Garda Síochána - although they are in a better position to judge than most - but it is probably an important perception in terms of influencing their behaviour within the force. Thus it would appear that individual Gardaí are much more committed to the idea of community policing than the corporate entity of the Garda Síochána for which they work.

Table 3.8.2 Importance of Different Police Activities as Seen from the Overall Perspective of Policy in the Garda Síochána (%)

Important or Very Important Police Activities	Liaison Gardaí (LG)				NLG	All
	NW	CA	Othr	Total	Total	Total
Detection of crime	91	95	91	93	93	93
Traffic policing	83	90	85	86	81	84
Public order policing	80	90	78	83	79	82
Prevention of crime	81	82	83	82	83	82
Community policing	61	66	65	64	69	66
Total (%)*	-	-	-	-	-	-

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes; Othr= Gardaí (101) who liaise with neither Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert schemes but are, or have been, involved in community relations work; LG= Liaison Gardaí; NLG= Not Liaison Gardaí. *The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

3.8.2 Influence of Community Policing on Garda Promotions

Table 3.8.3 summarises the views of Gardaí on the impact of community policing on their promotional prospects within the force. The results show two bodies of almost equally divided opinion: those (43%) who believe that community policing helps a Garda's promotional prospects and those (49%) who believe that it neither helps nor hinders. While few (8%) believe that community policing hinders promotional prospects, the two bodies of opinion suggest that there is some ambiguity within the corporate culture of the Garda Síochána about the esteem in which community policing is held. This view is supported by the findings cited in the previous sub-section which suggest that community policing is held in much lower corporate esteem than other policing activities.

Table 3.8.3 Influence of Community Policing on Garda Promotions (%)

Does community policing help or hinder promotional prospects?	Liaison Gardaí (LG)				NLG	All
	NW	CA	Othr	Total	Total	Total
Helps	32	41	55	41	46	43
Hinders	10	10	4	8	8	8
Neither helps nor hinders	58	49	41	51	46	49
Total (%)	100	100	100	100	100	100

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

NW= Gardaí (169) who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí (174) who liaise with Community Alert schemes; Othr= Gardaí (101) who liaise with neither Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert schemes but are, or have been, involved in community relations work; LG= Liaison Gardaí; NLG= Not Liaison Gardaí.

3.8.3 Summary

There is almost complete unanimity among Gardaí in the top priority which they attach to the detection and prevention of crime and to public order policing. However community policing is also a priority for nine out of ten Gardaí. The priorities of individual Gardaí are not necessarily those of the corporate entity - the Garda Síochána - to which they belong. Indeed our results show a remarkable contrast between the policing priorities of individual

Gardaí and their perception of the force's corporate policing priorities. Individual Gardaí believe that the force as a corporate entity gives much less priority to community policing relative to other policing activities than they do themselves. Gardaí believe that community policing has the lowest corporate priority within the force and is separated by a wide gap in importance from other policing activities. The tension between individual and corporate policing priorities - as perceived by the Gardaí in our sample - is also mirrored in their views about whether community policing helps or hinders one's promotional prospects within the force: some (43%) believe that community policing helps a Garda's promotional prospects while others (49%) believe that it neither helps nor hinders. This result suggests that there is some ambiguity within the corporate culture of the Garda Síochána about the esteem in which community policing is held.

3.9 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter analysed Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert from the perspective of members of the Garda Síochána. It was based on a postal survey of 1,400 Gardaí which yielded 734 completed questionnaires; this is a response rate of 52% and is equivalent to about 7% of the entire force. Accordingly, this is a strong sample in terms of response rate and absolute numbers and provides a solid basis for understanding the Garda perspective on Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. For the purpose of the analysis, the sample was divided into two basic categories of Gardaí: Liaison Gardaí and Non-Liaison Gardaí. Liaison Gardaí are defined as those who have ever liaised with a Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert scheme or been involved in community relations work (which comprise 60% of the total sample) while Non-Liaison Gardaí are defined as those who have never been involved with schemes or with community relations work (which comprise 40% of the total sample).

3.9.1 Main Results

Our analysis of the characteristics of the sample revealed that Liaison Gardaí are slightly older than Non-Liaison Gardaí and this is accounted for by the fact that Gardaí liaising with Community Alert schemes are markedly older than Gardaí liaising with Neighbourhood Watch schemes. Nine out of ten Gardaí in the sample are men but there is a higher proportion of women Gardaí involved in Neighbourhood Watch than Community Alert. Eight out of ten members in the sample are Garda rank, similar to the proportion in the entire force. Gardaí liaising with Community Alert are more likely to be sergeants than Gardaí liaising with Neighbourhood Watch. The Dublin Metropolitan Area, while having the highest proportion of Gardaí (23%) in the sample, is significantly under-represented by comparison with the proportion of the force in this region (37%). All other regions have a higher proportion of Gardaí in the sample than their corresponding proportion in the force; nevertheless the sample contains a good regional dispersal of Gardaí throughout the country. Liaison Gardaí tend to have slightly more years of service than Non-Liaison Gardaí while Community Alert Gardaí tend to have considerably more years of service than Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí.

We analysed the Garda input to both schemes and found that that Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí tend to be assigned more schemes than Community Alert Gardaí although the majority in both schemes tend to be assigned between one and two schemes. Perhaps because of this, Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí spend slightly longer on scheme activities (12.8 hours

per month, equivalent to 8% of their time) compared to Community Alert Gardaí (11.2 hours per month, equivalent to 7% of their time). This in turn may help to explain the finding, reported in Chapter Two, that the overall Garda input per scheme - as perceived by scheme organisers - tends to be less in Neighbourhood Watch than in Community Alert. Liaison Gardaí always or usually attend all scheme meetings and tend to be significantly more involved in community activities than Non-Liaison Gardaí even when scheme activities are excluded.

The results of our survey showed that Gardaí believe strongly in the effectiveness of the schemes. Between eight and nine out of ten believe that the schemes are effective in achieving their core objectives such as reducing the feeling of being isolated, improving home security, increasing awareness of crime and of vulnerable people, feeling safer, and increasing community involvement in the prevention of crime. A similar level of belief in the effectiveness of the schemes was displayed by scheme organisers (see Chapter Two) which does not, of course, prove that the schemes are in fact effective. Gardaí and scheme organisers are also similar in that those involved with Community Alert are more convinced about the effectiveness of the schemes than those involved in Neighbourhood Watch. About six out of ten Gardaí believe that the schemes yield a little information and a similar number believe that this information is useful.

In rural areas, Muintir na Tire has a special role in promoting and developing Community Alert schemes through its five development officers. We invited Gardaí to assess their role and six out of ten Gardaí reported that Muintir na Tire is playing a helpful role in establishing and supporting schemes and would like to see this role increased in the future. A similar proportion believe that Community Alert schemes are more effective if they have Muintir na Tire involvement.

Our measurement of Garda attitudes to the schemes found that more than three quarters had a very positive attitude; Gardaí involved with Community Alert (85%) tended to be more positive than Gardaí involved with Neighbourhood Watch (76%). Our analysis also found, following a factor analysis of 12 attitude statements, that three quarters of all Gardaí are in favour of community-based policing schemes; they believe the schemes are a good idea and require more manpower at local level but they also believe that the community has to take more responsibility for policing and that young people would not commit crime if they had something better to do. This attitude cluster indicates both a commitment to community policing and an implication that it is not being fully implemented in practice. Approximately six out of every ten Gardaí - both Liaison and Non-Liaison - are definitely opposed to civilian patrolling by schemes while a third would consider it if it was done with the consent of, or after training by, the Gardaí; scheme organisers have very similar views on this issue.

We also measured attitudes to the broader concept of community policing and its relative importance vis à vis other policing priorities. The top policing priorities for virtually all Gardaí are the detection and prevention of crime and the maintenance of public order. However community policing is also a priority for nine out of ten Gardaí. The priorities of individual Gardaí are not necessarily those of the corporate entity - the Garda Síochána - to which they belong. Indeed our results show a remarkable contrast between the policing priorities of individual Gardaí and their perception of the force's corporate policing priorities. Individual Gardaí believe that the force as a corporate entity gives much less priority to

community policing relative to other policing activities than they do themselves. Gardaí believe that community policing has the lowest priority within the force and is separated by a wide gap in importance from other policing activities. The tension between individual and corporate policing priorities - as perceived by the Gardaí in our sample - is also mirrored in their views about whether community policing helps or hinders one's promotional prospects within the force: some (43%) believe that community policing helps a Garda's promotional prospects while others (49%) believe that it neither helps nor hinders. This result suggests that there is some ambiguity within the corporate culture of the Garda Síochána about the esteem in which community policing is held.

These results give rise to three issues which we now consider in more detail. The three issues are: the standing of community policing vis à vis other policing activities within the Garda Síochána, the differences between Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert, and the role which support organisations - such as Muintir na Tire and the proposed National Neighbourhood Watch Council - could play in establishing and developing schemes.

3.9.2 Community Policing and the Garda Síochána

Our analysis suggests that community policing holds an uneasy and ambivalent position within the corporate culture of the Garda Síochána. Individual Gardaí place community policing near the top of their policing priorities but perceive the force itself as according it a much lower priority. This ambivalence finds expression in divisions of opinion between individual Gardaí on the issue of whether community policing is helpful to their promotional prospects. As we saw in Chapter Two, it also finds expression in the perceptions of scheme organisers who believe that the Garda commitment to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert is much stronger at local than at national level.

The perceptions of individual Gardaí regarding the corporate priorities of the Garda Síochána are not necessarily correct, although individual Gardaí are probably in a better position to judge the situation than most. However the key issue here is not whether individual Garda perceptions of corporate policy on community policing are accurate or not. It is the perceptions themselves that are important and the perceived lack of corporate priority accorded to community policing is likely to have a significant effect on Garda behaviour. This is to be expected, if only because the promotional prospects of individual Gardaí are dependant, inter alia, upon the value which is placed on different types of police work. Our impression is that the corporate position of the Garda Síochána on community policing is itself poorly defined - as we have already suggested in the Chapter Two - and it is often seen in terms of a set of projects or schemes such as Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert rather than a strategic approach to serving the community in a spirit of partnership. In view of this, we believe that any future plans for Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert would need to be underpinned by a more developed corporate policy on community policing in general, coupled with a clearer expression of corporate commitment to community policing at every level of the force. Otherwise there is a danger of community policing becoming little more than a public relations exercise; many of our consultations indicated that this is how community policing is perceived, both inside and outside the force.

3.9.3 Differences Between Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are quite similar schemes but are experienced quite differently by Gardaí; as we saw in Chapter Two, they are also experienced quite differently by scheme organisers. Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí tend to be assigned slightly

more schemes than Community Alert Gardaí although the majority tend to have between one and two schemes each. Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí also spend slightly more time on the schemes compared to Community Alert - 8% compared to 7% - although the perception of scheme organisers reported in Chapter Two is that Gardaí make a greater input to Community Alert than Neighbourhood Watch. Although all Gardaí are positively disposed towards both sets of schemes and are convinced of their effectiveness, Community Alert Gardaí score consistently higher on these variables than Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí.

It is difficult to know if the differences between Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are attributable to the schemes themselves or to the different crime, policing and community contexts which prevail in urban and rural Ireland. Whichever is the case, it would be worth examining this matter further to determine if different arrangements are appropriate for Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí and Community Alert Gardaí. By definition, a community policing approach must adapt to the variety of local circumstances in which communities find themselves.

3.9.4 Role of Muintir na Tíre

Muintir na Tíre was involved in setting up Community Alert. It has five development officers in five Garda regions (excluding Dublin) who are active in establishing and supporting the schemes. Our survey of Gardaí in Community Alert areas found a very positive response to the role of Muintir na Tíre in establishing and supporting these schemes and a desire among many Gardaí to see this role expanded in the future.

The role of Muintir na Tíre in relation to Community Alert draws attention to the absence of such a support organisation in relation to Neighbourhood Watch. We have seen in Chapter One that proposals have been advanced, following extensive consultations, to establish such an organisation under the name, National Neighbourhood Watch Council. As with Muintir na Tíre, we believe that there is a strong case for such a support organisation but only if the more fundamental issues affecting these schemes have been fully clarified and resourced.

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert constitute a major community resource involving over 3,500 schemes. This resource is an opportunity and a challenge to the Garda Síochána because it invites a more radical commitment to community policing than seems to be evident at present. As we show more fully in Chapter Five, it is not possible to continue to operate these schemes without a radical re-think of what they are expected to achieve. These schemes do not seem to be achieving what they were originally expected to achieve and accordingly it is necessary to either change the expectations, change the schemes, or change both.

Appendix to Chapter Three

Table A3.1 Level of Agreement (%) with Each Attitude Statement

Attitude Statement	LG	NLG	Total
1. I have no interest in getting involved in NW and CA schemes	35	37	36
2. NW and CA schemes are very effective in preventing crime	79	74	77
3. NW and CA schemes are a waste of time	12	14	13
4. There is nothing that can be done to reduce crime	8	8	8
5. More Gardaí and longer prison sentences are the only answer to crime	63	67	65
6. The Gardaí should do more to promote and support NW and CA	72	66	70
7. The idea of NW and CA is good but people are too apathetic	82	82	82
8. Young people would not commit crime if they had something better to do	59	53	56
9. The community has to take responsibility for policing itself	81	78	80
10. NW and CA requires additional Garda manpower at local level	82	75	79
11. If the Gardaí do their job properly, there should be no need for NW and CA schemes	8	14	10
12. Crime is the business of the Gardaí not the community	11	14	12
Total*	-	-	-

Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

LG= Liaison Gardaí (444); NLG= Not Liaison Gardaí (290).

