



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
POLICING AUTHORITY

Minutes – Policing Strategy and Performance Committee Meeting

Date: 19 October 2021

Venue: Remote Video-Conference

Committee Meeting

Attendance

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

Apologies: N/A

Secretary: Mark Nother

Executive: Helen Hall, Margaret Tumelty, Aoife Clabby, Michal Alfasi-Hanley, Karen Shelly, Sophia Carey, Magali Lapouge (Part A only), Judy Higgins

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. No conflicts of interest were declared.

The Chief Executive provided an overview of any pertinent developments since the last meeting of the Committee, and the Committee Chair provided an overview of communication between the Committee Chair and Deputy Commissioner, Policing and Security, concerning the agenda for this meeting.

Dates for committee meetings in 2022 were agreed as proposed. The scheduled Committee meeting for November was deferred to January 2022.

3. Policing Performance Assessment

An overview of engagements undertaken since the September 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 in Part B of the meeting.

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. Policing Plan 2022

The Committee considered materials provided by the Executive concerning the Policing Plan 2022, and an overview of the presentation at the Organisational Development Committee meeting on 13 October was provided. A number of themes were identified for discussion with the Garda Síochána representatives in part B of the meeting.

5. Protective Services

The Committee discussed matters pertaining to protective services in the areas of sexual offences, domestic abuse and child sexual abuse, and considered material provided by the Executive. A number of areas were agreed for follow-up with the Garda Síochána representatives in Part B of the meeting.

Part B – Meeting with Garda Síochána representatives

Attendance

Authority: As previous

Executive: As previous, Cormac Keating

Garda Síochána: Deputy Commissioner Anne Marie McMahon (Policing and Security), Deputy Commissioner Shawna Coxon (Strategy, Governance and Performance), Assistant Commissioner John O’Driscoll (Organised and Serious Crime), Andrew O’Sullivan (Chief Information Officer), Gráinne Shortall (Policing Authority Liaison Office).

6. Closed session

The standing option to conduct a closed session was not exercised. There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting.

7. Policing Performance Assessment

The Garda Síochána representatives acknowledged ongoing internal discipline matters and those related to alleged criminal activity by former and serving members that was subject to ongoing investigation. It was outlined that the organisation was treating these and any related matters with the utmost gravity, ensuring a thorough and expeditious approach was taken to address emergent issues. The Committee was also informed that communication was ongoing with GSOC in relation to these matters, in addition to that concerning CAD/999.

The Garda Síochána representatives provided the Committee with an update on the current numbers of members driving on Chief’s Permissions, totalling in excess of 1,000 individuals. It was outlined that an interim training programme was to be provided to a cohort within this number to alleviate a proportion of demand for training and to mitigate against risk. The Committee noted this update and indicated an intention to further discuss such at the next meeting, in line with a request made by the Garda Síochána.

On reporting to the Authority, the Committee highlighted recent delays in the furnishing of reports to the Authority in a timely manner, and the Garda Síochána representatives undertook to address any delay in future. The Garda Síochána representatives also responded to a Committee query concerning the methodology for determining RAG/traffic light statuses for targets in the Policing Plan 2021, outlining the process between updates from the relevant business owner and the Strategic Transformation Office (STO) – who compile the monthly updates into a report; In terms of governance, the Committee heard that Garda Executive consider the status of targets weekly with items escalated to Executive level when appropriate (for example if things are at risk, subject to dispute on status categorisation, or there are concerns), risk management is performed internally by the Executive and queries may go back to action manager before a decision is made. The existence of four Programme Boards, which are used to hold the action managers to account, was mentioned. The Committee

requested more information on the formal structure of this process from the Garda Síochána representatives.

The Committee queried the change in RAG status from amber to green for a target relating to the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau, the rationale for which was not immediately apparent from the reporting. In response, the Garda Síochána representatives outlined the availability of information on economic crime to Garda members on the Garda Portal, and increased capacity in the unit. The Committee pointed out that this information was relevant and pertinent but was not included in the latest report, and indicated its preference for the inclusion of this level of detail, and justification for a change in RAG status, in future.

