



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
POLICING AUTHORITY

Minutes – Policing Strategy and Performance Committee Meeting

Date: 20 July 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, Aoife Clabby, Michal Alfasi-Hanley, Karen Shelly

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 subject to minor amendments following comments received from the Garda Síochána. There were no matters arising and no conflicts of interest identified.

The Committee Chair provided an overview of recent developments on matters discussed at the previous Authority meeting, and an overview of communication between the Committee Chair and Deputy Commissioner Policing and Security, concerning the agenda for this meeting. An update was also provided to members on the late receipt of papers concerning the agenda. It was agreed that these would be noted but due to the late stage at which they were received they would not form part of the engagement with the Garda Síochána.

3. Policing Performance Assessment

An overview of fieldwork activity since the June 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, a number of matters were identified for follow-up with the Garda Síochána representatives in Part B of the meeting.

4. Schengen Information System

The Committee considered materials provided by the Executive pertaining to this agenda item and identified key considerations to be engaged upon with the Garda Síochána in Part B of the meeting.

5. Public Order and Eviction Events

The Committee discussed matters pertaining to public order and eviction events and considered material provided by the Garda Síochána. A number of areas were agreed for follow-up with the Garda Síochána in Part B of the meeting.

The Committee also discussed and agreed an approach regarding planned further engagement with the Garda Síochána on such matters, to be undertaken by the Executive.

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 Anne Marie Cagney (Dublin Metropolitan Region), Assistant Commissioner Paula Hilman (Roads Policing and Community Engagement), Assistant Commissioner Michael Finn (Southern Region), Andrew O’Sullivan (Chief Information Officer), Detective Chief Superintendent Declan Daly (Garda National Protective Services Bureau), Gráinne Shortall (Policing Authority Liaison Office).

6. Closed session

The standing option to conduct a closed session was not exercised. Comments on the minutes of the previous meeting were acknowledged by the Committee Chair and it was noted that revised minutes would be made available in advance of the next meeting.

7. Policing Performance

A high-level summary of crime trends and performance to-date in 2021, focussed on the Policing Plan, was provided by the Deputy Commissioner Policing and Strategy, including:

- there is a observed decrease in incidents and detections of property crime and crimes against the person with detection rates falling at a slightly higher rate than incidents – which indicates a falling detection rate – and that this arises from the drop in sub-categories of these offences that typically record higher detection rates;
- there continues to be an increase in the number of reported sexual assault and rape cases;
- it was hoped the recent increase in resources to the Garda National Cyber Crime Bureau, namely the commencement of operations of regional cyber-crime hubs, would see an impact made on reducing the backlog of devices awaiting examination – the one target in the Plan marked red/off-target as of 30 June – and that this was being monitored;
- the amber/at-risk targets in the Plan predominantly related to ongoing, previously discussed issues with the HR, IT and training functions and that these continued to be heavily impacted by COVID-19 related disruptions;
- approximately 80% of call backs to victims of domestic abuse continued to be undertaken within 7 days and that 85% of victim assessments were completed within 3 days;
- feedback from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) ahead of an upcoming crime statistics release indicated a continued improvement of data quality; and,
- the Garda Síochána was awarded three awards for their communications at an industry event hosted by the Public Relations Institute of Ireland.

The Garda Síochána representatives committed to reverting to the Committee in respect of two targets within the Plan that featured no written update.

Arising from queries put forward by the Committee it was outlined that community policing activities, with particular reference to those concerning engagement with minority communities, were considered

to be having a positive and significant impact. It was cited that the increased grassroots engagement activities and increased visibility through the increased provision of vehicles and bikes had been well received. On a more formal level, the Garda Diversity Forum had enjoyed and continued to enjoy success since its establishment in 2020 and provided an important guidance and feedback mechanism. This was hoped to be mirrored at the sub-national level with the establishment of a Divisional Diversity Forum in Blanchardstown which would serve as the first of a kind that would be replicated in other Divisions. Supports to these activities and further opportunities were being considered with outreach through sport being cited as an area being currently explored in conjunction with stakeholders.

The Committee heard that the review of Divisional Protective Service Units rollout and activity was underway and that due to COVID-19 restrictions was being undertaken in a slightly altered format; the review was described as being undertaken in a modular format with modules on transport, training and resourcing having commenced. In addition the planned external element on the review was forced to be removed from the methodology due to public health restrictions. However, an internal element was retained through interaction with external stakeholders regarding training. It was reported that rather than delay or defer the review the decision was taken to commence with this altered approach to ensure it was completed as planned.

The Committee voiced its concern at the lack of an independent, external element to the review and sought assurances as to the intention to include such a review process in the future and on the current ability of the organisation to assess and learning from best practice. In response, it was reported that the ongoing review process would mark the commencement of a longer-term two-year review cycle and that going forward external speakers will be utilised in planned annual conferences of DPSU members; also regarded as an avenue for internal sharing of experience and best-practice. In respect of operational activity it was provided that the DPSUs continued to take on cases based on a risk-based or complexity triage with other cases continuing to be investigated by other members within the Division. This, in tandem with the ongoing rollout of the domestic abuse risk assessment tool will allow for a greater organisational capacity to respond to sexual crimes.

On a similar theme of external, independent expertise the Committee enquired as to the role of third party actors in the design, delivery and review of training. It was reported by the Garda Síochána representatives that although much of the policing skills training is delivered internally it is the case that there is significant external input into the design and delivery where there is an identified need. Where specialist training is required it was outlined that this is delivered via external training partners, often through dedicated and bespoke courses. For example, it was explained that domestic abuse and sexual offences training had significant external input from victims, and national and international partners as appropriate; similar processes had recently also taken place in respect of training on hate crime and crises intervention.