*The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

Table A3.2 Factor Loadings Associated with Each Attitude Statement

Attitude Statement	Factor Loadings*		
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1. I have no interest in getting involved in NW and CA schemes	0.6		
2. NW and CA schemes are very effective in preventing crime	-0.5		
3. NW and CA schemes are a waste of time	0.8		
4. There is nothing that can be done to reduce crime			
5. More Gardaí and longer prison sentences are the only answer to crime			
6. The Gardaí should do more to promote and support NW and CA	-0.4		0.5
7. The idea of NW and CA is good but people are too apathetic		0.6	
8. Young people would not commit crime if they had something better to do		0.5	
9. The community has to take responsibility for policing itself		0.5	
10. NW and CA requires additional Garda manpower at local level		0.5	
11. If the Gardaí do their job properly, there should be no need for NW and CA schemes	0.6		
12. Crime is the business of the Gardaí not the community	0.6		
Eigen value	2.6	1.4	1.1
Percent of variance explained	22	12	10

*The size of the factor loading varies from plus to minus one; the closer the factor loading to plus or minus one on each attitude statement, the stronger its statistical association with the underlying attitude factor. Based on a postal survey of a randomly selected sample of 700 Liaison Gardaí and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí carried out in February and March 1998 which resulted in 734 completed questionnaires, 444 (60%) of them from Liaison Gardaí and 290 (40%) of them from Non-Liaison Gardaí.

Chapter Four

Case Studies of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert

4.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the results of twelve case studies which we carried out on six Neighbourhood Watch schemes and six Community Alert schemes. Table 4.1.1 summarises the location of the case studies. The selection of schemes was informed by our desire to look at the diversity of schemes, particularly in terms of their size (i.e., those with a large and those with a small number of households) and age (i.e., those long-established and those recently established). In the case of Neighbourhood Watch, we also made our selection to reflect different geographical and social settings such as private and public housing estates within Dublin as well as small towns and villages in other parts of Ireland. In the case of Community Alert, our selection reflected different types of rural Ireland such as places close to towns and places which are relatively remote from centres of population.

Table 4.1.1 Case Studies of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert, 1997

Scheme	No	Locations
Neighbourhood Watch	6	Dublin (3), Donegal (1), Cork county (1), Kildare county (1)
Community Alert	6	Cork county (1), Wexford county (1), Monaghan county (1) Galway county (1), Sligo county (1), Offaly county (1)
Total	12	-

Each case study involved meetings with all relevant Gardaí in the district (Garda, Sergeant and Superintendent) as well as members of the Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert committee. In each case, we used the following broad template of themes to collect our information:

- size of scheme
- profile of the community
- setting up and running the scheme
- relations between committee and Gardaí
- relations between committee and the community
- Garda attitudes to community policing
- impact and benefits of the scheme
- improvements needed.

We use these themes to present our composite findings on each category of scheme.

4.2 Size of Scheme

Table 4.2.1 summarises the number of households in each of the 12 schemes. Two features are worth noting. First, the average size of Community Alert scheme (231 households) is slightly higher than the average size of Neighbourhood Watch Scheme (211 households). This is not far out of line with the national picture which emerges from the Garda data base

on these schemes which shows that the average size of Community Alert Scheme is 222 households whereas the average size of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes is 158 households (see Chapter One).

Table 4.2.1 Size of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert Schemes in Case Study Sample, 1997

Scheme Number	Neighbourhood Watch No of Households	Community Alert No of Households
Scheme One	250	350
Scheme Two	130	142
Scheme Three	17	200
Scheme Four	500	320
Scheme Five	170	312
Scheme Six	200	60
Average in Sample	211	231

Second, there is a good deal of variation in the size of all schemes and this is again reflective of the national picture. This would seem to reflect the flexibility which committees enjoy in the local definition of community for the purposes of the scheme as well actual differences in the size of these entities. All of the Community Alert schemes were co-terminus with Catholic parishes; by contrast, the boundaries of the Neighbourhood Watch schemes tended to be synonymous with the remit of Residents' Associations, and these in turn are shaped by factors such as the clustering of houses, the age of houses and especially their ownership status. These factors probably explain why Neighbourhood Watch schemes show greater variation in size than Community Alert schemes.

4.3 Profile of Community

All of the schemes in our sample are based in communities which are long-established - where the residents have been living there for 20 years and more - and are relatively cohesive. The residents in all but one of the Neighbourhood Watch schemes own their own homes. In larger urban areas, Neighbourhood Watch residents tend to be middle aged or older but a greater age range is to be found in the smaller towns and villages. Community Alert areas varied from prosperous agricultural communities to those with relatively poor land where tourism or fishing were alternative sources of income. These rural, parish-based communities were relatively diverse in terms of the age and socio-economic characteristics of the residents.

4.4 Setting up the Scheme

Table 4.4.1 summarises the year in which the scheme was set up. This reveals that most of the schemes were set up about five years ago.

Table 4.4.1 Year That Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert Schemes Were Established in Case Study Sample, 1997

Scheme Number	Neighbourhood Watch Year	Community Alert Year
Scheme One	1992	1993
Scheme Two	1989	1992
Scheme Three	1991	1994
Scheme Four	1993	1993
Scheme Five	1992	1993
Scheme Six	1990	1993
Average No. Years	5	5

Half of all schemes - both Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert - were set up on the initiative of the Gardaí. However half the Neighbourhood Watch schemes were set up in response to particular problems such as nuisance caused by gangs of youths taking drugs and alcohol, or robbing cars and abusing residents. This contrasts with Community Alert where half the schemes were set up as a result of fears that an incident might happen. The levels of crime in these Community Alert areas are extremely small and the desire to keep them that way seems to be the main motivation behind setting up the schemes. "Why set up a scheme when there is little or no crime in the area?" we asked one committee. "Because we want to keep it that way" was the reply.

The size of committee ranges between three and seven people. Neighbourhood Watch committees tend to meet on a reasonably regular basis every one to two months. In addition, all the Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators in the Dublin sample have met with other Co-ordinators in their Garda Sub-Division through meetings organised by the Gardaí. Community Alert committees meet only during the winter months or on an informal basis if the need arises. This is consistent with another study of 15 Community Alert schemes conducted by the Community Relations Section of the Garda Síochána in 1995 which found that "on average all schemes held between 2 and 4 meetings annually" (Community Relations Section, 1995, p.6). Four of the six Community Alert schemes in our case study have had some contact with Muintir na Tire through one of its Development Officers. Only one of the committees in our sample has met with other Community Alert committees.

4.5 Relations Between Scheme and Gardaí

The Garda Síochána support Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert through its 25 Crime Prevention Officers - one in each Garda Division - and its 1,447 Liaison Gardaí (see Chapter One). These supports include general information on how to set up the scheme; assistance with the survey of households, provision of leaflets and stickers; attending meetings of the committee; and responding to queries as they arise. Generally speaking, the Liaison Garda will call upon the Garda Crime Prevention Officer for the Garda District to help in setting up schemes; this typically involves explaining the rationale and procedures for the scheme and the provision of leaflets and stickers. There is however no budget for this work at District or Sub-District level.

All the committees described their relations with the Gardaí as very good or excellent. All indicated that they passed on "information" to the Gardaí although the Gardaí see this as very

different to the type of “intelligence” which they would need to secure a conviction in court. However all but two of the areas - both in Dublin - have relatively little information to pass on because of the low crime rate.

One of the most visible and practical expressions of Garda interest in the schemes involves attending committee meetings. In many instances, the meetings are built around a presentation by the Liaison Garda or the Garda Crime Prevention Officer on crime and police activity in the area or a specific topic such as safety in the home, drugs, care for the elderly, et cetera. In view of the crucial role played by Liaison Gardaí in these meetings, one of them described the schemes as “community driven but Garda directed” and this would appear to be very apt in each of the cases sampled.

There were some complaints by committees about their relations with the Gardaí including: (1) a high turnover of Liaison Gardaí (2) inadequate feedback from Gardaí (3) messages left in the station are not passed on to the Liaison Garda as requested and (4) inadequate Garda patrol in the area. Similar complaints were cited in the course of 59 meetings which Muintir na Tire organised for 546 Community Alert schemes throughout the country between January and March 1998 (Muintir na Tire, 1998, p.11). However the largest number of complaints in our case studies were made by the Neighbourhood Watch committee in a local authority estate in the inner city of Dublin which has a serious drug-related crime problem; to the best of our knowledge, it is relatively unusual to find schemes in areas like this. Residents in this area are traditionally distrustful of the Gardaí and, according to the committee, no one would ever consider joining the Gardaí. Residents feel that Gardaí patrol the area in order to watch them rather than protect them. The Superintendent acknowledges that Gardaí have a credibility gap in this, and similar, areas which they need to tackle by communicating directly with ordinary people in the community. One Garda observed that attitudes to people living in disadvantaged areas may be part of the problem: “Many Gardaí - particularly those posted to Dublin for the first time - carry prejudices with them which hinder community policing. Gardaí need to know the community in which they work and, if possible, spend some time there after work - possibly by having a drink in the local pub - to show their commitment of the community”.

4.6 Relations Between Scheme and Community

The different procedures for establishing Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert schemes have been described above (see Chapter One). Once established, membership of the committee is usually determined by those who attended the meeting and agree to accept a position on the committee; given the absence of competition for these positions, a vote is not normally necessary.

The relationship between the committee and the community is highly informal. About half the schemes - drawn equally from Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert - seem to make no effort to communicate with the community. This however needs to be seen in the context that, in the absence of serious crime, there is very little of substance to communicate. The other half, in turn, are divided between those who liaise with the community through a local newsletter or parish bulletin and those who report directly to residents within their street or road. In one Garda Division, the Garda Crime Prevention Officer produces a regular newsletter with information on all the schemes. In some areas, the elderly are visited every

month by the Co-ordinator of the scheme or by the Liaison Garda. Some areas use the local radio to highlight items relevant to the schemes.

The relatively fragmented relationships between schemes and their communities is consistent with the findings of a national survey of the population involving 938 interviews carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute in April 1994 (Murphy and Whelan, 1995a). A third (33%) of the respondents living in a Neighbourhood Watch area felt they were never kept informed by co-ordinators of the scheme; in Dublin, this proportion rose to 40% (Ibid, pp.14-15).

4.7 Garda Attitudes to Community Policing

There was consensus among the Gardaí that community policing is perceived within the force as less important than crime detection. This was crystallised in the experience of one Garda who said that he received great praise for an arrest he made as a result of information received through the Community Alert scheme but no credit for the fact that he had established the scheme. The perception is also widespread that a Garda's promotional prospects are helped more by involvement in crime detection than by involvement in community policing.

It is also recognised however that these attitudes are changing due in part to the fact that increasing numbers of Gardaí have some experience of community policing at some point in their career. In addition, almost all of the Superintendents indicated that a Garda's promotional prospects depended on having experience and competence in all areas of policing, including community policing. Moreover the relative standing of different types of police functions seems to be less important in rural areas since, as one Garda observed, all rural policing is community policing.

4.8 Impact of Schemes

The case studies revealed that virtually all of the committees have a strong belief in the efficacy of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. Gardaí too believe that the schemes are worthwhile even if they do not always share the same level of enthusiasm as the committees. This result is consistent with other studies which show a strong belief in the efficacy of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert both among the general population and among those living in scheme areas (Murphy and Whelan, 1995a, p.15) as well as among advocates of the schemes (see for example, Behan, 1994; Quigley, 1995; Muintir na Tire, 1988). It is also consistent with our own survey findings (see Chapters Two and Three).

The five most frequently mentioned benefits of all schemes are:

1. increased awareness of the need for crime prevention measures such as more security in the home and displaying stickers and signs as a deterrent to crime.
2. increased awareness of the need to look out for vulnerable older people in the community.
3. improved contact and communication between the community and the Gardaí, particularly through the Liaison Garda who is seen to play a pivotal role as both the friendly face of the force and a named person that can be contacted by the community.
4. reduced level of crime or, in cases where there is no crime, ensuring that this situation is

maintained.

5. reduced fear of being a victim of crime, particularly among the elderly living alone.

Both the Gardaí and committee members provided various examples of the first three benefits. However evidence of impact on the level of crime and the fear of being a victim of crime was more difficult to find.

In order to test claims about the impact of schemes on the level of crime, we collated statistics on each category of crime by Garda Sub-District (the catchment area of each Garda Station) for two years prior to the scheme and two years after the scheme. This is not a perfect test of impact for many reasons including the fact that a scheme normally covers only part of a Garda Sub-District. Nevertheless the results, which are summarised in Table A4.1, provide no grounds for claiming that the schemes are associated with a reduction in crime. In four of the six Neighbourhood Watch schemes, the number of crimes increased in the year following its introduction while, in the case of Community Alert, the number of crimes decreased in the year following its introduction but rose again two years after the scheme had been introduced. This is in line with other studies which show no connection between community policing schemes and crime levels (see Chapter One). Moreover most studies acknowledge that establishing a causal relationship between community policing schemes and crime levels is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to prove.

