‘Your Dublin Your Voice’ – Responding to your concerns in relation to Anti Social Behaviour, drugs and begging problems.

The results of the first ‘Your Dublin your voice’ survey demonstrated that over one third of the respondents (800) felt that anti social behaviour, drugs and begging are the worst thing about living, working or studying in the city. Many felt that this behaviour is seriously damaging Dublin’s reputation. See www.yourdublinyourvoice.ie for more detail.

One of the unique features of the “Your Dublin Your Voice” engagement initiative is to listen and respond to the views of the panel members. We asked for your views, now we want to address your key concerns. We see this as a two way process. Your number one concern was the negative impact of anti social behaviour, drugs and begging. To follow up on this we met with key decision makers from policing, health, local government, business, tourism and foreign investment to get their perspective on the results and also to identify future actions that can be taken to address these issues.

Present at the meeting were:
Assistant commissioner of the Gardai with responsibility for Dublin, Dublin City Manager, Fingal County Manager, South Dublin County Manager, IDA East Region Manager, CEO of the Business Improvement Districts (BIDS), CEO Dublin City Business Association (DCBA), CEO Temple Bar Traders, Dublin Chamber of Commerce, Health Service Executive – Manager with responsibility for the national Drug rehabilitation Programmes, The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Representative from the Inner City Community Policing Forum, Dublin Tourism, Inner City Area Manager, Director of Housing in Dublin City Council , Director of the Homeless Agency Dublin City Council.

The Discussion:
Much of the discussion centred on the ‘perceptions’ versus the ‘reality’ in relation to feelings of safety in the city. Dublin is shown to be relatively safe city when it comes to crime statistics. Recent crime statistics for the Dublin region show that overall crime is down on last year while crime against the person is at its lowest levels in over 4 and a half years. Property crime has decreased with a particular downward trend in burglaries. Dublin is a particularly safe city in comparison to other international cities.

However the following issues were discussed in relation to the results of the survey:

- **The biggest challenge from the tourism perspective is the ‘sense of menace’ that tourists feel when they are walking about the city.** In some cities the authorities have a policy of zero tolerance for key tourism areas. Tourism is an extremely important part of Dublin’s economy with real growth potential in the business tourism sectors – the
opening of the national convention centre is important in this regard. Particular issues have been reported in relation to the anti social behaviour along the boardwalk and the quays

- **There are concerns about anti social activities around the IFSC (Irish Financial Services Centre) in particular Amiens Street / Talbot Street.** Over 24,000 people work with world leading companies in Dublin’s IFSC. One of the most successful aspects of Ireland’s Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) strategy is down to reference selling from our existing industry base as well as a strong reputation as a great place to invest in (in particular for European and International headquarters). The IDA welcomes any initiatives undertaken to address these concerns.

- **The Gardai are working to tackle these issues – however there was clear agreement that they alone cannot solve this challenge.** They require support and wider engagement – a lot of these challenges are not exclusively related to crime enforcement. The Gardai highlighted progress in reducing begging which has come about with the introduction of new legislation. In the first five months since the Criminal Justice Public Order Act 2011 (Begging Legislation) came into force, An Garda Siochana has detected over 350 cases in the city centre area alone.

- To address these issues a Local Policing Business Forum has been in operation in the city centre area for the past year. This was launched following a proposal made at the City Joint Policing Committee and is a partnership between the DCCBA, BIDS, Dublin Tourism, Temple Bar Traders, DCC and the Garda Siochana. The Forum meetings are chaired by the Lord Mayor of Dublin developing inter-agency responses to some of the issues identified.

- The business representative organisation BIDS (Business Improvement Districts) commented that 85% of businesses in the city centre district rely on personal consumption (spending). The city centre is the national hub of retail economic activity and a key attraction for international tourists and investment. This anti social behaviour is impacting on trade – there is the challenge of perceptions versus the reality that exists. This perception is keeping shoppers, consumers out of the city centre – we need to address with improved communication. This solution requires a multi disciplinary approach.

- **The problem of over concentration of social services in the city centre.** There are 64 units of social infrastructure in Dublin 1 for example. While this infrastructure is important it has the effect of impacting on investment. Retail companies tend to look at what’s within a ½ km from the proposed site of investment in terms of social infrastructure. Ultimately businesses will relocate/shut down and new investment is reluctant to move in within a certain distance of these facilities – which in turn results in
city centre streets that stop functioning. The opening of New Look and Forever 21 has increased footfall by over 10% in Henry Street.

- While there is recognition of the importance of social infrastructure there is also the reality that is also reduces the attractiveness of our city for much needed retail investment. We need to manage these two areas in a sensitive manner ensuring that we have an adequate social infrastructure while ensuring the city centre is still attractive to investment.

- The DCBA (Dublin City Business Association) feel that it is essential that we deal with the perceptions of feeling unsafe. The perception of safety is essential if we want to succeed in promoting and growing tourism in the city. There was a feeling that we need to do more to regain our public space. One of the key areas for growth potential will be from international tourism – growth in this sector needs to make up for medium to long term flatness in the domestic economy.

- From the perspective of the HSE representative it was felt that there are already adequate mechanisms in place for collaboration and partnership to address these challenges of anti social behaviour, drugs and begging in the city. The existing case management approach, the national drugs strategy, joint Policing forums and the Local Drugs Task force were already tackling these issues.

