

Minutes – Policing Strategy and Performance Committee Meeting

Date: 20 July 2020

Venue: Remote Video-Conference

Committee Meeting

Attendance

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

Secretary: Karen Shelly

Executive: Helen Hall, Margaret Tumelty, Cormac Keating, Aoife Clabby, Mark Nother, Gráinne Curtin (Part A only), Michal Alfasi-Hanley (Part A only)

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

The minutes of the previous meetings were approved, subject to minor amendments. Feedback from the Garda Síochána on the previous minutes was provided by the Secretary and it was agreed to discuss same with the Garda Síochána representatives in Part B of the meeting.

The Executive were requested by the Committee to follow-up on a number of documents outstanding from the Garda Síochána.

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

3. Mid-year 2020 Policing Performance Assessment

A verbal update was provided on the draft report as provided to the Committee. Feedback was provided to the Executive to be incorporated in the submission of a draft to the July Authority meeting.

An overview of Executive fieldwork activity since the June meeting was provided by the Executive, including remote interactions with the Garda Síochána and with external stakeholders.

Arising from these updates the Committee discussed the quality and depth of the Garda Síochána's written reports on its performance against the Policing Plan as compared to the detail and sense of progress garnered through engagements. It was noted that the standards of reporting – as discussed previously by the Committee – were not of a sufficient level for the Committee to take a clear view of the progress being made and understand what risks or barriers to performance existed. It was agreed that this would be discussed with the Garda Síochána representatives in Part B as a matter of priority. Relatedly, the Committee discussed the centrality of the Policing Plan to the work of the Garda Síochána and the potential need for a change in approach to the Plan and the reporting. It was agreed that this issue and any potential changes in approach could occur in tandem with the intended work on performance measures, as discussed in the June meeting.

Following a discussion on performance against the Policing Plan and COVID-19 policing the Committee identified a number of key areas for discussion with the Garda Síochána in Part B of the meeting.

4. Preparation for the Garda Síochána updates

The Committee discussed materials received and issues pertaining to the agenda items of the Homicide Review and DNA. Concerns were raised as to the absence of detail in the reporting on the former, and the intention to only provide a verbal update for the latter. It was agreed that the Committee Chair would advise the Garda Síochána representatives that the Homicide Review agenda item would be deferred to a later meeting as a more detailed report was required to sufficiently engage on the matter.

Part B – Meeting with Garda Síochána representatives

Attendance

Authority: As previous

Executive: As previous

Garda Síochána: Deputy Commissioner John Twomey (Policing and Security), Assistant Commissioner John O'Driscoll (Special Crime Operations), Sara Parsons (Deputy Head of the Garda Síochána Analysis Service), Emer Doyle (Strategy and Transformation Office), Gráinne Shortall (Policing Authority Liaison Office), Audrey Guilmartin (Policing Authority Liaison Office).

5. Closed session

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

Returning to the matter regarding the use of the term 'anti-spit hoods' from the minutes, the Garda Síochána representatives noted their preference for consistency with the internal Garda use of the term 'anti-spit guard'. The Committee Chair outlined that the matter had been discussed by the

Authority and it had been agreed at the Authority meeting that the device had the characteristics of a hood and that 'anti-spit hoods' would continue to be the terminology used by the Authority.

6. Mid-year 2020 Policing Performance Assessment

COVID-19 Policing

The Deputy Commissioner Policing and Security provided a verbal update on the Garda Síochána response to COVID-19 with regard to both the external policing and the internal organisational responses. It was outlined that in addition to the successes to date the organisation was also mindful of the uncertainty of the operating environment as the regulations are adapted and the associated evolving demands on the Garda Síochána. The principle of the 4 E's (engage, education, encourage, enforce) remain the cornerstone of the policing response, including viewing enforcement as the last resort in the limited cases where the graduation of the response through the first 3 E's does not suffice. The Committee heard that the organisation's response is affected by the nature of the regulations which require a certain level of public health expertise – which is not in the traditional remit of Garda members – and that ultimately this is of paramount concern to ongoing matters of import, such as the wearing of face masks and the hosting of house parties which are not in breach of any public order legislation. On reported concerns of poor use of PPE by members raised by the Committee the Garda Síochána representatives outlined the instructions provided from management and the increased availability of such within the organisation.

