



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
POLICING AUTHORITY

Minutes – Policing Strategy and Performance Committee Meeting

Date: 21 June 2022

Venue: Remote Video-Conference

Committee Meeting

Attendance

Authority: Deborah Donnelly (Committee Chair), Moling Ryan, Shalom Binchy

Apologies: Ronan Nolan (external member)

Secretary: Mark Nother

Executive: Margaret Tumelty, Michal Alfasi-Hanley, Gráinne Curtin, Linda Yeates

1. Closed session – Committee members

Committee members did not exercise the standing option to conduct a closed session.

2. Committee Chair's Opening Remarks

An update was provided by the Committee Chair following a discussion on the agenda with the Deputy Commissioner Policing and Security; there was a reminder that with the new quarterly reporting the committee would be taking an in-depth look at performance in general and that it would not just be a financial conversation.

There was a discussion regarding the Garda Síochána's planned publication of a Thematic Report on Gender, Sexual, and Domestic Violence. It was agreed that as the report was not yet ready for publication or provision to the Authority, it would instead be subject to discussion and engagement at the July meeting.

The Committee discussed the late submissions of two presentations by the Garda Síochána and the implications of receiving materials so close to the start of the meeting. It was agreed to accept the presentations given their centrality to the meeting agenda, but that the Garda Síochána representatives would be made aware there had not been sufficient time allowed to consider them and that, as such, further engagement might be undertaken as necessary at a later stage.

It was noted that the Deputy Commissioner Policing and Security would be provided time to update the Committee on matters pertinent to policing performance and that specifically it was anticipated that the topic of the ratio of Garda Members to Garda Staff may be addressed.

3. Consent Items

The minutes of the previous meetings were approved and no conflicts of interest were declared.

4. Policing Performance Assessment

The Executive provided an overview of any pertinent developments since the last Authority meeting, including an update on the progress of the resources letter to the Minister – as per section 62H(2)(b) of the Garda Síochána Act. The Committee considered materials pertaining to Garda Síochána performance and a number of items for attention were outlined for follow-up with the Garda Síochána representatives in Part B of the meeting.

5. Gender, Sexual and Domestic Violence

The Committee discussed the matters pertaining to Gender, Sexual and Domestic Violence. A number of areas were discussed and identified for discussion with the Garda Síochána in Part B.

6. Community Policing and Engagement

A number of themes were identified for discussion with the Garda Síochána representatives in part B of the meeting.

7. GAR requests and Administration

The Committee was updated on information provided by the Garda Síochána arising from requests made in previous meetings.

Part B – Meeting with Garda Síochána representatives

Authority: As previous.

Executive: As previous.

Garda Síochána: Deputy Commissioner Anne Marie McMahon (Policing and Security), Assistant Commissioner Justin Kelly (Organised and Serious Crime), Andrew O’Sullivan (Chief Information Officer), Rose Sweeney (Roads Policing and Community Engagement Bureau), Deirdre Morris (Strategic Transformation Office), Gráinne Shortall (Policing Authority Liaison Office)

8. Closed session

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

9. Policing Performance Assessment

It was highlighted to the Garda Representatives that, as agreed, would primarily focus on the matter of Garda resources as a key enabler to performance and impacts on services arising from constraints arising in relation to such. It was noted that the comprehensive nature of the articulated need of resources in the IT space enabled the Authority to understand with some clarity the impacts that resource shortages had on policing services, and that a similar articulation in respect of areas such as HR, finance, training, and estate would likewise be extremely useful. It was reiterated that this conversation was occurring in support of the Authority’s statutory function to advise the Minister of Justice on the adequacy of resources available to the Garda Síochána in respect of the coming financial year, as per the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended.

It was noted by the Committee that the backlog for the examination of devices in the Cyber Crime Bureau, as previously discussed, has increased from 2 to 3 years and information was sought on the extent to which this impacted obligations of effective service on the part of the Garda Síochána including reasonable timeframes of investigations and implications that the delays may have on criminal proceedings. It was also put forward by the Authority that this represented a lack of ability by the Garda Síochána to respond in a sufficiently agile manner, in terms of resource allocation, to the changing nature of crime. The Committee heard that a while a factor, the backlog is not in isolation down to lack of resources, rather, the Garda Síochána representatives, explained that the volume of materials, volume and range of devices, and complexity of security features has grown immensely and that this results in a fluid value in terms of individual resources. Illustratively it was stated that, based on internal measurement, productivity has increased by 29% but with the amount of devices also increasing the queue does not reflect the increased productivity. It was further outlined that the organisation is currently working on technical fixes and upgrades that will allow them to examine the devices in a shorter timeframe.

The Committee heard that one of the biggest concerns for the Garda Síochána representatives is the lack of analysts across many areas in the organisation and the inability to meet the current demand for analysis. The Garda Síochána representatives acknowledged that this is an ongoing problem and, based on projected recruitment timelines, it will be for a number of years to come. With significant impacts on

the service delivery of GSAS, GISC and ICT generally, which in turn impacts on policing service in areas such as community policing, crime prevention, etc.