In response to Committee queries on mental health intervention specifically – in the context of approximately 30% of applications to involuntarily detain people in approved mental health centres in 2020 being made by member of the Garda Síochána – the Garda Síochána representatives confirmed that there was external, expert input into training and in such instances highly trained, specialist negotiators were deployed where possible. Relatedly the Committee was updated as to a planned, health-led pilot for mental health related incidents.

Overall on training the Committee heard that provision continued to be minimal and predominantly online due to continued COVID-19 related restrictions.

On recruitment of specialised staff, and vacancies/shortages being experienced in relation to same, the Garda Síochána representatives expressed frustration at the lengthy and bureaucratic process that was required to be undertaken in order to receive approval for new staff position and the subsequent recruitment. In addition it was outlined that the pay and conditions that could be offered by private sector firms and the quick and agile manner by which they can recruit also represented a barrier for acquiring appropriately skilled staff when compared to the public sector processes. In response to a point made on the approval process the Chief Executive confirmed that no business cases were currently awaiting Authority approval and noted that, as per previous engagements, the internal Garda Síochána processes represented a significant barrier.

The Committee also enquired as to the setting of roads policing targets and the sense of ownership and/or the extent to which the Garda Síochána felt that they represented a level of outcome based activity that was not entirely within the ambit of the organisation.

8. Update on Schengen Information System

The Garda Síochána representatives provided a verbal update on the experience to-date and operational impact of the Schengen Information System II (SIS) following its go-live in March 2021. It was outlined that the experience was that the system was stable, the database working well, and good integration well with other Garda and partner agency systems (including a recent linkage with e-gates at Dublin Airport). In the period 15 March (launch) to end of June it was reported that there had been 4000 alerts that resulted in 55 hits on property, 48 arrests/extraditions and the identification of 22 persons wanted on European arrest warrants.

The Committee heard that the SIS would be extended to app functionality in the latter half of 2021 thus allowing use of the system through the mobility devices. At present members not present in stations must access information via phone through a search conducted by staff in the Garda Information Services Centre (GISC). In addition a 24/7 support team was planned to be established and initial preparations were underway in respect of the next system update (SIS III) – a project that will require a significant allocation of IT resources. It was reported that any future alteration of the information shared through SIS would be a government decision and not within the remit of the Garda Síochána. However, any opportunities for meaningful advancement or improvement of service would be considered as they arose.

It was also reported that an audit of the SIS was undertaken by EU-LISA – the European body responsible for SIS functionality, governance, etc. across the bloc – and that final results were expected in the coming weeks. This represented the first of a regular EU-LISA led monitoring and review process that will see Garda representatives undertaking similar external review duties in respect of the systems of other member states. In addition to this the Garda Síochána has representation on both the technical and policing sub-committees and thus is engaged in regular communication and information-sharing across the bloc.

9. Public Order and Evictions Events

In response to queries the Committee heard that the Garda Síochána is making good progress in identifying and applying lessons learned from previously discussed public order events but that larger,

structural change as per the recommendations of the Garda Inspectorate Report on Public Order were progressing at a more temperate pace. At a policy level there is ongoing work being undertaken by central and operational management to codify policy and procedure into distinct policies on: events and public order; major incidents; and critical incidents.

The Committee heard that while this structural change is occurring there is an assuredness on the part of management that proper policy and process is being followed in respect of all pre-planned events – e.g. consideration of and adherence to human rights matters/obligations, graduated use of force, etc. – but that the overall governance and outright consistency will be improved once this is completed. Similar assurances were given with regard to spontaneous events and Garda Síochána representatives spoke to ongoing consideration of CAD centre capacity and organisational response mechanisms, with particular reference to non-Dublin Metropolitan Region Divisions. Training continues to be rolled out in support of these efforts.

On eviction events the Garda Síochána reported that learnings had been taken from reviews of recent high-profile events and that these had prompted a refresh and reissue of relevant policy documents. In addition it was reported that an interdepartmental review group is considering wider related issues. Changes to the Private Security Authority's (PSA) remit through the Private Security Services (Amendment) Bill 2021 were cited as a positive in ensuring regulation of those enforcing court orders for evictions and repossessions. The Committee also heard that consistency and clarity of approach to dealing with such incidents is ensured by the policy and that all events require the notification to the applicable Superintendent within Divisions. It was outlined that this, along with the access call-takers to the policy documents, would ensure sufficient support and guidance to first responders and that risk-assessment processes and human rights considerations were critical aspects to these documents.

The Committee Chair noted that documents relevant to this agenda item had been received on the morning of the meeting and that they would be considered in full and may prompt further engagement.

10. AOB

The Garda Síochána representatives provided a verbal update on:

- the impact of COVID-19 on crime trends pertaining to blackmail/extortion and child pornography, both of which are being monitored and responded to accordingly;
- the soon to be introduced recording of victim/perpetrator relationships which will provide a greater insight into the wider context of criminality and provide more insightful data to ascertain prevalence of crimes such as elder abuse, etc.;
- the launch on 21 July of the online hate crime reporting facility, planned to coincide with International Hate Awareness Day.

On the latter it was agreed that the Garda Síochána would make contact with the Executive to allow for Authority support of the launch through its social media channels.