

Crowd Shout 'Out'

Local Gardai are closely monitoring social media, after an angry crowd gathered for two consecutive nights at Manor Street last weekend to demonstrate against alleged ongoing criminal activity in the area.

Extra gardai were drafted in from Tramore on both nights to police the demonstration and there were tense scenes on Saturday evening when a property housing three Roma families had its front door kicked and two downstairs windows broken. Earlier in the week, a demonstration over the increasing number of attacks and muggings in the area was organised via social media to meet in the car park adjacent to the Odeon Cinema at 5pm and march to Manor Street. Gardai were initially called to the Manor area shortly after 5pm where, a Garda spokesperson said, approximately 100 people had gathered. Prior to the gardai's arrival, several eyewitness reported that one of the protestors was chased down the street by two people, carrying a knife and a lead pipe.

Approximately ten gardai were initially deployed to the scene where, on arrival, they prevented the protestors from gaining access to the house to 'ensure the safety of the occupants. News of the protest quickly spread on Facebook, with many more protestors and onlookers arriving on the scene by about 7pm. At its height, the crowd is estimated to have come close to 200 and members of the gardai's Armed Response Unit were dispatched to the scene as tensions escalated. Extra gardai were also drafted in from Tramore.

The demonstrators remained at Manor Street for a number of hours, with chants of 'Out, Out, Out' and 'Scum' repeatedly arising throughout the evening. One male, in his 20s, was arrested for public order offences when a group of around 60 people made their way to the rear of a house, at Closegate and a few tried to gain entry. He was released a short time, pending a file to the DPP.

At around 9pm, armed officers removed almost 30 residents from the house - including number of young children - and brought them to alternative accommodation in Tramore. It's understood local interpreters were called in and a support group was also on the scene for the families.

However a new Facebook page, 'Get Roma Criminal Gypsies out', set up on Sunday, sparked a second protest that night, when it posted that the families had returned to Manor Street. A group of approximately 100 protestors gathered in the same spot at around 9.30pm. It's understood one couple and their young child had returned to the house on Sunday but, at the time of the protest, the house was empty.

There was no trouble at the protest, aside from repeated chants. A garda spokesperson said nobody presented themselves as the organiser of the protest but, following discussion with one protestor, gardai conveyed the message that there was nobody in the house and the crowd began to disperse.

Approximately 50 people in this crowd then made their way to William Street, at around 10.25pm, where they assembled outside a block of apartments where a number of Roma families reside. Entrance to this block is via an iron gated entrance, outside which the crowd gathered and continued with chants of 'Out, Out, Out'. Following close supervision by gardai the crowd dispersed and there were no arrests or public order incidents.

Labour TD Ciara Conway took to Twitter to voice her objections to Saturday's protest, having herself driven through the Manor Street area at around 7pm. "The so called protest and event ... against a family was despicable and dangerous."

Children's law and disability rights solicitor, Gareth Noble, who has expressed concern over a number of local anti-Roma Facebook pages created in recent weeks, posted the following: 'Delighted to be asked to assist Roma heritage families in Waterford who are victims of vile attacks. Liaising with gardai and local supports'.

Traveller support group, Pavee Point lodged an official complaint to get the 'Get Them Out Of Town' Facebook page removed earlier this month, after it suggested a 'small protest on Manor Street' to 'get the attention of the gardai'.