In the course of the case studies we detected a tendency to assume that the goals of the scheme are the same as its impacts. This is understandable given that no performance monitoring system has been put in place for measuring impacts. In considering the impact of schemes - particularly those which claimed to be successful - we were also struck by the paradox that the absence of criminal or nuisance activity can de-motivate committee members since, as one respondent noted: “the absence of crime in the area is a threat to the vitality of the scheme”.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter reported on the results of 12 case studies which were undertaken to show the range of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert Schemes throughout the country and the manner in which they operate. The selection of schemes was informed by our desire to look at their diversity, particularly in terms of their size (i.e., those with a large and those with a small number of households) and age (i.e., those long-established and those recently established). In the case of Neighbourhood Watch, we also made our selection to reflect different geographical and social settings such as private and public housing estates within Dublin as well as small towns and villages in other parts of Ireland. In the case of Community Alert, our selection reflected different types of rural Ireland such as places close to towns and places which are relatively remote from centres of population. We now present the main findings to emerge from this part of the study.

4.9.1 Main Findings

The case studies revealed that schemes are typically to be found in long-established and cohesive communities: Neighbourhood Watch schemes tend to be located in homogeneous communities of people who own their own homes while Community Alert schemes tend to be coterminous with the parish. On average, schemes tend to comprise about 200 households

with Neighbourhood Watch showing greater variation around this average. Committees vary in size from three to seven people; Neighbourhood Watch committees seem to meet on a more regular and formal basis than Community Alert committees, although this is contrary to the findings reported in Chapter Two. Committees have very good relations with the Gardaí but many do not have any formal mechanisms for communicating with their communities. Within the Gardaí, we found that community policing is seen to have less standing than conventional police work but this is changing as skills in community policing are becoming more widespread and being recognised as an integral part of policing skills. The schemes seem to have a positive impact in terms of raising awareness about crime prevention, increasing alertness to the presence of elderly and vulnerable in the community and maintaining good relations between the Gardaí and the community. It is virtually impossible to detect any impact in terms of reducing crime or the fear of crime.

In addition to these findings, our case studies also involved lengthy, open-ended discussions with committees and Gardaí about the nature and significance of the schemes, their impacts and their prospects for the future. We endeavoured to find examples of good practice among schemes but found this extremely difficult - not because many of the schemes were not well run - but because it was virtually impossible to find objective, reliable and valid indicators of impact which we could causally link with the running of the schemes. However our discussions were useful in identifying five areas of concern about the future development of the schemes which we express in the form of questions as follows:

1. Do these schemes have any relevance in disadvantaged urban areas where there is a high level of drug-related crime and where the Gardaí are distrusted?
2. Could these schemes do more to involve young people?
3. Is there enough activity to keep these schemes alive?
4. What is the best way of supporting these schemes?
5. Could the Gardaí share more information with the schemes and with the public generally?

We now discuss our answers to each of these questions.

4.9.2 Do these schemes have any relevance in disadvantaged urban areas where there is a high level of drug-related crime and where the Gardaí are distrusted?

The emergence of a scheme is typically based on two preconditions: (1) enough committed people to form a committee and (2) a reasonably positive attitude towards the Gardaí. These conditions - with one possible exception - were found in all the case studies whose committees are run by older people who own their homes and who are positively disposed to the Gardaí. The one exception was a local authority estate in the inner city of Dublin which had more crime and more serious social problems than any of other case study area and where respect for the Gardaí was tempered by a strong element of distrust.

It became clear throughout the case studies that Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are well suited to settled home-owning communities in larger urban areas and to parish-based communities in rural Ireland. However it is no accident that very few of these schemes are to be found in the most disadvantaged housing estates in larger urban areas where levels of crime are probably much higher than in many scheme areas. This is consistent with one other Irish study which found that, among a random sample of 299 residents in Cork in 1984, those living in areas with a high risk of crime were less willing to participate in schemes such as Neighbourhood Watch compared to those living in areas with a low risk of crime

(Hourihan, 1986; 1987). Studies in Britain (Hough and Mayhew, 1985) and the US (Lavrakas and Herz, 1982) have also found an inverse relationship between the risk of crime and the level of participation in crime prevention schemes.

Thus, although schemes such as Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert respond to the genuine needs of communities to protect themselves from crime and the fear of crime, they appear to be ill-suited to those communities where there is little support for the Gardaí and which have been adversely affected by the epidemic of drugs and related criminal activities that have blighted many disadvantaged urban communities over the past decade. In recognition of this, the Garda Síochána introduced Operation Dóchas during 1996 as part of a strategy to win the co-operation of disadvantaged communities in its fight against drugs and crime (Garda Síochána, 1997, p.4). From this perspective therefore, Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert can be seen as part of a strategy of community policing which has been devised for areas where there is already respect for the Gardaí and where the resources within the community are capable of setting up and running a committee. In short, these schemes do not seem to have been tailored to the needs of Ireland's most disadvantaged urban communities.

4.9.3 Could these schemes do more to involve young people?

The schemes have little or no involvement with young people. This might be expected given that the committees - as confirmed by Chapter Two - are run by older people who have reached a stage in life where most have bought a house and settled down. However none of the schemes seem to have made any effort to create projects or activities that might involve young people. A number of Gardaí acknowledged that the force does not have a clear youth policy and this may account for the fact that ideas for the involvement of young people have not been forthcoming. Some of those interviewed suggested that the schemes could become involved in getting young people to adopt an old person whom they could visit regularly; however no scheme seems to have tried out this idea. Others suggested involving transition year students in activities but this does not seem to have been tried either. Thus the age profile of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert shows a marked absence of younger people who, as is well known, are more likely to be the cause of nuisance and crime in an area. From the perspective of community policing therefore, it would appear that the schemes cover only part of the target group that needs to be involved.

4.9.4 Is there enough activity to keep these schemes alive?

The schemes produce a low level of activity - particularly in areas where there is not much crime or nuisance activity - and have very few resources. The Garda input mainly comprises the time of the Liaison Garda and the Crime Prevention Officer as well as the supply of leaflets and stickers; there are no discretionary funds to support specific initiatives. For example, a number of committees suggested that help in producing a newsletter would be helpful while others suggested that meetings with other committees in the Garda District, county, or Garda Division would provide an opportunity to learn about the different activities being carried out by committees. We found that a number of committees have become enthusiastically involved in the administration of the Scheme of Support for Older People - which is funded by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs - partly because of the intrinsic merits of the scheme but also because it gives the committee something to do.

The case studies left us with a clear impression that many committees barely have enough to do to keep them active and this explains why some of them - particularly the Community Alert schemes - rarely meet while others only meet during the winter months. In one instance, the committee which we selected for the case study had become dormant and we had to replace it with another case study. Thus our overall impression is that many of the schemes lack vitality, resources and activity and are heavily dependant on the input of the Liaison Garda and the commitment of one or two individuals in the community whose claims about its impact and effectiveness seem disproportionate to the level of activity taking place. In view of this, we were left wondering if the main benefit of some of the schemes was that they continued to exist and their existence alone seemed to support the belief that the community was a safer place to live in.

4.9.5 What is the best way of supporting these schemes?

None of the schemes could survive without the good will and support of the Gardaí, particularly the Liaison Garda. The Liaison Garda is the human face of the force and is a focal point at committee meetings. Supports for the schemes are also provided by the Garda Crime Prevention Officer and, in some rural areas, by the Development Officers of Muintir na Tire. These two sources of support are complementary, if not indeed overlapping although the level of support is so thinly spread that overlapping roles do not seem to be a problem in practice. Both Crime Prevention and Community Development Officers offer advice and support to individual schemes but they also try to bring schemes together at District level to discuss common issues. This has met with mixed success; in one case, a meeting of all committees in a Garda District had to be cancelled because no one attended. For their part, Gardaí and Sergeants noted that they do not meet with other members of the force who are involved in community policing to discuss their work.

4.9.6 Could the Gardaí share more information with the schemes and with the public generally?

Information and awareness is the main currency of the schemes. Virtually all of the information supplied by schemes to the Gardaí falls short of the intelligence required to bring successful prosecutions but is seen by the Gardaí as an important way of keeping in touch with the concerns of the community. In view of this it is noteworthy that disappointment was expressed by some of those interviewed at the poor feedback received from Gardaí on foot of information provided by the committees and the public generally. A number of Gardaí - including Superintendents - recognise that the public could be given more detailed information on crime and on the work of the Gardaí without jeopardising security or operational matters.

Appendix to Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Perspectives of the General Public

5.1 Introduction

This chapter assesses the impact of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. This is done by comparing the difference between scheme participants and non-participants on a number of characteristics and experiences which are relevant to the objectives of the schemes. The analysis, based on a national random sample of 1,402 people interviewed in November 1997, focuses on key variables which are relevant to assessing the impact of schemes: perception of crime as a problem, sense of personal safety, experience of victimisation, security precautions taken, seeing and reporting suspicious activity. In this analysis, scheme participants are defined as persons who know they live in an area covered by a scheme; non-participants are persons who are not - or are not aware of being - in an area covered by a scheme.

The analysis in this chapter is based on the methodological consideration that two conditions must be satisfied in order to establish impact. The first condition - usually referred to as the necessary condition - is that there are systematic differences between scheme participants and non-participants, particularly regarding those variables which are relevant to scheme objectives. If there are systematic differences between scheme participants and non-participants, then there is *prima facie* evidence that the schemes may be the cause of that difference; if there are no differences, then there can be no impact, at least not with respect to the variables measured. The second condition - usually referred to as the sufficient condition - is that the differences between scheme participants and non-participants must be shown to have their cause in the schemes; if this condition cannot be satisfied then it cannot be validly inferred that the differences between scheme participants and non-participants is attributable to the schemes. The key focus of this chapter is on the first condition. However, as we shall see, the data which we present and analyse will allow us to draw some reasonably robust conclusions about the overall impact of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert.

The characteristics of the sample are summarised in Table 5.1.1 and shows that 44% of respondents are scheme participants and 56% are non-participants. Given that this is a nationally representative sample, the proportion of respondents who are scheme participants is less than what might be expected since more than half (54%) of all households in Ireland are in a scheme (see Chapter One). The reason for this seems to lie in the method by which scheme participants and non-participants were identified; each respondent had to be subjectively aware of being in a scheme in order to be classified as such. This was the most effective and economical way of identifying scheme participants. This procedure has the disadvantage of excluding people from scheme areas who may be in one but are unaware of it and possibly unaware of any "public good" effects which the scheme may have had on them and their area. However it has the advantage of including in schemes only those who are actually aware of being in them. On balance, we believe that this procedure should make it easier to identify scheme impacts where they exist; conversely, if scheme impacts cannot be identified from this sample, we may be reasonably confident that they do not exist.

It is noteworthy that the proportion of the sample in Neighbourhood Watch (28%) is closer to the actual proportion of households in this scheme in Ireland (32%) compared to Community Alert (16% compared to 22%). This suggests that subjective identification with schemes is higher in Neighbourhood Watch than Community Alert; this, in turn, may be due to the fact that Neighbourhood Watch schemes (which, on average, comprise 158 households) are known to be smaller than Community Alert schemes (which, on average, comprise 222 households) and cover much smaller geographical areas (see Chapter One).

Table 5.1.1 Sample Characteristics of Scheme Participants and Non-Participants

Total		Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)			Total
		NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total	
Total	N	391	225	616	447	339	786	1,402
Total	%	28	16	44	32	24	56	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural.

Our analysis of this data set begins in section 5.2 with a descriptive account of some of the key objective differences between scheme participants and non-participants such as their age, sex, marital status, and social class characteristics. We also analyse if scheme participants and non-participants live in areas which have a residents association or a good community spirit. Finally in this section we compare the attitudes of scheme participants and non-participants to crime and to the role of the community in crime prevention.

In assessing the impact of schemes, it is important to define the schemes as accurately as possible, particularly from the perspective of how they are experienced by respondents. This is done in section 5.3 which describes Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in terms of the following variables: does respondent know the name of any scheme co-ordinator or committee member? when and how did the respondent last hear about the scheme? has the respondent received any written materials from the scheme? has advice been sought or received about crime prevention? what is the perceived level of scheme activity? This cluster of variables will be used to describe how participants actually experience the schemes since it is the impact of this experience which we are trying to measure.

The assessment of impact is carried out in sections 5.4 to 5.8 where scheme participants and non-participants are compared in terms of the following variables: perception of crime as a problem (section 5.4), sense of personal safety (section 5.5), experience of victimisation (section 5.6), security precautions taken (section 5.7), seeing and reporting suspicious activity (section 5.8). In section 5.9 we summarise the main conclusions to emerge from the analysis and formulate a succinct statement of impact.

5.2 Characteristics of People in Scheme and Non-Scheme Areas

5.2.1 Age

Table 5.2.1 reveals that persons in scheme areas tend to be older than persons in non-scheme areas. In the case of Neighbourhood Watch, about a third (34%) of scheme respondents are

Table 5.2.1 Age of Scheme Participants and Non-Participants

Age	Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
Fifteen to twenty four	16	11	14	30	26	28
Twenty five to thirty four	18	14	17	21	17	20
Thirty five to forty nine	29	31	30	24	24	24
Fifty to sixty four	22	26	23	14	17	15
Sixty five and over	14	18	16	11	16	13
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural.

under 35 years compared to half (51%) of non-scheme urban respondents. Even more pronounced, only a quarter of Community Alert participants are under 35 years compared to over two fifths (43%) of the non-scheme rural respondents.