The Committee enquired as to the demands and/or expectations now placed on the Garda Síochána arising from the increased community response during COVID-19, particularly in relation to the undertaking of additional, non-traditional policing activities such as supporting the delivery of goods and services to elderly and vulnerable communities. In response the Committee heard that rather than categorising community policing tasks or functions in this regard as in or out of scope the organisation would progress with the key function of community policing as being there for people when they need it, and the fundamental ideal that they support communities in times of stress and uncertainty. It was noted that a challenge to this level of service provided over recent months was the return to 'normal policing', in particular the large demand placed on the organisation by certain non-core duties such as the provision of policing services at private, major events and the services provided to courts. The Committee heard that these duties would be reviewed and that where possible a careful extraction would take place in partnership with stakeholders. The intention to retain a high level of community policing service was described based on 4 pillars: ring-fencing resources, minimising extraction from community services, working through a roster enabling high service levels, and maintaining high levels of communication with communities. A system of consistent and proportionate service could be found, it was stated, through the development of trust and strong relationships at the local level and the building of services based on community needs.

It was outlined that a strategic review of the COVID-19 response by Justice sector agencies was underway and that this would aid the development of the above. Wider consultation with stakeholders from other sectors has yet to take place. The proposed introduction of a Community

Safety Bill was cited as a notable influencing factor in the provision of community policing and the roles undertaken by the Garda Síochána and other stakeholders.

Policing Performance

The Committee Chair requested that the Reserve Strategy and the update on the Crowe Horwath recommendations implementation be provided to the Committee in line with prior commitments on same.

The Garda Síochána representatives were also asked about a lack of consistency in their communications with JPCs, as reported through Executive engagements, and the organisational approach to ensuring consistency of such. It was provided that the Garda Síochána places an importance on the partnership working facilitated through JPCs and that although consistency couldn't be guaranteed through the COVID-19 period this would be followed up on by management.

Reporting

The Committee raised concerns with the Garda Síochána representatives regarding the organisations reporting against policing performance. In particular it was noted that an absence of detail, inconsistencies in reporting, and the underreporting of risks and issues that act as barriers to performance in some areas result in a narrative that undersells areas of good practice and frustrates the ability of the Authority to fully assess performance. It was outlined that the positive experience of reporting through engagements was not reflected in the written reporting which lacked the same coherency and detail. It was reiterated that the Authority and the Committee did not seek to receive a reporting that was additional or more burdensome than the copying of the Authority on the reporting provided to management in their internal assessment of performance. It was suggested that it might be necessary at this juncture, in light of upcoming work on the 2021 Policing Plan, to radically take stock of the Plan and the associated reporting to reimagine a framework that best served both the Garda Síochána and the Authority.

The Garda Síochána representatives welcomed an open conversation on these matters and spoke to the organisations frustrations in terms of the demand placed by the reporting, in particular on certain key office holders who may hold the portfolios of a number of areas that require frequent or detailed reporting. It was also noted that, in terms of reporting and areas for inclusion in the Plan, the demands placed on the organisation by the Authority and other stakeholders were high. The size of the Policing Plan and the number of initiatives to be reported on was referenced as contributing to this issue. The Committee Chair noted on this point that the Authority had, on numerous occasions, encouraged and supported a reduction in the number of initiatives, most recently when that Garda Síochána was drafting the 2020 Plan and again when it was under revision following the onset of COVID-19.

The Committee emphasised the fact that from a statutory position and from the point of view of good, effective governance, a Policing Plan is required that is central to the organisation's operations. The performance of oversight by the Authority requires monthly reporting against this Plan. However, outside of these parameters the Committee spoke to the opportunity and scope to design a Plan that worked for the Garda Síochána and noted that wider discussions were needed on

these topics to design a framework that served both the Authority and the Garda Síochána, but also the public and other stakeholders.

Homicide Review

The Committee Chair outlined that the Committee felt the lack of detail in the report provided meant that the discussion would be best deferred to a later date once the Garda Síochána had reverted with a comprehensive report that gave a sense of the actions taken, progress made and how these had mitigated the risks which presented in the review. In particular the Committee sought the inclusion of detail on the assurance process for recommendations marked as 'complete' and increase narrative on those marked as 'ongoing'. The Garda Síochána representatives accepted that the reporting would need to be revised and provided a brief verbal update on the working group responsible for the implementation and their processes regarding marking recommendations complete.

It was also provided that an IT fix was scheduled as part of a wider Pulse upgrade in October and that the peer-review processes is in place and would be further enhanced with the roll-out of IMS as the system features a review notification tool. The Homicide Review will be discussed at the September meeting of the Authority with the Garda Commissioner, to be held in public.

7. DNA

The Committee received a verbal update on the progress concerning work relating to DNA samples and the ongoing liaison with the DNA Database Committee chaired by Ms Justice Murphy, pending the provision of a written update. The Chief Executive outlined to the Garda Síochána representatives that this was an agenda item on upcoming Authority meetings.

8. AOB

No issues were raised under this agenda item.
