



Minutes – Policing Strategy and Performance Committee Meeting

Date: 20 April 2020

Venue: Remote Video-Conference

Committee Meeting

Attendance

Authority: Judith Gillespie (Committee Chair), Moling Ryan, Vicky Conway, Deborah Donnelly, Ronan Nolan

Secretary: Fiona Larthwell

Executive: Helen Hall, Margaret Tumelty, Cormac Keating, Aoife Clabby, David Pasley, Mark Nother

Apologies: N/A

1. Closed session – Committee members

Committee members did not exercise the standing option to conduct a closed session.

2. Minutes of previous meetings

All tabled minutes from the previous meetings were approved. It was agreed that the Assaults Strategy would be placed on the agenda for further discussion at the June meeting of the Committee.

There were no matters arising and no conflicts of interest identified.

A brief summary was provided by the Chief Executive on various matters arising since the previous Authority meeting, including interactions with the Garda Síochána on the type of information being recorded and the scope and frequency of its reporting during the course of the COVID-19 Emergency. The importance of recording interactions under the temporary regulations was emphasised, from a human rights monitoring and operational policing perspective.

3. Fieldwork Update

The Committee discussed the approach to fieldwork by the Executive in the context of COVID-19. It was noted that the Authority would need to consider a changed approach in the context of longer term restrictions, not simply for the initial lockdown period. It was agreed that continuing fieldwork was essential, which might include some onsite fieldwork. The Committee stressed the importance of the consideration of the safety of staff and colleagues in undertaking any fieldwork. It was

acknowledged that the Garda Síochána is supportive of maintaining the oversight relationship as normal.

An overview of activity since the March meeting was provided, including remote interactions with the Garda Síochána and with external stakeholders. The Executive outlined plans for the expansion of stakeholder engagement, including the voluntary sector as well as with the Joint Policing Committees. The Committee emphasised the need to contact both rural and urban stakeholders.

4. Policing Performance – Q1

The Committee considered performance through Q1 and acknowledged the sudden change in the operating environment of the Garda Síochána. The Committee identified a number of key areas for discussion with the Garda Síochána in Part B of the meeting. The Executive was asked to explore the reasons for the decrease in number of sexual offences reported.

5. Amendment of Policing Plan 2020

The Committee Chair emphasised the centrality of the Policing Plan to the terms of reference of the Committee and highlighted the Committee's role in advising Authority how the Policing Plan should be amended under the circumstances.

The Committee identified a number of items and key performance indicators that it would expect to see in the amended Policing Plan. It was agreed that it would be important to establish timelines for the production of the amended Policing Plan.

6. Emerging Issues – Policing of COVID-19

Emerging issues were discussed under this and preceding agenda items. The Committee agreed a number of areas for discussion with the Garda Síochána in Part B of the meeting.

The Chief Executive outlined that the Authority would be providing the Minister for Justice and Equality with a report every fortnight on key oversight issues for the duration of COVID-19.

Part B – Meeting with Garda Síochána representatives

Attendance

Authority: As previous

Executive: As previous, with the exception of Liam Hallihan and the inclusion of Karen Shelly

Garda Síochána: Deputy Commissioner John Twomey (Policing and Security), Acting Deputy Commissioner Ann-Marie McMahon (Strategy, Governance and Performance), David Gilbride (Strategic Transformation Office), Gráinne Shortall (Policing Authority Liaison Office), Audrey Gilmartin (Policing Authority Liaison Office)

7. Closed session

The standing option to conduct a closed session was not exercised.

The Committee Chair opened this section of the meeting by commending the ongoing operations of the Garda Síochána in respect of COVID-19.

8. Amendment of Policing Plan 2020

The Committee sought clarity on the availability of a draft amended Policing Plan 2020. Garda Síochána representatives expressed the intention to supply this to the 29 April meeting of the Authority if possible. However, a number of challenges for amending the Plan were outlined, such as: variable internal stakeholder engagement; the rapidly changing working environment; the COVID-19 focus of resources and planning; and, the high number of unknown factors relating to the availability of enabling functions and emerging changes in crime trends.

The Committee sought and received assurances that certain crimes that appear to be increasingly prevalent – including domestic violence, and certain types of cyber-crime and fraud – would receive a greater focus in the amended Plan.

The Garda Síochána outlined the implications of reduced training capacity in the organisation, including the challenge faced in introducing new online training and in adapting existing classroom based training to be available online. The Committee expressed the view that training remains a priority. Garda Síochána representatives acknowledged that the current situation would require new approaches. However, it was also noted that there would ultimately be a training shortfall.

