



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
POLICING AUTHORITY

Minutes – Policing Strategy and Performance Committee Meeting

Date: 15 February 2022

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, Cormac Keating, Karen Shelly, Philip Cox, Gráinne Curtin (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 Executive provided an overview of any pertinent developments since the last meeting.

It was agreed to move the date of the April meeting to Thursday 21 April¹.

3. Committee Workplan 2022

The approach to meetings and themes for consideration throughout the year, with due regard to the new Policing Priorities, Strategy Statement and Policing Plan for 2022 and approaches to monitoring their implementation, were discussed. The need to more closely align the work of the Committee to that of the Organisational Development Committee and of the Authority was noted. The Committee Chair informed members of standing, monthly governance meetings that had been established to this end.

4. Policing Performance Assessment

An update was provided by the Executive on progress on the Assessment of Policing Performance 2019-2021, and associated engagements with the Garda Síochána. A number of items for attention were outlined for follow-up with the Garda Síochána representatives in Part B of the meeting.

¹ This meeting was subsequently deferred to 18 May 2022.

5. Garda Reporting

The Committee considered a sample performance report provided by the Garda Síochána and identified a number of queries and areas for clarification or follow-up with the Garda representatives in Part B of the meeting.

6. Public Order

The Committee discussed the matters pertaining to public order policing, including consideration of materials provided. An approach and a number of issues were identified for discussion 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, Michal Alfasi-Hanley.

Garda Síochána: Deputy Commissioner Anne Marie McMahon (Policing and Security), Deputy Commissioner Shawna Coxon (Strategy, Governance and Performance), Assistant Commissioner Paula Hilman (Roads Policing & Community Engagement), Deirdre Morris (Strategic Transformation Office), Gráinne Shortall (Policing Authority Liaison Office), Anne-Marie Flynn (Policing Authority Liaison Office).

7. 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.

8. Policing Performance Assessment

The Garda Síochána representatives relayed an improvement in workforce resilience levels, which had dropped during the recent wave of COVID-19 in January, such that the temporary leave embargo and pause on training were lifted in February. It was also provided that industrial action undertaken by the Association of Garda Chief Superintendents and the Association of Garda Superintendents had been paused, pending the outcome of discussions at the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC).

The Committee heard that the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment Tool went live in the Southern Region on 15 February. The project will now be rolled out in the Eastern Region, and aims to then include the DMR.

The Committee welcomed the continuation of the rollout of the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment Tool and thanked the Garda Síochána representatives for a recent engagement in the Innovation Centre, noting that points made around resourcing challenges – and their impacts on policing services and community safety – have been heard by the Authority.

9. Garda Reporting

The Garda Síochána representatives presented a proposed new approach to quarterly reporting, following agreement to engage on same at the January meeting. The Committee heard that honing the report will be an iterative, collaborative process aimed at emphasising the outcomes rather than outputs, maximising usefulness to both parties, and reducing the workload of reporting to the Authority. The Committee heard that the report will be compiled by the Strategic Transformation Office with input from each subject owner, and that the move to a better approach reflects a mature organisational performance conversation within the Garda Síochána, in terms of how success is measured and how that is reflected in regular reporting to the Authority.

The Committee welcomed the project and the clear focus on outcomes for communities, but emphasised its position that the quarterly Policing Performance Reports are to be informative and useful to Garda Management as well as to the Authority, and should include the challenges to progress, as well

as progress made against the Policing Plan and wider strategic ambitions. The Committee suggested some minor amendments and it was agreed that further engagement would continue at Executive level.

