



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
POLICING AUTHORITY

Minutes – Policing Strategy and Performance Committee Meeting

Date: 19 April 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: Mark Nother

Executive: Helen Hall, Margaret Tumelty, Cormac Keating, Aoife Clabby, Karen Shelly, Michal Alfasi-Hanley

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.

Regarding the business of the Committee, meeting dates of the Committee for the remainder of the year were finalised and a consideration of the standing Terms of Reference of the Committee took place. It was agreed that a number of suggested amendments to the Terms of Reference – reflecting the progression of Authority and Garda Síochána ways of working – would be brought to the Authority's May meeting for wider discussion and Authority consideration.

The Committee Chair provided members 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: performance against the 2021 Business Plan as of end Q1; ongoing engagement with the Garda Síochána in respect of emergency calls; the production the Authority's thirtieth report on the policing of COVID-19; and, ongoing preparations in respect of the Authority meeting in public with the Commissioner at the end of April.

3. Policing Performance Assessment

An overview of fieldwork activity that occurred since the March 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 in the previous month and throughout Q1; COVID-19 policing; detection rates; use of Garda search powers; and, the policing of drug driving, the Committee identified a number of key areas for discussion with the Garda Síochána in Part B of the meeting.

4. Homicide Review

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.

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).

5. Closed session

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

6. Policing Performance

The Deputy Commissioner Policing and Strategy provided the Committee with a high-level overview of performance since the last meeting. It was outlined that COVID-19 continued to affect the wider crime environment and to represent a significant organisational challenge in terms of its draw on resources and the scale of the operational response required. The Committee heard that the dedicated policing operations of Faoiseamh, Fanacht, Navigation and Treoraím represented the mainstay of policing activity to ensure the protection of people and adherence to the public health restrictions. In respect of Faoiseamh it was outlined that approximately 30,000 contacts with victims of Domestic Abuse and 4,000 charges relating to breaches of court orders had taken place since the beginning of the operation in early 2020.

Beyond COVID-19, it was also reported that the commencement of the Schengen Information System was providing early successes for operational activities and that a significant milestone for the Operational Model had been achieved with the publication of a General Scheme of the bill which will allow for the legislative replacement of the old District model with the new Divisional structures.

At a governance level the Committee was informed of ongoing work in respect of commencing a further six Policing Plan target – delayed due to the COVID-19 response – and the Garda Síochána Strategy Statement 2022-2024.

Further to the engaging on the topic in the March Committee meeting, the Garda Síochána also offered an update in respect of the work being undertaken to ensure the adequacy of health and safety arrangements in interview suites in Garda stations. It was provided that although arrangements, as far as practicable, had taken place to-date, in the Dublin Metropolitan Region a number of Divisions housed stations that were in need of remedial work to ensure they met current standards. This work was reported as having been identified as essential. It was also outlined to the

Committee that despite work undertaken to-date and ongoing or planned developments the ability to comprehensively address all the issues caused by COVID-19 was restricted by the physical infrastructure and the feasibility of altering such. Relatedly, it was provided that the Garda Síochána is working with stakeholders where issues are identified to mitigate and risks or issues and that work was underway to ensure remote access is provided where possible.

Drug Policing in the Community

The Committee Chair outlined to the Garda Síochána representatives that the Committee would, when considering performance, retain a focus on the community impact of policing activity and wider issues of community safety – including quality of life considerations and feelings of safety – throughout the year and that this would also be an agenda item for the upcoming Authority meeting.

In this context, the Committee sought from the Garda Síochána representatives an overview of how, in practice, the operational activity of drugs policing units intersected with that of community policing members and how the recent increase in drug policing activity was perceived by the Garda Síochána to have had an impact on communities. The Garda Síochána representatives spoke to the fact the organisation is one with a strong community policing ethos at its core and that the day-to-day activity of its members saw them established within the communities they work and live in. It was outlined that the Community Policing Framework, the rollout of which was delayed by COVID-19, had been reviewed and that the finalisation of it and the related strategy rollout would build on this ethos and establish a dedicated resource for community policing in every Division through small areas of policing and dedicated community policing teams.

It was also provided that each Division has seen an increase in 2020 of resources allocated to Divisional Drug Units throughout the country and that the recent increases in drug related policing activity, had yielded results through increases in detections and seizures of drugs, cash and other assets. This, the Committee heard, is supported on an ongoing basis by the liaison between Divisional Drugs Units and Community Policing Units who provide local intelligence, pass on reports and information and support the policing activities of the former, as necessary.

