

Opening remarks by the Chairperson of the Policing Authority
to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality - 27th September 2017

Chairperson

Thank you for the opportunity to make an opening statement. When the Chief Executive and I last met this Committee, a year ago almost to the day, the Authority was just 9 months old and I was largely looking forward - describing our first steps in establishing a framework to support the Authority's statutory function of overseeing the performance of the Garda Síochána and describing what we would do in relation to a range of matters, including senior Garda appointments. I look forward today to giving you a flavour of what has been achieved in a year and nine months and perhaps where we might be going next.

Performance oversight – the Authority's overarching function

Given the very large number of potential areas of work for the Authority, our approach to performance oversight needs to be planned and disciplined as far as possible, based on a number of principles:

- To work in a way which is thematic with a view to bringing a focus and depth to each theme and to cover the breath of performance issues over time;
- To use the policing plan as an essential foundation document by setting priorities and setting performance targets which can to a large extent be measured and then examining progress monthly;
- To research sources of data, information and experiences which are external to the Garda Síochána, partly to help us develop our understanding of themes, to enable the Authority to bring depth to each theme but also to provide a basis for a challenge conversation with the Garda Síochána if appropriate;
- To make overseeing the Garda response to the recommendations made by other bodies a central pillar of our work – for example you may have seen recently our third report on the implementation of the recommendations in the Garda Inspectorate “Changing Policing in Ireland” report; and
- Not to duplicate the oversight work of others, for example the issues in the Garda College.

The day to day work of supporting this approach is carried out at various levels – information gathering and engagement at official level; formal meetings of Authority Committees with senior Gardaí and formal meetings of the full Authority with the Garda Síochána at Commissioner level 11 or 12 times a year, five of which are in public.

The persistence inherent in this framework, and the rigour it is bringing, is a very big change for the Garda Síochána, for the Department of Justice and Equality and for oversight of policing more generally.

Within this framework, for example, the Authority held a planned meeting in public about Roads Policing in April last. Another theme chosen by the Authority's Policing Strategy and Performance Committee in its workplan for this year was the area of the treatment of children by the Garda Síochána as both victims and suspects and indeed as members of the public. Considerable work has been done in this area and I am aware that this Committee may wish to discuss this topic further.

Code of Ethics

Since we last appeared before you, the Authority completed its work in developing and establishing a Code of Ethics for the Garda Síochána in the timeframe given to us in the Garda Síochána Act. The Code was launched in January by the Tánaiste. In our approach to the Code we went beyond the statutory requirements and established a Code for all those who work in the Garda Síochána

Having a Code is only a first step - albeit a very important one of which the Authority is very proud. It must now be embedded in all aspects of Garda work. While it is the responsibility of every person in the Garda Síochána to behave and work ethically, it is the responsibility of the Commissioner and Garda leadership to ensure that it is rolled out and embedded. We are now overseeing the development of a plan to embed the Code and will continue to drive its implementation.

Appointments in the Garda Síochána

The Authority has a range of responsibilities in relation to appointments in the Garda Síochána, all of which are quite specifically regulated either in the Act or Statutory Instruments, and all of which are different. They can be summarised as follows:

- For Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, to agree the requirements for the jobs with the Minister, to ask the Public Appointments service to run a selection competition and to nominate one name from that competition to Government for each position – Section 9 of the Act is attached to the advance copy of these remarks supplied for your information.
- For the ranks of Superintendent to Assistant Garda Commissioner, to undertake competitions ourselves in accordance with Regulations and to make appointments to sanctioned positions. You will be aware that previously the competitions were run by the Garda Síochána and appointments were made by Government. Within the framework of the Statutory Instrument, the Authority set about establishing selection processes which would be as transparent as possible, be confidential, meet the highest standards of fair procedures, be mindful of reports of perceived bias in previous selection processes and be in line best practice in modern selection practices. In this context we also had regard to audit recommendations made by the Commission for Public Service Appointments in 2015 on Garda Síochána recruitment and selection procedures.
- The Authority set out the governing principles for appointments and its procedures in Statements of Practice and Candidate Information booklets. These are publicly available. Copies for the most recent competition and the relevant Regulations have also been sent to

the Committee for your information. Since this function was given to the Authority at the beginning of this year, the following appointments have been made:

Assistant Commissioner	Chief Superintendent	Superintendent
3	6	7

- For the other Garda ranks, the Authority has a number of places on the Promotion Advisory Council established by the Garda Commissioner;
- For senior civilian positions at Principal and above, we have a role in approving the numbers of such positions. The recruitment is the responsibility of the Commissioner and the outcome of the recruitment process comes to the Authority for appointment. To date we have made 5 appointments ranging from Principal to Chief Administrative Officer; and
- For civil service grades below Principal, we have a role with others in approving the numbers and grades.

I have been made aware in advance that the Committee may have some questions in relation to the Authority's appointments function. I know Chairperson that you will appreciate that I cannot discuss anything relating to an individual candidate and that I need to be careful not to say anything which might even by inference appear to relate to an individual or to prejudice any future selection processes in which the Authority might be involved

Conclusion

These opening remarks are intended to give you a flavour of three big areas of activity for the Authority. There is quite a lot more and I know you'll have questions. However, it is important that I end by underlining that oversight is not an end in itself and it is not a game of "Gotcha". It is about enhancing policing performance with a view to ensuring that communities are safe, that the country is secure and that the Irish people receive the best possible service from the Garda Síochána. Community confidence and trust in the Garda Síochána remains strong in Ireland and that is a tribute to the work of the women and men in the Garda organisation throughout the country.