

Minutes – Policing Strategy and Performance Committee Meeting

Date: 16 March 2021

Venue: Remote Video-Conference

Committee Meeting

Attendance

Authority: Deborah Donnelly (Committee Chair), Moling Ryan, Shalom Binchy, Stephen Martin, Ronan Nolan

Apologies: N/A

Secretary: Karen Shelly

Executive: Helen Hall, Margaret Tumelty, Cormac Keating, Aoife Clabby, Michal Alfasi-Hanley, Mark Nother, David Pasley, Grainne Curtain.

1. Closed session – Committee members

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

2. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the previous meetings were approved. There were no matters arising and no conflicts of interest identified.

The Committee Chair welcomed the new members to the Committee and provided an overview of the intended approach to Committee business for the year. The Committee discussed the proposed work-plan and meetings dates for the remainder of the year. It was agreed that the Committee, in all areas of policing, would retain a centrality of focus on the Policing Plan and that all operational areas would be considered with particular focus through the lens' of detection rates, human rights, strategic resource management and diversity – both internal and external. A number of areas of focus were identified for inclusion in the agendas of future meetings.

Members were also provided with an overview of communication between the Committee Chair and Deputy Commissioner Policing and Security concerning the agenda for the meeting.

Members of the Executive provided an update on issues relating to the work of the Authority arising since the last meeting, including: business planning; the processing of information requests by the Garda Síochána; and, the publication of both the Authority's twelfth report on the policing of COVID-19 and the Authority Assessment of Policing Performance 2020.

It was agreed to amend the agenda to take item three, specifically the policing of COVID-19, and item six – public order policing – together given the overlapping subject matter.

3. Policing Performance Assessment

An overview of fieldwork activity since the February meeting was provided by the Executive, including remote interactions with the Garda Síochána and with external stakeholders. A number of emerging issues were identified for follow-up with the Garda Síochána under various agenda items.

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

4. Organised and Serious Crime

The Committee considered materials provided by the Executive pertaining to this agenda item and agreed a number of areas to follow-up on for comment and clarification in Part B of the meeting.

5. Approach to Policing Priorities 2022

The Committee were provided with an overview of the proposed approach to the development of the Policing Priorities 2022, including the utilisation of a broad public consultation. Following a discussion on methodology and the benefits and risks of the proposed approach, the Committee agreed to propose same to the Authority for approval.

6. Public Order Policing

Discussed under item three.

Part B – Meeting with Garda Síochána representatives

Attendance

Authority: As previous

Executive: As previous

Garda Síochána: Deputy Commissioner Anne Marie McMahon (Policing and Security), Assistant Commissioner John O’Driscoll (Organised and Serious Crime), Assistant Commissioner Paula Hilman (Community Engagement and Roads Policing), Andrew O’Sullivan (Chief Information Officer), David Gilbride (Executive Director Strategy and Transformation), Gráinne Shortall (Policing Authority Liaison Office).

7. Closed session

The standing option to conduct a closed session was not exercised. The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

8. Policing Performance

The Deputy Commissioner Policing and Strategy acknowledged the publication of the Authority’s Assessment of Policing Performance 2020, noting the positive assessment provided on the response to COVID-19 and the ongoing response to drugs and organised crime. These positives notwithstanding, the ongoing challenges highlighted by the Authority were also noted and high-level updates provided in respect of the ongoing work against the areas of workforce planning, training, ICT and estate management.

The Garda Síochána representatives provided the Committee with a short presentation and update on the rollout of the Schengen Information System following go-live on 15 March 2021. An overview of the policing benefits and future progression of the system was included. It was reported that 80% of members had completed or were in the process of competing training – the threshold required for go-live – and that following rollout there would be a need for ongoing resource allocation. The Committee received assurances that all relevant GDPR and human rights considerations were covered by the relevant European legislation.

The Committee also sought assurances on the ongoing cooperation and processes in place to facilitate information sharing in similar cases with the PSNI and mainland UK police services. The Garda Síochána representatives outlined that despite the withdrawal of such in Schengen the prior arrangements for information sharing and cooperation (preceding Irish involvement in Schengen) were still in place and adequately met the needs to ensure effective joint policing. It was agreed that the Garda Síochána representatives would revert to the Committee in Q2/Q3 to update on Schengen and associated matters.

The Committee Chair outlined to the Garda Síochána representatives that the Committee would be placing the Policing Plan at the centre of its oversight work and engagement throughout the year with particular focus on analysing performance through the lens’ of human rights, ethics, diversity and strategic resource management.

Regarding performance against the Policing Plan the Committee heard that, at a high level, the demands of responding to COVID-19 continued to significantly impact on the Garda Síochána. As such, certain targets had not been commenced to date but that these would be reviewed at the end of the month. Similarly it was outlined that temporary reassignments of members to COVID-19 related operational duties from specialist units, and the ongoing cessation of training in the Garda Síochána were both being reviewed with the aim of beginning to reverse these measures in the coming weeks.