5.2.2 Gender

Respondents in scheme and non-scheme areas are almost evenly divided between men and women, as Table 5.2.2 shows. However there is a noticeable difference between the two schemes with women more likely to be involved in Neighbourhood Watch (54% women) and men more likely to be involved in Community Alert (52% men).

Table 5.2.2 Gender of Scheme Participants and Non-Participants

Gender	Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
Men	46	52	48	50	50	50
Women	54	48	52	50	50	50
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural.

5.2.3 Marital Status

Table 5.2.3 shows that scheme respondents are markedly more likely to be married (62%) than non-scheme respondents (51%). There is almost no difference between Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in this regard.

Table 5.2.3 Marital Status of Scheme Participants and Non-Participants

Marital Status	Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
Married	61	63	62	50	53	51
Single	39	37	38	50	47	49
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural.

5.2.4 Social Class

From the perspective of social class, Table 5.2.4 reveals that both Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert have an under-representation of working class groups in their participants (see Census 91, 1995). Neighbourhood Watch respondents are disproportionately middle

class compared to their share in the urban population (44% compared to 31%) while Community Alert respondents are disproportionately farmers compared to their share in the rural population (40% compared to 32%). However it is also clear that both schemes draw support from all social classes.

Table 5.2.4 Social Class of Scheme Participants and Non-Participants

Social Class	Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
Middle class (ABC1)	44	23	36	31	20	26
Skilled working class (C2)	26	18	23	30	22	27
Other working class (DE)	27	19	24	38	26	33
Farmers (F)	3	40	17	1	32	14
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural.

The majority of the sample - both in scheme and non-scheme areas - reported that they do not have a residents association in their area. Residents associations are largely a phenomenon of urban areas and this is reflected in Table 5.2.6 which shows that urban areas are four times more likely to have a residents association than rural areas. However it is also clear from the table that Neighbourhood Watch areas are twice as likely to have a residents association as urban areas without a scheme; notwithstanding this, only slightly more than half (55%) of all Neighbourhood Watch areas appear to have a residents association. Around two thirds of residents associations tend to be active in the opinion of respondents.

Table 5.2.6 Residents Association in Scheme and Non-Scheme Areas

Variable	Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
Residents Association in area	55	14	40	20	5	14
Residents Association is active	77	60	66	58	67	60
Total*	-	-	-	-	-	-

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural;

*The totals are not additive because they are not cumulative.

5.2.7 Community Spirit

Respondents were asked to assess the community spirit in their area. The results are summarised in Table 5.2.7 and show that rural respondents give a higher rating to the community spirit in their area compared to urban respondents. In rural areas, both scheme and non-scheme respondents give the community spirit the same high rating. However in urban areas, Neighbourhood Watch respondents rate the community spirit of their area higher than those who are not in this scheme.

Table 5.2.7 Characteristics Scheme Participants and Non-Participants

Variable	Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
Community spirit is good	67	83	73	50	84	64
Scheme improves community spirit	21	21	21	NA	NA	NA
Total*	-	-	-	-	-	-

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural; NA= Not Applicable.

*The totals are not additive because they are not cumulative.

We also asked scheme participants if the good community spirit in their area was due to the scheme. A fifth (21%) felt that the scheme improved the community spirit, according to Table 5.2.7. This suggests that schemes are built in communities which are already strong and cohesive.

5.2.8 Attitudes to Crime

In addition to exploring objective differences between scheme and non-scheme participants, we also examined if they had different attitudes to crime in general and to the role of the community - particularly through schemes such as Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert - in preventing crime. Accordingly, we presented respondents with 15 attitude statements and invited them to agree or disagree on a scale from one to five. Their responses were factor analysed and this produced four core attitudes as summarised in Table 5.2.8. The data in Table 5.2.8 is the percent supporting that attitude and is calculated by averaging the support for each individual attitude statement. (See Table A5.1 at the end of this chapter for the level of support for each attitude statement and Table A5.2 for the “factor loadings” associated with each attitude statement; a more detailed description of this method of factor analysing attitudes is given in Chapter Three).

The results reveal that there is very little difference between the attitudes of scheme participants and non-participants. There is a high level of support for the schemes, especially among scheme participants (80%), who believe that they are effective in preventing crime and should be promoted more widely. There is also a high level of support among scheme participants (75%) for the view that the community has some responsibility for crime prevention notwithstanding people’s apathy. A sizeable minority (40%) believe that the community has no role in crime prevention since this is the business of the Gardaí and the criminal justice system. A still smaller proportion (35%) believe that schemes bring some benefits in terms of extra Gardaí and the power to patrol and enforce the law in their area. In interpreting these findings, it should be noted that these percentages do not sum to 100% and that people’s attitudes are not necessarily internally consistent. Overall, our interpretation of these results is that people - but especially scheme participants - are well disposed towards the schemes and see a role for the community in crime prevention.

Table 5.2.8 Attitudes to Schemes in Scheme and Non-Scheme Areas, 1997

Attitudes to schemes	Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
Factor 1: Support for schemes in crime prevention	80	80	80	64	70	66
Factor 2: No role for community in	40	40	40	39	44	41

crime prevention						
Factor 3: Schemes bring some benefits	35	35	35	35	35	35
Factor 4: Community responsible for crime prevention	75	76	75	69	70	70
Total*	-	-	-	-	-	-

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural.

*The totals are not additive because they are not cumulative.

5.2.9 Summary

Our analysis shows that scheme participants tend to be older than the non-scheme respondents in both urban and rural areas. There is no gender difference between scheme participants and non-participants although we found that women were slightly more likely to be involved in Neighbourhood Watch and men were slightly more likely to be involved in Community Alert. The majority (61%) of persons who know that they live in a scheme area are married and this is considerably higher than the corresponding proportions in urban and rural Ireland respectively. Scheme participants are drawn from all social classes. Nevertheless Neighbourhood Watch participants are disproportionately middle class compared to their share in the urban population while Community Alert participants are disproportionately farmers compared to their share in the national population. The majority of scheme areas do not have a residents association although the community spirit, particularly in rural areas, was felt to be very good; in urban areas, Neighbourhood Watch respondents rated the community spirit of their area higher than those who were not in this scheme. However the majority of scheme respondents felt their good community spirit was not attributable to the scheme. Scheme participants do not have very different attitudes to crime compared to non-participants. A majority of respondents - but especially scheme participants - are well disposed towards the schemes and see a role for the community in crime prevention.

5.3 Description of Schemes

This section uses a number of indicators to measure the extent of participants' awareness and involvement in their scheme. We do this in order to have a clearer idea of what exactly the scheme means to people in practical terms. For this reason, we asked participants if they knew the names of any scheme co-ordinators or committee members; we asked when was the last time they heard anything about the scheme and when was the last time they attended a scheme meeting; we also asked when was the last time they received any information or advice from the scheme and whether the scheme is active or inactive. We discuss the responses in the next few subsections and form a view on what it means to be a scheme participant.

5.3.1 Knowing the Names of Scheme Co-ordinators or Committees

Table 5.3.1 reveals that only a third (36%) of Neighbourhood Watch participants know the name of a scheme co-ordinator in their area. The proportion of Community Alert participants who know the name of any committee member is higher but still only half (51%).

Table 5.3.1 Do you know the names of the scheme organisers?

Do you know the names of scheme organisers?	Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total
Yes	36	51	42
No	64	49	58
Total	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

5.3.2 When and How Last Heard About The Scheme

Table 5.3.2 reveals that more than a third (37%) of scheme participants have heard nothing about their scheme for over a year and over a fifth (22%) have never heard anything. In other words, a majority (59%) of participants seem to be effectively out of touch with their scheme with no difference between Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. At the other end of the spectrum, a minority of participants (26%) had heard something about the scheme within the past three months.

Table 5.3.2 When did you last hear anything about the scheme?

When did you last hear anything about the scheme?	Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total
Within past week	7	6	7
Two weeks to a month ago	10	10	10
Two to three months ago	9	7	9
Four to twelve months ago	15	15	15
Over a year ago	37	40	37
Never	22	22	22
Total	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

We know from our case studies and from our conversations with Muintir na Tire that Community Alert have an annual cycle of meetings which are clustered during the winter months (see Chapter Four). Given that the interviews were undertaken in mid-November, the relatively small proportion of people who had heard of the scheme within the past year is unlikely to be due to seasonality. In the case of both schemes therefore an inference that a large proportion of them are not in regular contact with their communities would seem to be justified; this is a pattern which we also found in our case studies.

The manner in which respondents last heard of the scheme - and therefore excluding those who never heard of it - is summarised in Table 5.3.3. This reveals that personal contact is the main form of communication between schemes and their communities; this is the pattern in four out of ten schemes. This form of communication is preferred in Community Alert areas where half (51%) the respondents heard about the scheme in this way; in Neighbourhood Watch, about a third (36%) of respondents heard about the scheme through personal contact. Newsletters and newspapers are also an important source of information about schemes for

over a quarter (28%) of respondents and is particularly important for Neighbourhood Watch participants.

Table 5.3.3 How did you last hear about the scheme?

How did you last hear about the scheme?	Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total
In person	36	51	41
Over the phone	1	1	1
By post / letter	10	7	9
Newsletter / newspaper	32	20	28
Don't know	21	21	21
Total	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.
NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

5.3.3 Attended Meetings

Table 5.3.4 reveals that most people (70%) have never attended a scheme meeting and this applies equally to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. In addition, about one fifth (18%) have not been at a scheme meeting in the past year. Community Alert participants seem to have a poorer rate of attendance at meetings than Neighbourhood Watch participants.

Table 5.3.4 When did you last attend a meeting about the scheme?

When did you last attend a meeting about the scheme?	Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total
Within past week	2	0	1
Two weeks to a month ago	2	4	2
Two to three months ago	2	4	3
Four to twelve months ago	3	6	4
Over a year ago	20	11	18
Never	69	72	70
Don't know	2	0	2
Total	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.
NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

5.3.4 Receipt of Written Materials

Table 5.3.5 shows that the majority of scheme participants (60%) have never received any written materials about their scheme or at least do not ever remember receiving it. However the two schemes differ markedly in this regard. Nearly half (48%) of Neighbourhood Watch participants have received written materials about their scheme compared to just over a quarter for Community Alert (27%).

Table 5.3.5 Have you ever received written materials about the scheme?

Have you ever received written materials about the scheme?	Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total
Yes	48	27	40
No	32	54	40
Don't know / don't remember	20	19	20
Total	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

5.3.5 Advice Sought and Received About Crime Prevention

Crime prevention is a core objective of the schemes and for this reason we asked respondents if they ever received advice from the scheme on this matter. Table 5.3.6 shows that only an extremely small minority (8%) have ever sought advice on crime prevention from the scheme. There is no difference between Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in this regard. However this result needs to be seen in the context of Table 5.3.7 which shows that more than a quarter (29%) of scheme participants have received advice on crime prevention. Neighbourhood Watch participants were more likely to receive advice, perhaps because they were also more likely to receive written material on the scheme. It is also interesting to observe that, as Table 5.3.8 illustrates, participants found the advice useful which they received from their scheme.

Table 5.3.6 Did you ever look for advice about crime prevention as part of the scheme?

Did you ever look for advice about crime prevention from the scheme?	Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total
Yes	8	9	8
No	91	89	90
Don't know / don't remember	1	2	2
Total	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

Table 5.3.7 Did you ever receive advice about crime prevention as part of the scheme?

Did you ever receive advice about crime prevention from the scheme?	Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total
Yes	33	22	29
No	50	62	54
Don't know / don't remember	17	16	17
Total	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

Table 5.3.8 How useful was the advice received from the scheme?

How useful was the advice received from the scheme?	Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total
Very useful	47	53	49
Fairly useful	45	43	44
Not very useful	4	0	3
No use at all	2	0	1
Don't know / can't remember	2	4	3
Total	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.
NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

5.3.6 Perceived Level of Activity of Scheme

The data in Table 5.3.9 suggest that about two thirds (64%) of all schemes may be inactive; a substantial proportion of participants (36%) do not know if their scheme has been active which probably means - at least from the perspective of those participants - that for all practical purposes their scheme is inactive. Both Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are virtually identical in this regard. Of the active schemes, only one in ten were considered to be very active.

Table 5.3.9 How active is the scheme?

How active was your scheme in the past year?	Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total
Very active	9	10	9
Fairly active	27	28	27
Not very active	17	13	16
Not active at all	12	11	12
Don't know	35	38	36
Total	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.
NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

5.3.7 Summary

The analysis in this section looked at the activity level in schemes from a number of different perspectives. Globally speaking, the analysis revealed that about two thirds of schemes appear to be inactive and one third active. This is exemplified by the fact that seven out of ten participants have never attended a scheme meeting while six out of ten have heard nothing about the scheme or about crime prevention and do not know the name of anyone on the scheme committee. This is considerably higher than reported in previous research: in April 1994, a national survey of the population involving 938 interviews carried out by the Economic and Social Research Institute found that a third (33%) of the respondents living in Neighbourhood Watch areas felt they were never kept informed by the scheme co-ordinators; in Dublin, the proportion who claimed they were never kept informed was 40% (Murphy and Whelan, 1995a, pp.14-15).

