



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
POLICING AUTHORITY

Policing Authority publishes 16th report on policing performance by the Garda Síochána during the COVID-19 crisis

14 December 2021

The Policing Authority has today published [the 16th in a series of reports on its assessment of policing performance by the Garda Síochána during the COVID-19 crisis](#). An oversight framework was put in place by the Authority in early 2020 as a response to the extraordinary circumstances then emerging and which continue today, and it has been reporting regularly to the Minister for Justice.

The Policing Authority began engaging with communities, organisations and groups nationwide in late March 2020 to inform its oversight of policing during the health emergency. This report draws together the key themes that have arisen across the conversations and to identify what might be the questions and challenges for the Garda Síochána arising from those themes.

Policing Authority Chairperson, Bob Collins commented:

“The Garda Síochána had already recognised the need for a new approach to policing before any new powers were identified or regulations formulated. The agile, creative and community focussed response has stood the organisation in good stead and has served the people well. The potential has been clear from the beginning. The immediacy of the response; the engagement with and service to the community, particularly to those who are vulnerable; the change in tone; all have been widely acknowledged and appreciated. A challenge will be to give reality to the Commissioner’s expressed commitment to capture the experiences of the last two years and to make them a permanent part of the style and approach of the Garda Síochána’s policing service. ”

The report also presents an overview of the key oversight issues, on which the Authority continues to engage with the Commissioner, the Garda organisation as a whole and with relevant stakeholders:

- **Human Rights and Necessary Restrictions:** Through its oversight activities and engagement with the Commissioner and the Senior Management of the Garda Síochána the Authority continually emphasised the need for the Garda Síochána to respect the human rights of those it is policing while exercising the new powers afforded to it during the COVID-19 emergency.
- **Agility of the Garda Síochána:** The extraordinary response of the Garda Síochána to reprioritise activities and redeploy staff, most notably during the third wave when resources were stretched to the limit, demonstrates the capacity of the organisation for agility and change.

- **Domestic Violence and Community Policing during the Pandemic:** Organisations working with those enduring domestic abuse remained positive about the Garda Síochána's response to policing of this area of crime through the ongoing implementation of Operation Faoiseamh. Despite overwhelmingly positive feedback, issues remain, particularly with regard to inconsistencies in the policing service provided, although these appear to be less frequent than they were before and are more likely to occur outside the specialist units.
- **Wellbeing of Garda Members and Staff:** By the nature of their work, Garda members are sometimes at high risk of contracting COVID-19 and have been subject to physical and verbal assaults from a minority of the public, including the 'weaponising' of coughing and spitting. The Authority found the attacks on Garda personnel repugnant and publicly rebuked those who acted in this way and reiterates its condemnation of any assault on a member or staff of the Garda Síochána.
- **Recording of the Use of Powers:** The Authority has consistently held the view that emergency powers for the Garda Síochána should be as limited as possible and used as sparingly as possible, and has been supportive of the Garda Síochána employing a balanced and graduated approach to using its emergency powers. The Authority has questioned and sought to oversee that the powers are being used consistently and fairly across the country by the Garda Síochána and has required the organisation to provide data and information on the use of powers

This report was submitted to the Minister for Justice on Friday, and was presented to Cabinet today.