The Committee Chair stated that while it was important to ensure that oversight continues during this period, especially with regard to the new powers, there was a recognition of the demands on the Garda Síochána.

It was requested that the Garda Síochána and the Authority's staff continue to work towards the deadline of the April meeting for the draft amended Plan.

9. Policing Performance – Q1

Garda Síochána representatives informed the Committee that it was difficult to provide a detailed organisational stance on Q1 performance, as the circumstances meant that there had been little time for reflection. Work with stakeholders to reform the roster was provided as a particularly noteworthy success with all of the organisation moving to the new arrangements with a small number of exceptions based on operational considerations.

It was noted that there were changing patterns in crime, from the end of March into April in respect of: roads policing; the night-time economy; domestic abuse and online fraud.

A number of specific areas were discussed under this agenda item:

- Victims: The launch of Operation Faoiseamh was highlighted and the Committee placed on the record its thanks in relation to this operation, commenting that it was a very visible campaign. Staffing of DPSUs was discussed, as was contingency planning to ensure continued provision of service.
- Public Attitudes Survey: this discussion focussed on the statistical significance of movements and the extent to which it informs policing. The Garda Síochána acknowledged that more could be done with the data, referenced the intent to increase sampling in 2020, and noted

the Survey's importance as an important way of gauging public opinion. The Committee was informed that the Garda Síochána intended to continue with the survey by phone. The Committee requested that consideration be given to the inclusion of questions pertaining to the policing of COVID-19.

- Human rights reviews and statistics on use of force: Garda Síochána representatives committed to providing comprehensive answers to questions posed by the Committee. A discussion on the recording and reporting of the use of spit hoods followed. The Committee was informed that there were strict governance arrangements in place and that a report was being prepared for the Authority and the Department.
- Roads Policing: it was noted that, although road use had reduced substantially, resource levels had been maintained due to the need to provide checkpoints and maintain an overt policing presence. Increases in speeding offences and the numbers of road deaths were also discussed.
- Detections: The Committee informed the Garda Síochána that this would form a standalone agenda item in subsequent meetings, including a focus on sexual offence detections.
- Drugs: Garda Síochána representatives outlined successes in respect of Operation Tara (the introduction of drugs units across all Divisions), which had resulted in increases in searches and seizures.

The Committee returned to the subject of members driving on Chief's Authorisation's and received the following assurances:

- that the return to use of such permissions was expressly limited to the duration of the COVID-19 Emergency;
- that newly attested members were not eligible to drive under Chief's Authorisation;
- that these only applied to operation of the 210 additional cars acquired for community engagement; and,
- that these vehicles are not response vehicles and are solely used in local communities to facilitate support to the vulnerable and the elderly.

10. Emerging Issues – Policing of COVID-19

Garda Síochána representatives outlined that they are operating with a COVID-19 focus and undertaking operations in 5 key areas:

- Checkpoints;
- Community engagement;
- Crime prevention & detection;
- Command & Control; and
- Daily management conference calls.

It was noted that to support this the Templemore training college had ceased training operations and redeployment had taken place where possible. It was reiterated that emerging areas of challenge included fraud, cybercrime and domestic abuse.

The Committees asked if there were positive changes that had been made in response to the COVID-19 Emergency that might be maintained. Garda Síochána representative stated that:

- the mobility project was having positive impacts and had been expedited;
- the roster had increased visibility and availability but was subject to ongoing negotiations with stakeholders;
- positives had been seen in a reduced workload in respect of prisoner escort activities and video-conferencing being utilised by the Courts Service;
- and, that there had been an increase in cyber and economic crime capacity due to redeployments and increased stakeholder engagement.

The Committee sought assurances that translation services, legal representations and medical consultations were still being made available to those in custody. It was informed that the organisation was in contact with the law society regarding legal representation access, and a number of responses had been rolled out to adhere to social distancing including tele-conference facilities, screens, and others on a case-by-case basis.

The Committee voiced concerns regarding the potential use of spit hoods and received assurances on training and governance, including the inclusion of a warning as part of a strict, phased approach that may result in the use of such equipment. In addition, the Committee was informed that visors were being provided as an alternative for use in applicable situations.

A discussion took place regarding collection of data on the use of new powers granted to the Garda Síochána and how reporting might take place. It was agreed that this topic would be returned to in the Authority meeting and that Garda Síochána and Authority staff would liaise in advance of the meeting.

Measures taken to monitor and ensure that welfare of members and staff were discussed, including the need to secure priority COVID-19 testing.

11. AOB

The Committee Chair reiterated the Committee's earlier remarks, taking the opportunity to acknowledge and thank the Garda Síochána for their ongoing efforts.