In assessing the impact of the schemes therefore - which we do in the following sections - it is important to remember that nearly two thirds of them seem to exist in name only and have little or no connection to the community in which they are situated. In these instances therefore, we are faced with the difficulty that if impacts are identified, do we attribute them to the characteristics of an inactive scheme or to the characteristics of the participants? It is to this and related issues that we now turn.

5.4 Perception of Crime as a Problem

Table 5.4.1 summarises the difference between and within schemes in terms of how crime is perceived. Overall, the majority of people - around three quarters of the total, both inside and outside schemes - believe that crime is a small problem. Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert participants perceive crime to be a bigger problem than their urban and rural counterparts respectively. However this is probably not statistically significant when sampling error - estimated to be plus or minus 4.5% when making comparison between both sets of schemes - is taken into account. Accordingly, we infer from Table 5.4.1 that schemes have no impact on participants' perception of crime.

Table 5.4.1 Perception of Crime as a Problem in Scheme and Non-Scheme Areas

Is crime a problem?	Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
Very big problem	3	1	2	5	1	3
Fairly big problem	24	9	19	20	5	13
Fairly small problem	51	35	45	42	27	36
Very small problem	21	53	33	28	61	43
Don't know	1	2	1	5	6	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural.

The types of crime which are a problem are summarised in Table 5.4.2 and reveal that vandalism and burglary of houses are the most frequently cited problems. Burglary of houses is the most frequently cited crime (along with vandalism) and is cited more frequently in urban than in rural areas and cited more frequently still in Neighbourhood Watch than in Community Alert areas.

**Table 5.4.2 Type of Crimes Which Are Problems
in Scheme and Non-Scheme Areas, 1997**

Type of crimes which are problems	Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
Burglary of houses	56	31	47	38	18	29
Vandalism	35	24	31	36	20	29
Theft of cars	26	12	21	28	3	17
Burglaries of shops / offices	14	12	13	10	18	14
Theft from cars	14	8	12	19	5	13
Theft from people	9	2	7	7	2	5
Assault on people	8	2	6	7	1	4
Other crimes	7	10	8	8	9	8
Total*	-	-	-	-	-	-

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural.

*The totals are not additive because they are not cumulative.

It is worth emphasising that the data here concern perceptions of crime and, as our review in Chapter One has shown, this bears no relationship to the reality of officially recorded statistics. In general, public perceptions of crime tend to overestimate the size of the problem, irrespective of whether or not one has been a victim of crime and many studies attribute this to the role of the media in shaping public perceptions (O'Connell and Whelan, 1996; O'Connell, Invernizzi and Fuller, 1998). We have no information on the media consumption habits of scheme participants and non-participants although we do know that the crime rate in larger urban areas tends to be higher than in rural areas.

5.5 Sense of Personal Safety

Table 5.5.1 summarises the difference between and within schemes in terms of the sense of personal security. It is clear from this that the vast majority of people feel safe - particularly at home and in their local area, both during the day and night - with virtually no difference between scheme and non-scheme participants. Overall, when sampling error is taken into account, there is no statistically significant difference between scheme participants and non-participants in terms of feeling safe. Accordingly, we infer that schemes do not make people feel safer.

Table 5.5.1 Sense of Personal Security in Scheme and Non-Scheme Areas

Do you feel very safe or fairly safe?	Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
In my home by day	96	98	97	98	97	98
In my home by night	92	93	93	91	95	93
Walking the streets by day	91	96	93	95	96	95
Walking the streets by night	64	78	69	72	79	75
Walking in town/city centre by day	80	88	83	86	91	88
Walking in town / city centre by night	42	65	52	49	71	58
Total*	-	-	-			-

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural.

*The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

5.6 Experience of Victimisation

Table 5.6.1 summarises the difference between and within schemes in terms of the experience of victimisation. In this study victimisation was measured by asking the following question: "Have you or any member of your household been a victim of a crime within the past 12 months?". The responses indicate that scheme participants have double the level of victimisation of non-scheme participants (12% compared to 6%) although, given the size of the sampling error, this is probably not statistically significant. Accordingly, the only statistically reliable conclusion to draw from Table 2.6.1 is that schemes have no impact on the level of victimisation of its participants. However this does not exclude the possibility that schemes may reduce the risk of victimisation within their areas; we have no data which would allow us to prove or disprove this and we know from previous research that such data would be extremely difficult to produce (see Chapter One).

Table 5.6.1 Experience of Victimisation in Scheme and Non-Scheme Areas

Been a victim of crime in the past year?	Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
Been a victim of a crime	17	4	12	10	2	6
Not been a victim of crime	83	96	88	90	98	94
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural.

It is interesting to note that the level of victimisation recorded in Table 5.6.1 is considerably higher in urban than in rural areas and this is consistent with previous Irish research (Rottman and Breen, 1986; O'Connell and Whelan, 1994; Murphy and Whelan, 1995). However the results reported here also suggest a higher level of victimisation by comparison with one study which found that the overall level of victimisation - as measured by the question: "Have you or any member of your household been a victim of a crime within the past three years?" - was 14%; in Dublin it was 23% and in other urban areas it was 21% (Murphy and Whelan, 1995, p.6). If this data is annualised, the rate of victimisation in urban areas would be 7% per annum which is slightly less than that reported here; this however may not be a reliable comparison given the possibility of forgetfulness and telescoping when measuring previous victim crimes.

An important objective of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert is to increase the reporting of crimes to the Gardaí. It is significant to inquire therefore if the reporting rate of crimes to the Gardaí is different between scheme participants and non-participants. Table 5.6.2 presents data on this topic. It shows that victims in scheme areas have a slightly higher rate of reporting to the Gardaí - 85% compared to 78% - but the difference is not great and probably not statistically significant when sampling error is taken into account. Neighbourhood Watch participants have a similar rate of reporting to other urban dwellers but Community Alert participants have a much higher rate of reporting than their rural neighbours. This suggests, other things being equal, that Community Alert may be instrumental in increasing the number of crimes reported to the Gardaí although the overall proportion of Community Alert participants who have a victim crime to report (4%) is extremely small.

Table 5.6.2 Reporting of Victimization in Scheme and Non-Scheme Areas, 1997

Was the victim crime reported to the Gardaí?	Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
Crime reported to Gardaí	86	78	85	84	43	78
Crime reported to scheme member	18	0	17	NA	NA	NA
Total	100	100	100	-	-	-

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural. NA= Not Applicable.

5.7 Security Precautions Taken

A key objective of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert is to encourage people to make their homes more secure against crime. Table 5.7.1 presents data on the security precautions taken by scheme and non-scheme participants. This reveals that scheme participants take consistently more security precautions than non-participants. The main security precautions taken include keeping an eye on the neighbours house if away, letting neighbours know if away themselves, putting locks on windows and doors as well as a security chain and peephole on door. It also emerges from Table 5.7.1 that participants in Neighbourhood Watch take consistently more precautions than participants in Community Alert and some of this difference seems to be attributable to the fact that urban residents tend to take more security precautions than rural residents.

Table 5.7.1 Security Precautions Taken in Scheme and Non-Scheme Areas

Security precautions taken	Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
Keep eye on neighbours house if away	66	60	64	46	48	47
Let neighbours know if away	63	48	58	47	46	47
Put locks on windows	49	24	40	37	18	29
Put mortise locks on doors	42	23	35	26	18	22
Got security chain, peephole on door	38	24	33	20	18	19
Got automatic security light	27	25	26	15	17	16
Noted serial numbers of goods	23	17	21	11	7	9
Got dog as security	17	24	20	14	19	16
Got burglar alarm installed	28	6	20	16	4	11
Mark property	12	4	9	5	2	3
Photographed valued items	6	2	5	2	2	2
Total*	-	-	-	-	-	-

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural.

*The totals are not additive because they are not cumulative.

We cannot assume that the increased security precautions taken by scheme participants relative to non-participants is attributable to the impact of the scheme. The survey tested this association by asking scheme respondents if their security precautions were taken as a result of the scheme. The results are presented in Table 5.7.2 and indicate that only a small minority - no more than about one in six - knowingly took security precautions as a result of the scheme; the possibility that some participants may have taken security precautions but were unaware that the scheme had influenced them to do so cannot be discounted but this is highly speculative. This suggests that taking security precautions may have more to do with the characteristics of the participant than with the characteristics of the scheme. Accordingly, we are obliged to conclude that the higher level of security precautions taken by scheme participants - particularly those in Neighbourhood Watch - has little to do with their participation in the schemes. In other words, participants seem to be indicating that the schemes have very little influence in terms of taking security precautions.

Table 5.7.2 Security Precautions Taken in Scheme Areas as a Result of Schemes

Security precautions were taken as a result of the scheme	Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total
Keep eye on neighbours house if away	16	12	15
Let neighbours know if away	16	10	14
Put locks on windows	11	9	11
Put mortise locks on doors	12	9	11
Got security chain, peephole on door	8	7	8
Got automatic security light	8	10	9
Noted serial numbers of goods	9	7	8
Got dog as security	2	4	3
Got burglar alarm installed	5	2	4
Mark property	6	3	5
Photographed valued items	3	1	3
Total*	-	-	-

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

*The totals are not additive because they are not cumulative.

5.8 Seeing and Reporting Suspicious Activity

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert endeavour to raise awareness about the risk of crime and encourage participants to be on the look out for suspicious activity and to report it directly to the Gardaí or to someone on their scheme committee. Tables 5.8.1 and 5.8.2 summarise data which help us to assess the impact of this work. The data in Table 5.8.1 reveal that most people - around nine out of every ten - had not seen any suspicious activities in the previous six months. Nevertheless there is a slight tendency for scheme participants to see more suspicious activities compared to non-participants but it is not statistically significant when sampling error is taken into account.

Table 5.8.1 Seeing Suspicious Activities in Scheme and Non-Scheme Areas

Seen suspicious activities in the past six months	Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)		
	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
Have seen suspicious activities	12	7	10	10	2	6
Have not seen suspicious activities	88	93	90	90	98	94
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural.

If very little suspicious activity is observed, even less of it is reported. Table 5.8.2 reveals that 5% of scheme participants reported suspicious activities compared to 3% of non-participants. Most reports were to the Gardaí. Neighbourhood Watch had a slightly higher reporting rate than Community Alert. Overall, the level of reporting indicated by Table 5.8.2 is so small as to be insignificant and does not suggest any association between scheme membership and reporting suspicious activities.

Table 5.8.2 Reporting Suspicious Activities in Scheme and Non-Scheme Areas

Reported suspicious activities	Scheme (%)	Non-Scheme (%)
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	NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total
Reported to the Gardaí	5	4	4	4	0	3
Reported to scheme member /other	1	0	1	0	0	2
Total	6	4	5	4	0	3

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural.

5.9 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter, based on a national random sample of 1,402 people interviewed in November 1997, looked at some of the key characteristics of participants in Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert schemes and compared them to non-participants. It found that scheme participants tend to be older than the non-scheme respondents in both urban and rural areas. There is no gender difference between scheme participants and non-participants although we found that women were slightly more likely to be involved in Neighbourhood Watch and men were slightly more likely to be involved in Community Alert. The majority (61%) of persons who know that they live in a scheme area are married and this is considerably higher than the corresponding proportions in urban and rural Ireland respectively. Scheme participants are drawn from all social classes but Neighbourhood Watch participants are disproportionately middle class compared to their share in the urban population while Community Alert participants are disproportionately farmers compared to their share in the national population.

The majority of scheme areas do not have a residents association although the community spirit, particularly in rural areas, was felt to be very good; in urban areas, Neighbourhood Watch participants rated the community spirit higher than non-participants although the majority of them felt their good community spirit was not attributable to the scheme. Scheme participants do not have very different attitudes to crime compared to non-participants. A majority of respondents - but especially scheme participants - are well disposed towards the schemes and see a role for the community in crime prevention.

The chapter also described what the schemes mean in practical terms by looking at the types of contact between the schemes and the community in which they are located. This part of our analysis revealed that about two thirds of schemes appear - at least from the perspective of participants - to be inactive. This was exemplified by the fact that seven out of ten participants have never attended a scheme meeting while six out of ten have heard nothing about the scheme or about crime prevention in the past year and do not know the name of anyone on the scheme committee.

Our assessment of the impact of the schemes explored how crime was perceived by participants in scheme and non-scheme areas. Around three quarters of all respondents - both inside and outside schemes - believe that crime is a small problem and there is no statistically significant difference between scheme participants and non-participants when the sampling error - estimated to be plus or minus 4.5% for inter-scheme comparisons - is taken into account. In other words, schemes seem to have no impact on the perception of crime.

The vast majority of people - both scheme and non-scheme participants - feel safe at home and in their local area, both during the day and night with no statistically significant

difference between the two groups. Accordingly we infer that schemes do not seem to make people feel safer.

Our analysis also found that scheme participants have double the level of victimisation of non-scheme participants although this is not a statistically significant difference when sampling error is taken into account. Accordingly, we conclude that schemes do not seem to have an impact on the level of victimisation of their participants.

Participants in schemes, particularly those in Neighbourhood Watch, take consistently more security precautions than non-participants. However our analysis found that only a small minority - no more than about one in six - said they took security precautions as a result of the scheme which suggests that taking security precautions might have more to do with the characteristics of the participants than with the characteristics of the schemes. In other words, the schemes have very little effect in terms of taking security precautions.

