



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
POLICING AUTHORITY

17/01/2019

Policing Authority meeting in public with Garda Commissioner Opening Statement by Chairperson Josephine Feehily

This afternoon's meeting is an additional special meeting in public with the Garda Commissioner, outside of our normal schedule. It has a single agenda item, namely Garda performance issues arising in the context of the Garda Juvenile Diversion Scheme.

Programmes which provide a "second chance" to young people who commit an offence are enormously important in the public interest. The impact on the life of a child who is successfully diverted away from a criminal path is immeasurable, not to mention the impact on society in terms of possible future crimes not committed. They contribute to a core policing function of crime prevention and they are very valuable for securing community support for the police.

In that context, I want at the outset to put it beyond doubt that the Garda Youth Diversion Programme is a very good programme which had operated in various forms for over 50 years. The Authority has no doubt that it has benefitted many many thousands of children and has had notable successes.

The performance issue which we are examining today relates to children who were deemed unsuitable for the programme and for whom there was no follow up and no consequences. This issue was identified by the Garda Inspectorate in 2014 and the Garda Professional Standards Unit carried out some work in 2017. The Authority has been monitoring your colleagues' work as you tried to bottom out the extent of the problem and we have had it on our agenda in public meetings in April, June and November last year.

For the benefit of the public, I should explain that children who enter the Youth Diversion Programme must accept responsibility for their actions, accept a caution from the Gardaí, and agree to a certain level of supervision in return for not being prosecuted. A "deal" is made. So when there are no consequences for children who are unsuitable for the programme, it is inherently unfair on those who accepted their responsibilities. More seriously than that, however, is that without follow up, opportunities to help those children are missed. Children are failed and victims of crime are failed. This is a grave set of circumstances.

As always, the Authority will not discuss individual cases in public session; Neither will we discuss the detail of disciplinary action that may be taken in relation to individual members of the Garda Síochána and we recognise that you will be careful in discussing this matter not to say or imply anything which might prejudice any further action. We have had a number of detailed briefings from you, Commissioner, in private session in relation to these matters.

We also received a detailed technical letter from you late yesterday about a new issue in relation to referrals, which has similar outcomes for another large number of children. The Authority members have not had time to analyse it in detail. Nevertheless, we will have some questions today and will examine it further at our next meeting.

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