Searches

In response to Committee queries during, and following, the March Committee meeting, the Garda Síochána representatives provided the Committee with a short, verbal update on the recent increases in search activity and committed to providing further information in writing. It was outlined to the Committee that while the legislative basis relied upon – in respect of individual instances where persons are searched – are recorded on PULSE, the organisation cannot currently readily interrogate the frequency under which powers are used under individual Acts. Rather, this requires a manual review of PULSE incidents. However, it was reported that increases in searches are considered by Garda management and analysts to mainly correspond with increases in operational activity concerning COVID-19 and drugs policing.

The Committee heard that the Garda Síochána representatives are content that the use of search powers – exercised at the discretion of members in instances where there is reasonable suspicion

that an offence has has/is/will take place – is proportionately applied by members across Divisions and that current training sufficiently equips them in respect of use of these powers.

Detections

On detection rates, the Garda Síochána representatives agreed with the Committee's view that current reporting in respect of detection rates has certain shortcomings in terms of being based on shortened timeframes and lacks a contextual detail. In respect of this it was outlined that 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 – and that learnings from this would provide a sense of value of the approach's potential wider application.

Drug Driving

Speaking to increases in drug driving detections reported in recent years, the Garda Síochána representatives attributed such to both an increase in those engaging in such activity – in line with rising levels of drug use in society generally – and in Garda Síochána capacity to detect offenders through additional testing capacity, including at the roadside. The Committee heard that in 2020, in response to current trends, the Garda Síochána allocated an additional 41 drug testing machines, increasing roadside testing, and bringing capacity in line with desired levels. While the increased detections rates are envisaged to lead to a related increase in convictions there may be a lag in figures due to delays in the wider criminal justice process being experienced due to COVID-19.

The Garda Síochána representatives outlined that: these increases in people drug driving but also using drugs generally required a multi-agency response as exhibited in the range of actors involved in the implementation of the National Drug Strategy; there is need in wider society to understand the linkages between organised crime activity and casual or social drug use; and that behavioural change was one aspect that the Garda Síochána engages with through its campaigns with the Road Safety Authority.

COVID-19 Policing

The Committee outlined to the Garda Síochána a number of concerns relating to the consistency of approach with regard to COVID-19 policing, in particular the reported sense of some tensions that may be arising in respect of student populations. The Garda Síochána representatives outlined that from the onset of public health regulations the policing of certain students had presented a challenge for the organisation due to breaches such as house parties. It was reported that the approach in the early months of the health restrictions focused, as per the 4 Es, on engagement and education but that since the reintroduction of level 5 restrictions in January 2021 that there had been an increasing move to enforcement through the application of fines. It was stated to the Committee the Garda Síochána and its members are aware of the challenging situation for students and that extensive engagement has occurred through community policing teams with individuals and through the Students Unions. However, this needed to be balanced with the issues being experienced and reported by wider groups in the community and the need to police based on the public health restrictions. Assurances were provided to the Committee that the Garda Síochána is happy with the current approach and the fair and consistent manner in which policing is occurring.

The Committee heard that the change in regulations would necessitate a review of and adaption to the policing approach to COVID-19 regulations and that this would occur and be subject to further discussion with the Authority.

7. Homicide Review

The Committee engaged with the Garda Síochána on the continued implementation of the recommendations arising from the work of the Homicide Incident Review Team (HIRT). It was outlined that since the last update in Q4 2020, two further recommendations were closed and a number of others were nearing completion, however the implementation process continued to be impacted by COVID-19; it was reported that certain policy and procedure related work, while delayed, was envisaged to be completed in the coming weeks.

It was also reported that the establishment of peer-to-peer reviews – due to be commenced in 2020 – had been delayed due to level 5 restrictions but were due to recommence on 1 June 2021. It was outlined that these reviews would replace the current ad-hoc review process with a standardised peer review structure led from a governance and policy perspective by the Serious Crime Review Team within the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation (NBCI). In practice the reviews are to be carried out by experienced members from the same or a neighbouring Division – based on capacity considerations – who will undertake reviews after 60 days and report their findings to the NBCI and the relevant Divisional Officer.

Relatedly, the Committee heard that training in the Investigation Management System has been identified for priority restart.

8. AOB

There were no items raised under AOB.
