

Policing Authority Annual Report 2016

Opening Remarks by Josephine Feehily, Chairperson

***** Check Against Delivery *****

27 April 2017

Welcome and thanks

On 1 January 2016, the Policing Authority came into being. It was a reform that had long been called for by individuals and groups who have a keen interest and a passion for high quality and high performing police service in Ireland.

Since then we have been exceptionally busy establishing an organisation from a blank page and carrying out a growing range of functions. I am very pleased to report to the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality in our first annual report that with the support of an incredible group of colleagues and a dedicated and committed executive team we have put in place many of the key building blocks to be an effective oversight body. We have established structures, processes and procedures to manage our own work and have met our statutory deadlines.

We have also put in place or shaped some key building blocks in our oversight relationship with the Garda Síochána. Symbolism can be very important. In 2016, for the first time in the history of the State, the Policing Plan was approved by a group of civilians. It has performance targets which we are measuring in monthly reports and committee meetings. In 2017, the same group of civilians has appointed Assistant Garda Commissioners and will shortly appoint Chief Superintendents. These are very significant changes with the potential to influence Garda culture in a real way.

We are very proud of our achievement in establishing a Code of Ethics which applies to everybody in the Garda organisation. It is of enormous importance that any group of people with such power and discretion has a strong moral compass to help them. The Garda Commissioner recently quoted an old but true saying that ethics is about what you do when no one is looking. I agree with her and we are convinced that the Code will help inform in a very positive way the choices made in those moments when no-one is looking.

From the outset, we were determined to put in place the public facing parts of our work – public meetings, public consultations, meeting chairs of JPCs. We plan to build further on those initiatives in the period ahead. Our vision is of a society served by a professional, impartial and constantly improving police organisation which deserves and enjoys the support of the people – a vision which we believe can be helped in a real way by the maximum amount of transparency in relation to Garda policies, practices and the way they do their work. Our meetings in public are contributing in a real way to that objective.

Police oversight is not an end in itself, it is about better outcomes for the people of Ireland. Effective policing is enormously important for community safety, for the rule of law and for our democracy

and, that being the case, it is hugely beneficial that the Irish people continue to report respect and trust in the Garda Síochána. In the context, it is important that I recognise notable policing successes and initiatives during 2016 – success against organised crime, the significant impact of Operation Thor on burglaries and related crime and the establishment of Victim Service offices in all Garda Divisions, to mention a few. I would also like to refer to the recent unacceptable spate of assaults on Gardaí. I have asked the Garda Commissioner to convey the Authority's condemnation of such events and our wishes for a speedy recovery to her injured colleagues.

It is impossible to reflect on the Authority's first year without referring to recurring controversies about the Garda Síochána, many of which have been, and still are, the subject of Inquiries. A large part of the Authority's work for the future will be about following up on the implementation of recommendations made by those Inquiries which we see essential for the maintenance of community confidence.

I welcome the Government's announcement of the establishment of a Commission on the Future of Policing. The Authority is due to review its own powers and functions this year and I'm sure we will have considerable insights and experience to offer to the Commission.