The chapter also examined the extent of seeing and reporting suspicious activities among participants and non-participants. This revealed that very few people - around one in ten - had seen any suspicious activities in the previous six months and there is no statistically significant difference between scheme participants and non-participants in this regard. Very little suspicious activity was reported to the Gardaí with no appreciable difference between scheme participants and non-participants.

None of these findings will offer much comfort to advocates of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. Indeed our analysis was virtually unable to isolate any benefits associated with the schemes for each of the variables measured: feeling safer, reduced risk of victimisation, taking security precautions because of the scheme, reporting suspicious activities to the Gardaí. This result may be attributable to the fact, expressed by participants themselves, that about two thirds of the schemes are inactive. However this would not explain why the active schemes also seem to have no impact. We can offer no explanation for this although we would suggest that some of the impacts which the schemes are expected to produce - such as reducing crime, increasing the sense of safety, reducing victimisation - may be too ambitious and disproportionate to the resources of a group of community volunteers who meet no more than once a month and often much less. This suggests that some re-examination is needed of the overall objectives of the schemes and their role within the broader context of community policing. We now turn to a consideration of this and related issues in Chapter Six.

Appendix to Chapter Five

Table A5.1 Level of Agreement (%) with Each Attitude Statement

Attitude Statement	Scheme	Non-Scheme	Total
I have no interest in getting involved in NW and CA schemes	50	54	52
NW and CA schemes are very effective in preventing crime	71	62	66
NW and CA schemes are a waste of time	11	12	12
Every area should have a NW or CA scheme	90	70	79
The Gardaí should do more to promote NW and CA	81	75	78
NW and CA means that there are additional Gardaí allocated to your area	31	28	30
NW and CA gives people in the community more power to enforce the law themselves	30	33	32
NW and CA involves members of the community patrolling their own area	48	50	49
If the Gardaí do their job properly, there should be no need for NW and CA schemes	31	38	35
The idea of NW and CA is good but people are too apathetic	64	52	58
There is nothing that can be done to reduce crime	17	19	18
More Gardaí and longer prison sentences are the only answer to crime	65	64	64
Young people would not commit crime if they had something better to do	72	71	71
The community has to take responsibility for helping to prevent crime	90	86	87
Tackling crime is the business of the Gardaí not the community	39	41	40
Total*			

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

*The totals are not cumulative because they are not additive.

Table A5.2 Factor Loadings Associated with Each Attitude Statement

Attitude Statement	Factor Loadings*			
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
I have no interest in getting involved in NW and CA schemes	-0.6			
NW and CA schemes are very effective in preventing crime	0.7			
NW and CA schemes are a waste of time	-0.7			
Every area should have a NW or CA scheme	0.7			
The Gardaí should do more to promote NW and CA	0.6			
Tackling crime is the business of the Gardaí not the community		0.8		
More Gardaí and longer prison sentences are the only answer to crime		0.7		
If the Gardaí do their job properly, there should be no need for NW and CA schemes		0.7		
There is nothing that can be done to reduce crime		0.4		
NW and CA gives people in the community more power to enforce the law themselves			0.8	
NW and CA involves members of the community patrolling their own area			0.7	
NW and CA means that there are additional Gardaí allocated to your area			0.6	
The idea of NW and CA is good but people are too apathetic				0.6
The community has to take responsibility for helping to prevent crime				0.6
Young people would not commit crime if they had something better to do				0.5
Eigen value	3.2	2.1	1.3	1.1
Percent of variance explained	21	14	9	7

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

*The size of the factor loading varies from varies from plus to minus one; the closer the factor loading to plus or minus one on each attitude statement, the stronger its statistical association with the underlying attitude factor.

Chapter Six

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter draws together the main findings and conclusions of the report and sets out our recommendations. We do this by drawing together the findings and conclusions from each of the preceding chapters and making our recommendations on the strength of this. We begin therefore by setting the scene in section 6.2 and summarising the context in which the schemes were introduced in Ireland while also looking at the experience of similar schemes elsewhere. In section 6.3 we briefly outline the methodology used to carry out the evaluation; more detailed information is contained in each of the previous chapters. Section 6.4 summarises the main characteristics of the schemes and their organisers while section 6.5 summarises the perspectives and experiences of Gardaí regarding these schemes. The impact of the schemes is presented in section 6.6 and is arrived at by comparing scheme participants and non-participants on a number of key impact indicators. Finally, in section 6.7, we make our recommendations for the future of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert drawing upon the key findings of the study.

6.2 The Schemes in Context

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert were introduced in 1985 in the context of a rapid increase in the number of officially recorded crimes and amidst growing fears about crime and victimisation. A substantial proportion of crime at that time - as in the 1990s - was generated by drug use and there was growing concern in the Garda Síochána about its deteriorating relations with the public, particularly in more disadvantaged urban communities. In rural areas there was alarm at the growing number of attacks on the elderly.

In March 1984, the Dáil Select Committee on Crime, Lawlessness and Vandalism recommended “an early introduction of Neighbourhood Watch on a nation-wide basis” and this was endorsed by the then Minister for Justice. The Community Relations Section of the Garda Síochána were also enthusiastic supporters of the initiative having observed at first hand the operation of such schemes in the United States where they had been operating since the 1960s. Neighbourhood Watch schemes were only introduced in Britain in the early 1980s.

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert - like similar schemes elsewhere - are informed by a theoretical approach which believes that criminals choose to commit crimes - particularly crimes against property - in situations where the rewards are high relative to the risk of detection. Accordingly, this approach emphasises the importance of reducing opportunities for crime and increasing the risk of detection.

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert have broadly similar structures involving a joint initiative by the community and the Garda Síochána to raise awareness of the need for greater security in the home, more vigilance for suspicious activities and improved reporting

of information to the Gardaí. Each scheme is publicised through leaflets, stickers and signs; meetings are held at which Gardaí usually give an update on crime trends in the area. A crucial difference between Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert - in addition to the fact that Community Alert schemes have to do a survey to determine the level of support for the scheme in the area - is that a substantial proportion of schemes in Community Alert are supported by Muintir na Tire through its five development officers. However there are well-developed proposals to develop a somewhat similar support structure for Neighbourhood Watch to be called the National Neighbourhood Watch Council.

Our estimate is that the cost of running the schemes in 1997 was IR£4 million, most of it coming from the Garda Síochána (IR£3.8 million) although this was less than 1% of its total budget in that year. The estimated annual cost of running each Neighbourhood Watch scheme in 1997 (IR£1,136) was less than the cost of running each Community Alert scheme (IR£1,273) due to the employment of development officers to support the Community Alert schemes.

Between 1985 and 1997, an average of 158 new Neighbourhood Watch schemes were established each year; this is three times the rate of expansion of Community Alert which established 54 schemes per year over the same period. Overall, we calculate that more than half (54%) of all households in Ireland are in one or other scheme, with the Dublin (62%) and Western (60%) Garda Regions having the strongest concentration of households in schemes. Altogether, there were about 3,500 schemes in Ireland in 1998.

We reviewed three evaluations which have been carried out in Ireland - two on Neighbourhood Watch and one on Community Alert - and these suggest that the main impacts of the schemes are primarily in terms of helping people to feel more secure and part of a community and promoting positive attitudes towards the Gardaí. None of the Irish studies were able to show that the overall level of crime in the area had declined as a result of the schemes; nor have we been able to show that schemes make any difference in terms of reducing or detecting crime. Our review of studies from elsewhere indicates that global statements which claim that these schemes are either effective or ineffective cannot be sustained by the research evidence. As one commentator observed following a review of nearly 60 such studies in Britain and the US, "it is almost impossible to arrive at an overall conclusion about the effectiveness of NW [Neighbourhood Watch] in preventing crime". The reasons for this are due not solely to the fact that different studies produce different results but because many of the studies have serious methodological flaws.

6.3 Methodology

The methodology for our evaluation involved three surveys and twelve case studies. We describe briefly the scope of these data collection exercises.

6.3.1 Survey of Scheme Organisers

This was a postal survey of all scheme organisers in November and December 1997. The size of the survey relative to the total population of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert schemes is summarised in Table 6.3.1. This reveals that 827 schemes participated in the survey, a response rate of 24%. This is an acceptable response rate and the absolute number of 827 completed questionnaires provides a solid basis for drawing a profile of

scheme organisers. At the same time, the response rate suggests a degree of apathy among schemes and this was confirmed by other parts of our evaluation which found that only about a third of all schemes are active.

Table 6.3.1 Characteristics of the Sample of Scheme Organisers

Category	NW	CA	Total
Number of schemes in Ireland	2,318	1,141	3,459
Number of schemes in sample	455	372	827
Response rate (%)	20	33	24

Based on a postal survey of all scheme organisers in November and December 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert.

6.3.2 Survey of Gardaí

This was a postal survey of 1,400 randomly selected Gardaí: 700 Liaison Gardaí (so called because they liaise with Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert schemes) and 700 Non-Liaison Gardaí. The survey was carried out in February and March 1998 and produced 734 completed questionnaires, a response rate of 52%; this is equivalent to about 7% of the entire force. The size and composition of the Garda sample is summarised in Table 6.3.2.

Table 6.3.2 Characteristics of the Sample of Garda Síochána (%)

Category	Liaison Gardaí (LG)				NLG	All
	NW	CA	Othr	Total	Total	Total
Number of Gardaí sampled	-	-	-	700	700	1,400
No of completed questionnaires	169	174	101	444	290	734
Response rate (%)	-	-	-	63	41	52
% questionnaires in each category	23	23	14	60	40	100

Based on a postal survey carried out in February and March 1998. NW= Gardaí who liaise with Neighbourhood Watch schemes; CA= Gardaí who liaise with Community Alert schemes; Othr= Gardaí who liaise with neither Neighbourhood Watch or Community Alert schemes but are, or have been, involved in community relations work; LG= Liaison Gardaí; NLG= Not Liaison Gardaí.

6.3.3 Survey of National Population

This involved a national representative sample of 1,402 persons who were interviewed in November 1997. The characteristics of the sample are summarised in Table 6.3.3 and shows that 44% of respondents are scheme participants and 56% are non-participants. Given that this is a nationally representative sample, the proportion of respondents who are scheme participants is less than what might be expected since more than half (54%) of all households in Ireland are in a scheme (see Chapter One). The reason for this seems to lie in the method by which scheme participants and non-participants were identified; each respondent had to be subjectively aware of being in a scheme in order to be classified as such. This was the most effective and economical way of identifying scheme participants. This procedure has the disadvantage of excluding people from scheme areas who may be in one but are unaware of it and possibly unaware of any “public good” effects which the scheme may have had on them and their area. However it has the advantage of including in schemes only those who are actually aware of being in them. On balance, we believe that this procedure makes it easier to identify scheme impacts where they exist; conversely, if scheme impacts cannot be identified from this sample, we may be reasonably confident that they do not exist.

Table 6.3.3 Sample Characteristics of Scheme Participants and Non-Participants

Total		Scheme (%)			Non-Scheme (%)			Total
		NW	CA	Total	UN	RL	Total	
Total	N	391	225	616	447	339	786	1,402
Total	%	28	16	44	32	24	56	100

Based on a national random sample of 1,402 people who were interviewed in November 1997.

NW= Neighbourhood Watch; CA= Community Alert; UN= Urban; RL= Rural.

It is noteworthy that the proportion of the sample in Neighbourhood Watch (28%) is closer to the actual proportion of households in this scheme in Ireland (32%) compared to Community Alert (16% in the sample compared to 22% in Ireland). This suggests that subjective identification with schemes may be higher in Neighbourhood Watch than Community Alert; this, in turn, may be due to the fact that Neighbourhood Watch schemes (which, on average, comprise 158 households) are known to be smaller than Community Alert schemes (which, on average, comprise 222 households) and cover much smaller geographical areas (Chapter One).

6.3.4 Case Studies

We carried out twelve case studies in different parts of Ireland in order to give a more tangible picture of how the schemes work in practice. Table 6.3.4 summarises the location of these case studies. The selection of case study schemes was informed by our desire to look at the diversity of schemes, particularly in terms of their size (i.e., those with a large and those with a small number of households) and age (i.e., those long-established and those recently established). In the case of Neighbourhood Watch, we also made our selection to reflect different geographical and social settings such as private and public housing estates within Dublin as well as small towns and villages in other parts of Ireland. In the case of Community Alert, our selection reflected different types of rural Ireland such as places close to towns and places which are relatively remote from centres of population.

Table 6.3.4 Case Studies of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert, 1997

Scheme	No	Locations
Neighbourhood Watch	6	Dublin (3), Donegal (1), Cork county (1), Kildare county (1)
Community Alert	6	Cork county (1), Wexford county (1), Monaghan county (1) Galway county (1), Sligo county (1), Offaly county (1)
Total	12	-

6.4 Key Characteristics of Schemes and Scheme Organisers

Our survey showed that scheme organisers tend to be older and are more likely to be married than the adult population generally. Two out of every three scheme organisers are men and have been living in their area for over ten years. Scheme organisers differ from the rest of the adult population in Ireland in that they are much more likely to own their own homes, to be middle class and to be involved in either the world of paid work or retired; very few are unemployed. Schemes themselves tend to be located in areas of high home ownership.