10. Public Order

The Committee were provided with an overview of the Garda Síochána's strategic and operational approach to public order policing. While approaches were described as being influenced by public health restrictions in 2020 and 2021, the overall aim of the Garda Síochána, it was outlined, is to engage with organisers to facilitate protest whilst maintaining public order and ensuring the safety of protestors and wider society. It was outlined that, in the main, events including demonstrations, protests and marches occur without incident and that the deployment of full public order unit responses and tactics is infrequently required. Nevertheless, public order and public safety approaches are taken to prepare adequately for such eventualities in respect of both planned and spontaneous events. The Garda Síochána representatives explained that the area of public order has changed significantly, and public order responses are tactics within the wider arena of public safety. The Committee heard that to this end, new policies are being developed and implementation of the recommendations of the Garda Inspectorate Review of Public Order is largely completed, including training and qualifications, governance, policy review, etc.

The Garda Síochána representatives detailed the new Public Order and Public Safety (POPS) command structure and provided an update on progress to establish it. It was recognised that in order to operate successfully cultural change would be required whereby events and/or incidents would be commanded on a functional rather than geographic basis. The Committee heard that this aligned well with the wider, ongoing implementation of the Operating Model, itself a function-based organisational structure. Acknowledgement was given to the central role of internal communications and change management, particularly from a cultural standpoint, in the implementation of the POPS structure.

In respect of public order events, the Committee sought clarity on the approach to ensuring consistency of policing approach and service provision through the country. The Garda Síochána representatives outlined the role of the recently established National Steering Committee on Public Order, which consists of representation across the four Regions and the wider relevant functions and is chaired by Assistant Commissioner Roads Policing and Community Engagement. The Committee heard that the group, in addition to overseeing the aforementioned policy and process change, is responsible for the governance of public order policing. Public order units are deployed in line with anticipated need, for example on weekends in urban centres, near planned events/gatherings, and/or as a high-visibility, preventative measure. The Garda Síochána representatives reported that public order units are not a full-time resource and additional structure is required for call out. It was provided that, for spontaneous events that occur outside the Dublin Metropolitan Region (DMR) – which comparatively possesses a greater public order capacity – the response is dictated by the resources available. As such, outside of planned deployments, where there is a recognised need for specialist response, the Committee heard that in the other three Regions formal and informal means are used to assess public order response capacity. For example, if such is unavailable, the Committee heard that the Armed Support Unit can instead be deployed as an appropriately trained, 24/7 resource. Deployment figures for such were not available.

The Committee raised concerns on this approach to public order in particular with a view to the need for policing to ensure a graduated, proportional response to incidents and the potential human rights and public confidence issues that may arise.

These concerns were acknowledged by the Garda Síochána representatives but it was outlined that the occurrence of such was relatively limited and that it was an approach grounded in an approach that was cognisant of policing demand and effective use and deployment of resources. Predominantly, the Committee heard, this centres on an insufficient demand to justify full-time availability of dedicated public order units and the necessary speed of response. It was also provided that ASU members, in addition to undertaking the relevant training, commonly have previous practical experience in Public Order Units and also can be deployed with less-lethal equipment as per the needs of each individual incident.

The Committee also engaged with the Garda Síochána representatives on the review of the 'Rise Up' anti-lockdown protest on the Grafton Street in 2021. In response to the queries posed by the Committee, the Garda Síochána representatives outlined that: members injured during the event made a full recovery and returned to duty. Further discussion took place on the internal review process, including on matters relating to: planning and preparation, methodology, record keeping, use of intelligence, strategic and operational management, etc.

In respect of the review, it was established that it was undertaken predominantly from a 'lessons learned' perspective, and the issue of command was not within the Terms of Reference. The Committee raised concerns in relation to this and matters within the report pertaining to the governance and process regarding information sharing and use of intelligence. There was also engagement on the operational management of the event, including health and safety of Garda members and the management of risk. The Garda Síochána outlined that as a result of the review the relevant processes and policies were under active consideration, and that updates would be made where necessary, to ensure to ensure that they are fit for purpose and in line with best practice. The Committee sought clarity on the process by which the findings would be translated into operational improvements and the associated governance. It was agreed to return to a small number of outstanding matters.

The Committee reiterated a previous request for outstanding materials pertaining to public order and the Garda Síochána representatives agreed to bring the matter back to the Garda Executive.

11. AOB

There were no items raised under AOB.