In terms of finance and it was described that even where analysts can be brought into the organisation the technology need must also be met within an already insufficient IT budget. For example, there are 40 new analysts due to commence in roles that require IT set-ups at a combined cost of 1.92 million that was not in the budget for 2022 – this will therefore impact on other, planned IT projects. Which will in turn impact on service delivery.

The Garda Síochána representatives acknowledged the severe issues being faced in retaining Garda Staff generally but also specifically at the skill level that is needed for specialist positions such as analysts. The Committee also heard of the impact of the pace of recruitment with a competition for specialist Forensic Analyst Engineers that is underway would not yield people in positions until at least Q4 2022. Similarly, there is a number of Garda staff vacancies in the Garda National Diversity and Integration Unit due to staff churn that is affecting the ability of the unit to meet its targets. However, it was stated that there is a determination in cases such as these not to backfill vacancies with Garda Members unless demand dictated based on the critical nature of the role – in an effort to maintain the progress made in the workforce modernisation programme. This was reported to the Committee as an issues across functions with few units fully staffed to the extent requested by the units.

It was noted that the issue of a lack of sergeants, borne out of natural churn and delays in 2021 in undertaking the necessary promotion competition, had been largely addressed by the finalisation of that competition in early 2022 and the allocation of members to sergeant rank across the organisation – albeit with an acknowledgement that resources, in particular at supervisory grade were a standing pressure across functions and units.

Similarly, the area of training and the ability of the organisation to deal with demand was discussed in the context of it being a longstanding barrier across many functions including modernisation projects and operational areas such as protective service, roads policing, etc. The Committee heard that there is a backlog of training that needs to be completed and while online training is being utilised as much as possible following COVID-19, not all areas suited to online learning and there are capacity constraints on the LMS system. Accordingly, a competition has been approved for additional trainers in technical areas but it is likely that training will continue to present a barrier to delivery in some areas given the scale of demand against capacity.

The Garda Síochána representatives spoke about the parameters of the existing workforce limits based on the Government Decision of 2016 which aims to expand the Garda workforce to a total strength of 21,000: 15,000 members, 4,000 staff and 2,000 Reserves. The Committee heard that the organisation is approaching the ceiling for Garda Staff and to fully staff GSAS, GISC and IT sections alone would leave insufficient capacity to address other known staff needs and lessen the ability to meet future needs. It was suggested by the Garda Síochána representative that there may need to be engagement with stakeholders, including the Authority, on this matter and the rationale behind current limits and their applicability in 2022.

10. Gender, Sexual and Domestic Violence

The Committee heard that the planned publication of a thematic report on gender, sexual and domestic violence – announced for early June publication by the Garda Síochána in the May Commissioners

Monthly Report to the Authority – was delayed but would instead be ready in time for engagement at the July meeting of the Committee. The Garda Síochána representatives outlined that the report will look at the themes emerging in respect of those crime types and that on publication of the report by GSAS the relevant bureaus under the Organised and Serious Crime portfolio will consider the information provided and determine any necessary policing response. The main objective of the report was outlined as being to create a baseline for these crime types. It was also stated that the report, in this context, is an opportunity to be proactive and to look at what the data is saying and review at policies and training as appropriate.

The Committee also received verbal updates on both: the recording of the victim:offender relationships and the benefits from an evidenced-based policing perspective; and, the pilot examining the move to outcome based narrative in reporting. It was outlined that as a result of there have been 29 new outcomes for investigations put on PULSE and that the experience to date has been positive from an operational and management perspective. It has been decided to extend the project to more divisions beyond the sole pilot division in order to get a larger sample.

11. Community Policing and Engagement

The Garda Síochána representatives outlined that the Community Policing Framework rollout, which was paused during COVID-19, is now back on track with the hopes of a further 10 divisions being included in the roll-out by the end of Q3 2022.

On the allocation of Community Policing Officers it was outlined that it is the prerogative of the Chief Superintendent in each division to look at resources and allocate the people as they see fit, within the model of the Framework. The Committee highlighted this as a potential issue for uniformity within the divisions. It was provided that there are approximately 1500 Community Policing Officers nationally and that there will be a competition for Community Policing Officers run in July. It was outlined that the Community Policing Toolkit – a resource of community policing related materials and information on the Garda Portal – has been a primary method by which to ensure that good practice and positive initiatives during the COVID-19 response are maintained and shared across the organisation.

The Garda Síochána outlined a customer relationship management system as a key component of the Framework and updated the Committee that rather than a dedicated, standalone CRM system as planned the community policing aspect would now form part of the wider CAD2 project; delivering cost efficiencies and also ensure that the systems were inbuilt rather than separate.

The Crime Prevention Strategy 2021 -2024 was discussed at a high level with the Garda Síochána representatives describing the difficulties in measuring the effectiveness of Crime Prevention beyond the ultimate objective that it will lead to positive outcomes. The Committee heard that they are not at a stage where they are measuring the impact of such activity at present. It was noted that Operation Thor continues to achieve positive results since its launch in 2015 and it will be utilised again in the winter months; burglary rates it was reported are beginning to increase again but have not rebounded back to pre-pandemic levels.

12. AOB

The Garda Síochána representatives provided verbal updates on the technical advances in the area of online explicit materials that aids in staff welfare and protection from having to view materials in the first instance and on the innovation project planned for pilot on the utilisation of virtual ID parades.