Most schemes, according to the organisers, are active and have continued to be active since they were first launched. Three quarters were launched at the initiative of the community;

the remainder at the initiative of the Gardaí. We estimate that the schemes in our sample are smaller than the average scheme in Ireland and surmise that this may be due to the fact that smaller schemes may be the more active ones.

Seven out of ten scheme areas have an active community organisation such as a residents group or community association. Crime is not perceived as a problem in the scheme areas. Nuisances such as rubbish, loitering teenagers and under age drinking are seen as problems by about four out of ten scheme organisers, particularly in Neighbourhood Watch areas.

Most schemes do the same basic activities, according to their organisers. Some of these are occasional (such as erecting signs and displaying stickers) but others are continuous (such as reporting incidents to the Gardaí, watching each other's property, visiting the elderly, disseminating information). Our survey presented a positive picture of the schemes' links with the community by showing that two thirds of them disseminated information about the scheme through the church magazine (32%), their own newsletter (22%) or through free newspapers (12%).

The frequency of meetings is a matter of considerable variation between schemes. About a fifth of schemes never have general meetings of members while a similar proportion meet about six times a year. Two thirds of scheme organisers never have separate meetings from the meeting of all members. Community Alert schemes meet more frequently than Neighbourhood Watch schemes although we do not know how many attend these meetings.

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are designed to build a bridge between the Gardaí and the community and scheme organisers believe that they are effective in this regard. Most scheme organisers - about nine out of ten - know their Liaison Garda by name and six out of ten have heard from the Liaison Garda at least once in the previous three months. Gardaí are regular attenders at scheme meetings - particularly meetings of members as distinct from meetings of scheme organisers - and usually make a presentation at those meetings. However it is important to record that Gardaí seem to stay in more regular contact with Community Alert schemes than with Neighbourhood Watch schemes. We do not know if this reflects a lack of commitment by the Gardaí or by the schemes. However it may affect the overall vitality of the schemes as well as relations between the schemes and the Gardaí.

The Garda input to the schemes was highly rated by the scheme organisers in the sample although some weaknesses were also identified. Most scheme organisers have supplied information on suspicious activities to the Gardaí and feel appreciated for doing so. Garda feedback is invariably appreciated by scheme organisers but no feedback was given in four out of ten cases. The Garda presentation is often the centre piece of scheme meetings and is seen by most scheme organisers as useful. Scheme organisers believe that the Gardaí are committed to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert, particularly at local level but are less sure about the national commitment. The central role of the Gardaí in supporting the schemes is underlined by the belief - shared by the vast majority of scheme organisers - that the schemes could not, and should not, be run without the Gardaí. In this regard, eight out of ten scheme organisers - particularly those in Community Alert areas - expressed satisfaction with the Garda input to the schemes. At the same time there was also widespread support for a more active role by the Gardaí in supporting schemes through improved information about crime and more feedback on suspicious activities as well as more resource materials such as an instruction manual, video and training.

Our survey of scheme organisers revealed that two out of every three schemes tend to operate in relative isolation without contacting other schemes or networks of schemes; Neighbourhood Watch schemes tend to have even less contact than Community Alert schemes. About 350 Community Alert schemes are affiliated to Muintir na Tire and it appears that about two thirds of these participated in the postal survey.

We have already suggested that the schemes in our sample are probably the more active ones and our analysis of scheme meetings and contacts between schemes and Gardaí would seem to suggest this. Scheme organisers also have a high level of interest and enthusiasm for the scheme; they are strong believers in the effectiveness of the schemes particularly in areas such as home security, display of stickers, creating awareness of vulnerable people in the community, and helping people to feel less isolated and more safe. In general, belief in the effectiveness of the schemes is much higher among Community Alert than among Neighbourhood Watch particularly on issues such as reducing fear, isolation and insecurity in the home. Belief in the effectiveness of the schemes is not the same as actual effectiveness however.

6.5 Characteristics of Gardaí

The survey of Gardaí found that Liaison Gardaí are slightly older than Non-Liaison Gardaí and this is accounted for by the fact that Gardaí liaising with Community Alert schemes are

markedly older than Gardaí liaising with Neighbourhood Watch schemes. Nine out of ten Gardaí in the sample are men but there is a higher proportion of women Gardaí involved in Neighbourhood Watch than Community Alert. Eight out of ten members in the sample are Garda rank, similar to the proportion in the entire force. Gardaí liaising with Community Alert are more likely to be sergeants than Gardaí liaising with Neighbourhood Watch. The Dublin Metropolitan Area, while having the highest proportion of Gardaí (23%) in the sample, is significantly under-represented by comparison with the proportion of the force in this region (37%). All other regions have a higher proportion of Gardaí in the sample than their corresponding proportion in the force; nevertheless the sample contains a good regional dispersal of Gardaí throughout the country. Liaison Gardaí tend to have slightly more years of service than Non-Liaison Gardaí while Community Alert Gardaí tend to have considerably more years of service than Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí.

We analysed the Garda input to both schemes and found that that Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí tend to be assigned more schemes than Community Alert Gardaí although the majority in both schemes tend to be assigned between one and two schemes. Perhaps because of this, Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí spend slightly longer on scheme activities (12.8 hours per month, equivalent to 8% of their time) compared to Community Alert Gardaí (11.2 hours per month, equivalent to 7% of their time). This in turn may help to explain the finding that the overall Garda input per scheme - as perceived by scheme organisers - tends to be less in Neighbourhood Watch than in Community Alert. Liaison Gardaí always or usually attend all scheme meetings and tend to be significantly more involved in community activities than Non-Liaison Gardaí even when scheme activities are excluded.

The results of our survey showed that Gardaí believe strongly in the effectiveness of the schemes. Between eight and nine out of ten believe that the schemes are effective in achieving their core objectives such as reducing the feeling of being isolated, improving home security, increasing awareness of crime and of vulnerable people, feeling safer, and increasing community involvement in the prevention of crime. A similar level of belief in the effectiveness of the schemes was displayed by scheme organisers which does not, of course, prove that the schemes are in fact effective. Gardaí and scheme organisers are also similar in that those involved with Community Alert are more convinced about the effectiveness of the schemes than those involved in Neighbourhood Watch. About six out of ten Gardaí believe that the schemes yield a little information and a similar number believe that this information is useful.

In rural areas, Muintir na Tire has a special role in promoting and developing Community Alert schemes through its five development officers. We invited Gardaí to assess their role and six out of ten Gardaí reported that Muintir na Tire is playing a helpful role in establishing and supporting schemes and would like to see this role increased in the future. A similar proportion believe that Community Alert schemes are more effective if they have Muintir na Tire involvement.

Our measurement of Garda attitudes to the schemes found that more than three quarters had a very positive attitude; Gardaí involved with Community Alert (85%) tended to be more positive than Gardaí involved with Neighbourhood Watch (76%). Our analysis also found, following a factor analysis of 12 attitude statements, that three quarters of all Gardaí are in favour of community-based policing schemes; they believe the schemes are a good idea and

require more manpower at local level but they also believe that the community has to take more responsibility for policing and that young people would not commit crime if they had something better to do. This attitude cluster indicates both a commitment to community policing and an implication that it is not being fully implemented in practice. Approximately six out of every ten Gardaí - both Liaison and Non-Liaison - are definitely opposed to civilian patrolling by schemes while a third would consider it if it was done with the consent of, or after training by, the Gardaí; scheme organisers have very similar views on this issue.

We also measured attitudes to the broader concept of community policing and its relative importance vis à vis other policing priorities. The top policing priorities for virtually all Gardaí are the detection and prevention of crime and the maintenance of public order. However community policing is also a priority for nine out of ten Gardaí. The priorities of individual Gardaí are not necessarily those of the corporate entity - the Garda Síochána - to which they belong. Indeed our results show a remarkable contrast between the policing priorities of individual Gardaí and their perception of the force's corporate policing priorities. Individual Gardaí believe that the force as a corporate entity gives much less priority to community policing relative to other policing activities than they do themselves. Gardaí believe that community policing has the lowest priority within the force and is separated by a wide gap in importance from other policing activities. The tension between individual and corporate policing priorities - as perceived by the Gardaí in our sample - is also mirrored in their views about whether community policing helps or hinders one's promotional prospects within the force: some (43%) believe that community policing helps a Garda's promotional prospects while others (49%) believe that it neither helps nor hinders. This result suggests that there is some ambiguity within the corporate culture of the Garda Síochána about the esteem in which community policing is held.

6.6 Impact of Schemes

We measured the impact of schemes by comparing differences between scheme participants and non-participants. We first outline some of the general differences between these two groups before proceeding to the key impact indicators. Scheme participants tend to be older than the non-scheme respondents in both urban and rural areas. There is no gender difference between scheme participants and non-participants although we found that women were slightly more likely to be involved in Neighbourhood Watch and men were slightly more likely to be involved in Community Alert. The majority (61%) of persons who know that they live in a scheme area are married and this is considerably higher than the corresponding proportions in urban and rural Ireland respectively. Scheme participants are drawn from all social classes but Neighbourhood Watch participants are disproportionately middle class compared to their share in the urban population while Community Alert participants are disproportionately farmers compared to their share in the rural population.

The majority of scheme areas do not have a residents association although the community spirit, particularly in rural areas, was felt to be very good; in urban areas, Neighbourhood Watch participants rated the community spirit higher than non-participants although the majority of them felt their good community spirit was not attributable to the scheme. Scheme participants do not have very different attitudes to crime compared to non-participants. A majority of respondents - but especially scheme participants - are well disposed towards the schemes and see a role for the community in crime prevention.

Our survey of the general population revealed that about two thirds of schemes appear - at least from the perspective of participants - to be inactive. This was exemplified by the fact that seven out of ten participants have never attended a scheme meeting while six out of ten have heard nothing about the scheme or about crime prevention in the past year and do not know the name of anyone on the scheme committee.

Our assessment of the impact of the schemes explored how crime was perceived by participants in scheme and non-scheme areas. Around three quarters of all respondents - both inside and outside schemes - believe that crime is a small problem and there is no statistically significant difference between scheme participants and non-participants when the sampling error - estimated to be plus or minus 4.5% for inter-scheme comparisons - is taken into account. In other words, schemes seem to have no impact on the perception of crime.

The vast majority of people - both scheme and non-scheme participants - feel safe at home and in their local area, both during the day and night with no statistically significant difference between the two groups. Accordingly we infer that schemes do not seem to make people feel safer.

Our analysis also found that scheme participants have double the level of victimisation of non-scheme participants although this is not a statistically significant difference when sampling error is taken into account. Accordingly, we conclude that schemes do not seem to have an impact on the level of victimisation of their participants.

Participants in schemes, particularly those in Neighbourhood Watch, take consistently more security precautions than non-participants. However our analysis found that only a small minority - no more than about one in six - said they took security precautions as a result of the scheme which suggests that taking security precautions might have more to do with the characteristics of the participants than with the characteristics of the schemes. In other words, the schemes have very little effect in terms of taking security precautions.

Our survey of the general population also examined the extent of seeing and reporting suspicious activities among participants and non-participants. This revealed that very few people - around one in ten - had seen any suspicious activities in the previous six months and there is no statistically significant difference between scheme participants and non-participants in this regard. Very little suspicious activity was reported to the Gardaí with no appreciable difference between scheme participants and non-participants.

None of these findings will offer much comfort to advocates of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. Indeed our analysis was virtually unable to isolate any benefits associated with the schemes for each of the variables measured: feeling safer, reduced risk of victimisation, taking security precautions because of the scheme, reporting suspicious activities to the Gardaí. This result may be attributable to the fact, expressed by participants themselves, that about two thirds of the schemes are inactive. However this would not explain why the active schemes also seem to have no impact. We can offer no explanation for this although we would suggest that some of the impacts which the schemes are expected to produce - such as reducing crime, increasing the sense of safety, reducing victimisation - may be too ambitious and disproportionate to the resources of a group of community volunteers who meet no more than once a month and often much less. This suggests that

some re-examination is needed of the overall objectives of the schemes and their role within the broader context of community policing.

6.7 Recommendations

In the light of the results presented in the previous sections, we make five recommendations. These recommendations are designed to respond to the fundamental finding of the evaluation, namely that Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert seem to have no appreciable impact on the experience of crime and safety for those living in areas covered by these schemes. In other words, the schemes have not been able to achieve the core objectives which were originally set for them and this effectively summarises the challenge posed by the results of our evaluation.

6.7.1 Re-Appraise Objectives of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert

Our first recommendation calls for a radical re-appraisal of the objectives of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. We make this recommendation because our analysis was unable to establish that participants in these schemes enjoyed benefits by comparison with non-participants in any of the following key areas: feeling safer, reduced risk of victimisation, taking security precautions because of the scheme, reporting suspicious activities to the Gardaí. We do not exclude the possibility that our evaluation may have overlooked some benefits produced by these schemes; however the failure of the schemes to show a positive impact in each of the areas measured - all of which are central to its core objectives - is sufficient to raise fundamental questions about the usefulness and effectiveness of the schemes.