An update on the work of the Divisional Drug Units was provided by the Garda representatives, who clarified that Operation Tara was due to launch in mid-2020 but was delayed until 1 July 2021 because of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The resources for Operation Tara were allocated in 2020 to Divisional Drug Units, and in some cases units that had been disbanded were re-established, so that every division has a Divisional Drug Unit. The Committee heard that the processes around reporting of activity and the measurement of performance were matters of ongoing improvement. Operation Tara was described as proactive, intelligence-led operations targeting small-scale, street-level – and sometimes larger – drug dealing operations at local level. It is coordinated with community policing units, and involves proactive searches both of premises and persons. A discussion about the current level of searches of persons and under the Drugs Acts centred around the fact that the levels of searches in mid-2020 were around 25% higher than current levels. The Garda Síochána representatives clarified that the levels in early to mid-2020 were unusually high, and that has evened out now as restrictions have eased. A number of possible influencing factors, not least an increased Garda presence and more identifiable criminal activity facilitated by the wider context of public health restrictions on movement reducing those in transit.

The Garda Síochána representatives added that national oversight is provided by GNDOCB and the governance and operational command structure is similar to that of Operation Thor. The Committee expressed concern that the recent methods of reporting were failing to capture sufficient detail of the activity that was occurring in this area. It was stated that such weaknesses in reporting resulted in the Committee and the wider Authority needing to proactively pursue further detail in order to make a full and accurate assessment of performance, when such detail should be routine and indeed be in the interest of the Garda Síochána. In this vein it was requested that additional information of this nature be added to future reporting, where operationally feasible, to give a more accurate overview of the inputs, outputs and outcomes. In response the Garda Síochána acknowledged weaknesses in the current reporting methods. It was agreed to return to the matter of reporting more generally at a later meeting.

The Committee enquired about reports concerning the potential unnecessary re-arrest of persons on spent warrants that were flagged on the Schengen II system. The Garda Síochána representatives outlined that there have been no identified issues to date but that there is constant monitoring, and updating where necessary, of the system nationally and at a European level.

8. Policing Plan 2022

The Garda Síochána representatives, introduced the draft Policing Plan 2022, which, in line with the draft Strategy Statement 2022-2024 has five central strategic pillars: Community; Tackling Crime and Preventive Policing; Victims and the Vulnerable; Protecting the Security of the Irish State; and, Sustainable Change and Innovation. Intersecting with those are five key enablers: People and Purpose; Partnerships; Engagement; Empowerment and Trust; and, Information-led Policing. It was further explained that the Plan:

- is consistent and in alignment with the draft Strategy Statement and the Policing Priorities;
- takes into account A Policing Service for the Future (APSFF) – the central strategy to the Government policing reform programme; –
- recognises that the policing oversight structures are expected to change within the strategy period 2021-24;
- is underpinned by aligned functional strategies and clear structures, governance and accountability, and a commitment to Human Rights;
- Includes victims and the Vulnerable as a dedicated strategic pillar for the first time; and
- features a reduced number of targets to ensure a greater focus and attention to those included, acknowledging the intention of the Plan to provide a sense of priority.

The Garda Síochána representatives elaborated on the need and intention to develop and move to outcome-based reporting, rather than simple, measurable targets, so that the true impact of strategic changes can be measured and seen. It was provided that the design of such metrics and reporting is ongoing and that such outcomes would be identified and reporting would be altered in 2022.

The Committee, supportive in principle of the approach articulated regarding reporting, emphasised the need to keep the Policing Plan central to the GS work of the next year, driving performance and using it to measure delivery of service to the community, as well as the need – in relation to the enhancement of performance measures and reporting –to avoid an over-reliance on the Public Attitudes Survey (PAS). The Committee requested a schematic depicting the process of performance management in detail, and the Garda Síochána representatives noted that the process is currently undergoing change but that such would be provided to the Authority as soon as practicable.

9. Protective Services

Sexual Offences

The Committee asked for a number of clarifications on: the definition of serious domestic abuse, in terms of the Divisional Protective Services Units (DPSUs); the crime allocation policy used to determine which cases are dealt with by local stations and which are escalated to the DPSU; and how is consistency in respect of victim services and engagement ensured across the Regions. The Garda Síochána representatives responded that the Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) is used to make these decisions, through daily meetings where all crimes are reviewed, allocated, and a decision on escalation can be made by divisional management. It was clarified further that serious domestic abuse would include one or more aggravating factors, which would include previous calls to the same address, any type of violence or sexual involvement, and that they can be complex cases more suited to

the skills available in the DPSU, however the PAF system ensures that the DPSUs are not overloaded with cases unnecessarily.