- The HSE fully supports access to facilities close to where their clients live - there are 6 clinics in the city centre that cover 25% of all treatment centres in the Dublin region. The trend in methadone treatment has stabilised in the past 2 years. There are 9,200 in treatment nationally, 4,500 in Dublin region and 1,500 in Dublin city (area between the 2 canals). The HSE is currently engaged in a review of methadone protocol.

- Representatives from the inner city have particular concerns about anti social behaviour and drug dealing in the NE inner city – issues with people selling and dealing with prescription tablets – in particular around Amiens Street – It was noted that an Bord Gais are relocating their headquarter office from this area and this is a further blow for the regeneration of the area.

- Another area highlighted was the anti social behaviour along the board-walk and transport hubs. Dublin City Council Central Area responds by: laneway auditing, removal of graffiti and keeping areas clean.

- **Challenge of homelessness**: Homelessness is a complex social challenge due to Family/Relationship Crisis, Mental Health, Addiction, Money problems all of which lowers personal resilience and creates dependency. The key challenges are:
1) Too much movement back and forth between emergency services and over reliance on temporary accommodation
2) The need for localisation of services across the region and reduction of high concentration of services in the city centre – which unnecessarily brings people into the city centre
3) Provision of access to housing
4) Need for support delivered as a housing service to people in mainstream housing
5) Delivering support to people in their own home
   - We are now moving towards decommissioning of emergency hostel accommodation to effective 24hr hostels which are fully staffed and funded (people would be no longer homeless during the day)
   - The current trends in homelessness show that there has been a steady decline in the numbers of rough sleepers – the latest rough sleeping count shows a min of 60 rough sleepers a night in the city centre. Rough sleepers predominantly are male – and there has been an increase in number of non nationals. There are real issues in particular with individuals who due to their legal status are not entitled to particular homeless services.
   - Localisation is a key issue. There is a process of consolidation of services across Dublin working towards “One Stop Shop” model. Also moving to a new system when assessment and placement services are delivered on a localised basis (rather than people congregating into particular areas of the city centre)

- **Homelessness achievements:** 1,780 tenancies for homeless households between 2007 and 2010. Reducing the use of Temporary Emergency Accommodation in favour of Housing First approach. Rough Sleeping has reduced significantly – particularly over the cold weather period
Summary of the key issues identified:

- Importance of enhanced collaboration amongst all the key stakeholders to tackle these critical issues. Important to get key decision makers around the table that can influence change. This is not something that can be solved by the Gardai alone.

- This will involve meetings (every 6 months) with key decision makers in the city that can agree and effectively lobby central government on key issues and also collectively accelerate actions across the city. This meeting of key influencers / decision makers in the city region has the potential to be a really effective structure.

- However there are already a large number of multi agency structures in place to address the challenges of antisocial behaviour. Current structures include: Joint policing committees, drugs task forces, local area committees, community policing forums, business forums. We need to ensure there is no duplication.

- The need for improved sharing of information to get a better picture of the key trends that are emerging in relation to crime, drugs, treatment, homelessness etc. Action: To share key indicators on a regular basis.

- There are real issues in particular with migrants who due to their legal status (habitual residency) are not entitled to particular homeless services. Proposal to draft the required change in legislation and submit to Government for consideration.

- A move towards localisation of homeless services across the region and reduction of high concentration of services in the city centre – Region will continue to implement this strategy in relation to homeless.

- The issue of open dealing of prescription pills. There have been over 3,000 search and arrests as a result of a police operation which has been mounted in the north inner city area over the past twelve months. However this is having limited effect as there are no powers of prosecution. Legislation is required to tackle the dealing in prescription drugs. Action: Submission to be made to Government on this issue.

- Alcohol related problems. Low cost alcohol and concentration of distribution network in the city centre. The Dublin City Development Plan will help tackle this – off licences in particular areas have to demonstrate the suitability of their site for application for a licence. Breach of conditions will be assessed in the renewal process.

- Responsible Selling of Alcohol - Another issue is the issue of supervision of off-licences? Ease of access to alcohol is prevalent in the city centre – responsible selling is required.
- **Opportunity to expand the community policing forums.** The community policing forum works particularly well in the North Inner City. This model of communities engaging with policing in their local areas was praised by the Gardai. There is increased accountability at local level to deal with the real problems. It was agreed that this initiative should be further promoted.

- **Discussion on how families can make a difference - Community pledges?** Parents need to ensure children are not involved in local level ASB and they and their families need to engage with the community and use community facilities where possible. People are looking for congregation points / gathering places / following their friends. However while they are not breaking laws they can be noisy, intimidating, frightening to tourists. There are many facilities available. This was subsequently a theme for a public awareness and media day held in July 2011.

- **Improved communication and highlighting success stories and key initiatives that are addressing these challenges.** Need to communicate with citizens and the media on the positive work that we are doing.

- **To develop a proposal for Dublin based community courts –** problem solving judges. This would deal with anti social behaviour and petty crime and merited further consideration.

- **Other actions discussed include:** Opportunities to use remotely monitored CCTV systems as used along the Grand Canal walk. Agreement that we need to address vandalism / graffiti with a Fix my street concept / rapid removal of graffiti and repairs along the lines of the ‘broken windows’ concept.

If you have any comments on this please contact our press office [Info@dublincity.ie](mailto:Info@dublincity.ie) / 222 2170 or Jamie Cudden – Research Manager, Dublin City Council: [jamie.cudden@dublincity.ie](mailto:jamie.cudden@dublincity.ie)