In response to queries from the Committee the Garda Síochána representatives outlined that:

- Despite COVID-19 related temporary reassignments across specialist units and bureaus the resourcing allocated to drugs units had been maintained, allowing the organisation to continue to achieve significant results thus far in 2021. A review of the approach and operations to date was reported as underway to further identify how to build on this success.
- Internal analysis would be undertaken on the increase in searches of the person to provide the Committee with greater insight into this activity.
- Health and safety measures, such as the installation of screens and utilisation of airflow where possible, had been considered and actioned where possible to ensure the wellbeing of those engaged in interviews while in Garda custody or providing statements. It was provided that the estate, namely the age profile of some of the building, had led to difficulties in this regard. It was agreed that the Garda Síochána representatives would revert to the Committee with more detailed reporting on this issue.

On detection rates the Committee expressed some concern as to the falling rates reported. The Garda Síochána representatives provided a brief explanation of the reporting and relevant contributory factors including ongoing data improvement processes in conjunction with the CSO, the changed operating environment and current crime counting rules. It was outlined that: although total number of detections were falling this was at a lesser pace than the fall of incidents of crime; longer term rates provided a more positive overview of rates; and, the ongoing pilot and movement towards outcome based reporting would provide greater clarity as to the barriers and challenges faced in improving detections rates – specifically in relation to sexual offences. The Committee also heard that the Garda Síochána’s strategic approach placed resource and operational priority on crime prevention as a proactive approach to reducing crime was a more effective and efficient use of resources and yielded improved long term outcomes.

The Garda Síochána outlined the fact the reporting on the Plan continued to evolve. The Committee welcomed the changes made to date, noting the higher quality reporting that provided a wider, more reflective overview of performance against the Plan – including ongoing challenges.

9. Drugs and Organised Crime

The Committee engaged with the Garda Síochána on the governance, strategy and ongoing performance of the bureaus within the portfolio of Organised and Serious Crime (OSC), with particular reference to the response of same to drugs and organised crime. The successes in relation to recent drug and asset seizures were noted by the Committee.

The role of the eight bureaux within OSC in leading national response and supporting Divisional activity was outlined. In respect of the Garda National Cyber-Crime Bureau (GNCCB), the Garda Síochána representatives spoke to the unique governance structure established with the new GNCCB satellite hubs within the Regions. The Committee heard that in the context of increased demand for device investigation and the devolution, in part, of these activities to the new hubs, that the direct management of the hubs by the GNCCB would ensure the best approach to maintaining examination and governance standards. Challenges were highlighted in respect of specialist staffing, increases in demand, and the need to decrease the backlog of devices awaiting examination in line with the Policing Plan target. Success – including arrests and prosecutions – in relation to online crime, specifically relating to child abuse, was reported as resulting from cooperation with international partners. Connected to this the Committee heard that there was ongoing actions being taken in relation to wellbeing where members and staff were working on such cases and crime types.

The Committee heard that the interconnected nature of crimes within the broad area of drugs and organised crime often resulted in the need for cooperation between bureaux and that in recognition of this there was a focus on the coherence and linkage of policing activities within OSC. Specifically, it was reported that a dedicated function for tactical assessment had been established to ensure optimum cooperation and cohesion between bureaux. The Committee also heard that strategies were being prepared by each bureau in respect of their specific area of responsibility.

Speaking to recent increases in certain crime incidents (blackmail, extortion, money mule, etc.), the Garda Síochána spoke to the ongoing activities of GNCCB, the Garda Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB), the Garda Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau (GNDOCB) and the Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB). This trend was attributed to a mix of increased criminality and also increases in reporting as a result of proactive policing activities to encourage same – including use of crime prevention officers, media, and other stakeholders to drive awareness and reporting.

10. Public Order

The Garda Síochána representatives reported that of the 19 recommendations arising from the Garda Inspectorate report *Public Order Policing: A Review of Practices in the Garda Síochána* (April 2019), 11 have been implemented with the remaining 8 ongoing. Concerning the latter, it was provided that training dependencies in respect of these recommendations had resulted in delays due to the cessation of training during COVID-19 restrictions. The Committee heard that responsibility for the implementation lay with a dedicated steering group on public order, chaired by the AC Roads Policing and Community Engagement.

Also on training, it was reported that senior public order management capacity was being significantly increased through the undertaking of Public Order Gold Commander Training through the College of Policing by senior members.

A new public order policy was described by the Garda Síochána representatives as being close to finalisation and imminently due to go before the Garda Executive for sign-off. As well as incorporating changes prompted by the aforementioned recommendations the new policy aligns with the decision making model, the Code of Ethics and human rights obligations. Also taken into account is alignment with the tiered management training mentioned above.

Operationally, it was outlined that the public order units remain part-time within Divisions but that the needs of the organisation were currently being analysed to ascertain the need for changes to this structure/approach.

With regard to recent public order events the Committee heard that a review and debrief of such was underway and that it was too early to be clear on the difference that the implementation of the recommendations had made on operational planning and performance. In addition to this review, short term activities in this policing area include planning for the European Football Championship matches due to be hosted in Dublin in June and the communicating and embedding of new policy and practice.

11. AOB

The Garda Síochána representatives gave the Committee a brief overview of the policing measures planned for St Patrick's Day.