On engagement with victims and ensuring a consistent, appropriate response the Garda Síochána representatives informed the Committee that the domestic abuse Risk Assessment Tool, which has been rolled out in the North Western Region, uses a matrix-based approach to assess the risk to the victim, and will improve consistency in this area when rolled out nationwide, and that training is provided consistently across the country. It was emphasised that the sensitivities of each case must be taken on, and that consistent, measurable actions like enforcing court orders and placing people in custody, where appropriate, show how seriously domestic abuse is being taken, and further enhanced since the inception of Operation Faoiseamh. It was noted that numbers of reports of domestic incidents are rising, despite the easing of restrictions, and some analysis of the causes of that will be needed.

In response to a query on the external element of the review of DPSUs that is currently underway, the Garda Síochána representatives expressed their desire to include an external reviewer, noting its value to the overall process, and that although it was not possible to facilitate the inclusion of such due to COVID-19 restrictions, they intend to include it in the future. The Committee asked briefly about the content and delivery of the six modules of domestic abuse training, and suggested that this topic be revisited in future.

The Committee asked about barriers to prosecution in sexual crime cases and what can be done to remove those, and the Garda Síochána representatives described an ongoing review of rape cases that were recorded as undetected, where outcomes are now being recorded (for example, victim withdrawal from the case, refusal to make a statement and any reasons for that, or other obstacles that fall within the remit of the GS). It was reported that the first stage has been the identification of possible causes for non-detection through interviews with the member who investigated the case, and a second stage is direct engagement with the victim, to understand their perspective and motivations. There is also, the Committee heard, an understood a need to update terminology in this area. It was provided that the first draft of the resultant report is nearing completion, and it is hoped that this can lead to a formal recording process for outcomes, based initially on Garda opinion, and then checks and balances can be built into the system, with verification by the victim. The Committee also heard that the capture of victim: offender relationships – recently incorporated into the PULSE system – will enrich these data. It was indicated that where intimate partners and violence are recorded together in one incident it should be automatically flagged as domestic abuse, and conversely where domestic violence is recorded but there is no relationship known between victim and offender, the data entered should be queried. It was also provided that the recording of the relationship is giving further insight into economic and elder abuse incidents, as well as the extent teen-parent domestic violence.

Implementation of the Garda Inspectorate report on CSA

In response to a query about the phone line for reporting Child Sexual Abuse, which has received 111 calls, the Garda representatives assured the Committee that it is monitored by the GNPSB, who ensure that calls are responded to in the appropriate manner.

The Committee asked for detail of the data sharing agreement between the Garda Síochána and the Child and Family Agency, Tusla, and were informed that the agreement will allow access for the Garda Síochána to information held legally by Tusla, which in some cases is necessary to secure a prosecution.

The Garda Síochána representatives outlined that in the absence of an IT system that can communicate with both PULSE and the Tusla system, there are Tusla staff available to the DPSUs, and an oversight group who will address any issues as they arise. The Committee was informed that the necessary IT system that will support notifications between Tusla and the GS will take some time and resources to implement, but that at present there was no clear timeline for implementation given the resource constraints and wider project prioritisation in respect of Garda ICT. .

The Committee enquired as to how consistency is maintained between Child Safeguarding Committees at local and regional level, and it was provided that the GNPSB have a policy in this area that delivers consistency between the regions, and any issues are escalated within the GNPSB and up to the Deputy Commissioner, Policing and Security, where necessary, however an in-depth assessment of effectiveness has not been carried out on the Child Safeguarding Committees. The Garda Síochána representatives agreed to provide further detail in respect of this matter.

In reference to return interviews with children who have been reported missing and returned home, the Committee asked about communication in situations where crimes are disclosed during interviews with social workers, where Garda members are not present. The Garda Síochána representatives explained that at divisional level responsibility for missing persons falls within the remit of the DPSUs who use the same mechanisms as with any vulnerable person to ensure consistency. It was stated that in such cases there is a clear cognisance for members of the inherent sensitivities and that trying to get the balance right when dealing with vulnerable children, who may have been exploited or a victim of crime while away from home, is of the utmost importance.

10. AOB

There were no items raised under AOB.