It may be that the objectives which were originally set for these schemes were too ambitious and disproportionate to the capacity of its volunteer committees. These schemes have multiple objectives which has the advantage of creating a broad agenda of action which can be tailored by each scheme according to local circumstances. However it can also be a dangerous starting point since the core problem which the schemes are designed to address is left vague and undefined. For example, we know that the first two objectives of the schemes are to reduce and prevent crime but we also know that crime is not perceived as a serious problem in scheme areas. This therefore raises a doubt as to whether it is appropriate to formulate the purpose of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in terms of these objectives.

The failure of the schemes to make an impact may also be due to the fact many of them, in the experience of participants, are largely inactive. Notwithstanding the ambitious objectives for the schemes, our case studies revealed that the schemes produce a low level of activity - particularly in areas where there is not much crime or nuisance activity - and have very few resources. Apart from the input of Garda time, there are no discretionary funds to support specific initiatives such as newsletters within the schemes. Some schemes have become enthusiastically involved in the administration of the Scheme of Support for Older People - which is funded by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs - partly because of the intrinsic merits of the scheme but also because it gives the committee something to do. Overall however, our impression is that committees barely have enough to keep them active and this explains why some of them - particularly the Community Alert schemes - rarely meet while others only meet during the winter months.

These considerations lead us to recommend that a radical re-appraisal of the objectives of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert should be undertaken as a matter of urgency. The re-appraisal which we envisage needs to articulate a clearer vision of community policing and the role of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in that context, taking into account the findings of this report. This review needs to involve the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Garda Síochána, other relevant statutory agencies, and the various voluntary bodies which have an interest in both policing and community such as Muintir na Tíre, the Neighbourhood Watch Representative Committees in Dublin, Cork and elsewhere, Victim Support, community development organisations, et cetera.

For many scheme organisers, community policing must involve better contact and communication with the Gardaí through the schemes. Most scheme organisers have reported suspicious activities to the Gardaí and are always appreciative of feedback when it is given; however in four out of ten cases, there was no feedback given and virtually every scheme organiser would like this rectified. Scheme organisers were also clear in calling for a greater Garda input to the schemes in the form of more information on crime statistics and suspicious activities as well as more resource materials such as an instruction manual, a video and training.

Our case studies reinforced the need for improved communication between the Gardaí and the community. Many of those we spoke to were disappointed at the poor feedback received from Gardaí on foot of information provided by the committees and the public generally. A number of Gardaí - including Superintendents - acknowledged that the public could be given more detailed information on crime and on the work of the Gardaí without jeopardising security or operational matters.

These pieces of evidence suggest that scheme organisers expect a greater willingness by the Gardaí to share information and to be more open and supportive. In this regard, the views of scheme organisers are probably not very different to those which people generally have about State services. In all areas of public service delivery there is a growing expectation that the service will be as open and accountable as possible - within the limits of operational effectiveness, client confidentiality, and resources - and will take account of the needs of the client and customer.

We see a need to articulate this vision more clearly in the context of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert so that these schemes become part of a broader strategy of making the Garda Síochána more responsive to the needs of the community and ensuring a partnership approach to the prevention and detection of crime. As things stand at present, it is our impression, despite the palpable goodwill and effort which the Gardaí show towards the schemes, that there is a tendency to place responsibility for this partnership on the community rather than on the Gardaí. Clearly the skills and resources of both parties in this arrangement are quite unequal and it is our view that the Gardaí could be - and should be - more proactive in building a partnership with the communities it serves. We believe that there is scope for the Gardaí to take the initiative in creating a more vibrant partnership with the community and to show a more explicit sense of obligation to the local community regarding its right to be kept informed - and to be heard - about all aspects of crime and safety in their area. This vision of community policing is already embryonic within the schemes but it has never been developed or resourced effectively; its time may now be due.

6.7.2 Renew Corporate Commitment of Garda Síochána to Community Policing

Our analysis suggests that community policing holds an uneasy and ambivalent position within the corporate culture of the Garda Síochána. Individual Gardaí place community policing near the top of their policing priorities but perceive the force itself as according it a much lower priority. This ambivalence about community policing finds expression in divisions of opinion between individual Gardaí on the issue of whether or not community policing is helpful to their promotional prospects. It also finds expression in the perceptions of scheme organisers who believe that the Garda commitment to Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert is much stronger at local than at national level.

The perceptions of individual Gardaí regarding the corporate priorities of the Garda Síochána are not necessarily correct, although individual Gardaí are probably in a better position to judge the situation than most. We know from its five year Corporate Strategy Policy Document (Garda Síochána, 1993) that community policing is a core element in the Garda Síochána's vision of its work. In that document, it describes its mission in terms of working "with community support ... to encourage and advise the community on how best to protect their persons and property from criminal behaviour" (Ibid, p.6). The methods for implementing this mission statement include "maintaining dialogue with the community at large about mechanisms which reduce crime exposure and develop community-based crime prevention programmes" (Ibid, p.7) as well as "progressing the implementation of Community Policing in urban and rural areas" (Ibid, p.9).

We also know that the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has expressed a commitment to community involvement in its Discussion Paper - Tackling Crime - published in May 1997 (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1997). This commitment is based on respect for local knowledge and experience and an awareness of the need for partnership between the Gardaí and the community. According to the Discussion Paper, "probably the most valuable product of effective consultation and involvement is that it creates a sense that, with broadly-based co-operation, something can actually be done about crime. The battle against crime will remain an uphill struggle for as long as it is seen as the task only of Gardaí, Courts and Prisons - 'someone else's job'" (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1997, p.141).

Our impression is that the corporate position of the Garda Síochána on community policing is poorly defined and it is often seen in terms of a set of projects or schemes such as Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert rather than a strategic approach to serving the community in a spirit of partnership. In view of this, we believe that any future plans for Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert would need to be underpinned by a more developed corporate policy on community policing coupled with a clearer expression of corporate commitment to community policing at every level of the force. Otherwise there is a danger of community policing becoming little more than a public relations exercise; many of our consultations indicated that this is how community policing is widely perceived, both inside and outside the force.

6.7.3 Targeting of Schemes by Class and Age Requires Attention

We have already indicated that the introduction of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert in the mid-1980s was prompted, inter alia, by two relatively different sets of problems. In rural areas, Community Alert was introduced as a way of countering the fear experienced

by many elderly people in isolated rural areas following a spate of violent attacks at that time. The scheme has remained relatively close to this founding ethos and, like many community organisations in rural Ireland, it tends to be run by men who are either farmers or professionals. These scheme organisers are strongly committed to Community Alert and are well supported in that by the Gardaí. The situation with regard to Neighbourhood Watch however is quite different.

In urban areas, Neighbourhood Watch was seen as a way for the Gardaí to build bridges back into disadvantaged urban communities where drug use and related crime were causing growing alienation between the Gardaí and the community. We now know that Neighbourhood Watch was rarely introduced into those areas - and is still regarded with suspicion if not stigma in many of these communities - and the problems of drugs and drug-related crime have, if anything, got worse since then. Instead, Neighbourhood Watch found richer soil in middle class areas which had a pre-existing community infrastructure and a leadership capacity among predominantly middle class scheme organisers, even in areas where there is a higher proportion of local authority residents. As we have seen, crime is not usually a serious problem in these areas although there are nuisances, as perceived by schemes organisers, such as rubbish, teenagers hanging around and under-age drinking.

Our case studies also indicated that very few schemes are to be found in the most disadvantaged housing estates in larger urban areas where levels of crime are probably much higher than in many scheme areas. This is consistent with one other Irish study which found that those living in areas with a high risk of crime were less willing to participate in schemes such as Neighbourhood Watch compared to those living in areas with a low risk of crime (Hourihan, 1986; 1987). Studies in Britain (Hough and Mayhew, 1985) and the US (Lavrakas and Herz, 1982) have also found an inverse relationship between the risk of crime and the level of participation in crime prevention schemes.

Thus, although schemes such as Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert respond to the genuine needs of communities to protect themselves from crime and the fear of crime, they appear to be ill-suited to those communities where there is little support for the Gardaí and which have been adversely affected by the epidemic of drugs and related criminal activities that have blighted many disadvantaged urban communities over the past decade. In recognition of this, the Garda Síochána introduced Operation Dóchas during 1996 as part of a strategy to win the co-operation of disadvantaged communities in its fight against drugs and crime (Garda Síochána, 1997, p.4). From this perspective therefore, Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert can be seen as part of a strategy of community policing which has been devised for areas where there is already respect for the Gardaí and where the resources within the community are capable of setting up and running a committee. In short, these schemes have not been tailored to the needs of Ireland's most disadvantaged urban communities.

None of this implies a criticism of the schemes but is a reminder that they were designed as a solution to a very different and possibly more serious set of problems than the ones confronting the typical Neighbourhood Watch area. This raises the question: what is to be done about community policing in the most disadvantaged urban areas? The answer to that question is outside the remit of this study but is raised here because it was also raised as part of the original rationale for Neighbourhood Watch. We assert only that any form of community policing in these areas must be built on solid principles of community

development such as partnership, participation, community enhancement and capacity building.

In raising the issue of targeting, we also wish to draw attention to the fact that Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are skewed not only with respect to class but also with respect to age. Our evaluation has shown that the schemes have little or no involvement with young people. This might be expected given that the committees are run by older people who have reached a stage in life where most have bought a house and settled down. However none of the schemes seem to have made any effort to create projects or activities that might involve young people. During the case studies, some Gardaí affirmed that the force does not have a clear youth policy and this may account for the fact that ideas for the involvement of young people have not been forthcoming. Some of those we consulted suggested that the schemes could involve young people by encouraging them to adopt an old person whom they could visit regularly; however we encountered no scheme that has tried out this idea. Others suggested involving transition year students in activities but this does not seem to have been tried either. Thus the age profile of Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert shows a marked absence of younger people who, as is well known, are more likely to be the cause of nuisance and crime. From the perspective of community policing therefore, we recommend that the involvement of young people be considered as part of the overall reappraisal of these schemes.

6.7.4 Different Supports Needed for Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert

Throughout this study we have found significant differences between Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert. For example, we found that Gardaí made less contact with scheme organisers in Neighbourhood Watch areas, they were less frequent attenders at Neighbourhood Watch meetings and they made fewer presentations at those meetings, and they gave less feedback to scheme organisers who had supplied information on suspicious activities. In view of this, it is not wholly surprising that Neighbourhood Watch organisers were less positive about the input of the Gardaí to their scheme than their Community Alert counterparts. Neighbourhood Watch schemes were also less active in terms of the frequency of their meetings and this may account for the significantly lower response rate from Neighbourhood Watch schemes in this study. It is not possible to infer from this alone that Neighbourhood Watch schemes are less active because of the lower level of Garda input but it would merit further investigation. Moreover it is consistent with the finding that Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí tend to be assigned a larger number of schemes than Community Alert Gardaí and, even though the former spend longer hours on schemes, the overall input per scheme seems to be less in Neighbourhood Watch than Community Alert.

The systematic differences in attitudes and perceptions of schemes organisers in Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are also found among the Gardaí assigned to those schemes. Although all Gardaí are positively disposed towards both sets of schemes and are convinced of their effectiveness, Community Alert Gardaí score consistently higher on these variables than Neighbourhood Watch Gardaí.

It is difficult to know if the differences between Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert are attributable to the schemes themselves or to the different crime, policing and community contexts which prevail in urban and rural Ireland; or to a combination of both. Whichever is the case, it would be worth examining this matter further to determine if different arrangements are appropriate for supporting Neighbourhood Watch and Community

Alert. By definition, a community policing approach must adapt to the variety of local circumstances in which communities find themselves. Accordingly, we recommend that the review which we propose should look more closely at how the Garda Síochána supports these schemes - especially Neighbourhood Watch - and examine its commitment to these schemes in the light of a more fully developed model of community policing.

6.7.5 Explore the Role of Support Organisations

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert have the same broad objectives but slightly different local structures. Community Alert schemes have the benefit of a national support structure through Muintir na Tire and its five development officers; about three in every ten Community Alert schemes (341) are affiliated to Muintir na Tire. Neighbourhood Watch schemes do not have a support structure analogous to Muintir na Tire but proposals have been developed - following extensive nation-wide consultations in the six Garda regions - to develop a national support structure to support these schemes. The proposed support structure would be called the National Neighbourhood Watch Council.

Our evaluation has shown that Muintir na Tire plays an important role in establishing and supporting Community Alert Schemes and a majority of Gardaí would like to see this role increased. However, the case for expanding the role of Muintir na Tire depends not only on the quality of its work as a support organisation to Community Alert - for which there is considerable endorsing evidence - but also, and more fundamentally, on whether Community Alert itself is achieving its objectives. These considerations suggest that the role of Muintir na Tire - and the proposed National Neighbourhood Watch Council - should be part of the review of the schemes which we propose, taking the findings of this report into account. We see little point in developing support organisations for these schemes until the more fundamental issues affecting them have been fully clarified and resourced.

6.7.6 Conclusion

Neighbourhood Watch and Community Alert constitute a major community resource involving over 3,500 schemes covering more than half of all households in the country. This resource is an opportunity and a challenge to the Garda Síochána because it invites a more radical commitment to community policing than seems to be evident at present. This study has shown that it is not possible to continue to operate these schemes without a radical re-think of what they are expected to achieve. These schemes do not seem to be achieving what they were originally expected to achieve and accordingly it is necessary to either change the expectations, or change the schemes, or change both. That is the challenge posed by this evaluation.

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