

Minutes – Policing Strategy and Performance Committee Meeting

Date: 20 September 2022

Venue: Remote Video-Conference

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

Secretary: Mark Nother

Executive: Helen Hall, Margaret Tumelty, Michal Alfasi-Hanley, Judy Higgins, Linda Yeates

1. Closed session – Committee members

Committee members did not exercise the standing option to conduct a closed session. The agenda was agreed as set, and no conflicts of interest were declared.

2. Committee Chair's Opening Remarks

An update was provided to Members by the Committee Chair following advance engagement with the Deputy Commissioner Policing and Security on the meeting agenda.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the previous meetings were approved by the Committee subject to engagement on a small number of matters raised by the Garda Síochána, communicated in advance for discussion in Part B of the meeting.

The Chief Executive provided a verbal update on key business matters and/or developments since the July Authority meeting, including: the national Joint Policing Committee event hosted by the Authority that took place on 19 September; the publication of the Assessment of Policing Performance 2022 in August; the submission of the advice to the Minister on Garda Resources in August; and the progress of the Examination of the Garda Síochána Review of closure (including cancellation) of Computer Aided Dispatch Incidents.

4. Policing Performance Assessment

An update was provided by the Executive on matters pertaining to Policing Performance since the last meeting of the Committee, a number of matters were agreed for engagement with the Garda Síochána in Part B of the meeting.

5. Policing Plan 2022 – Realignment of Milestones

6. Policing Plan 2023

The Committee discussed the updated provided in respect of both Policing Plan 2022 and 2023 and agreed a number of matters for engagement with the Garda Síochána in Part B of the meeting.

7. GAR requests and Administration

An update was provided in respect of the three prior requests for information from the Garda Síochána.

Part B – Meeting with Garda Síochána representatives

Authority: As previous.

Executive: As previous.

Garda Síochána: Deputy Commissioner Shawna Coxon (Strategy, Governance and Performance), Deputy Commissioner Anne Marie McMahon (Policing and Security), Assistant Commissioner Paula Hilman (Roads Policing and Community Engagement), Assistant Commissioner Paul Cleary (Organised and Serious Crime), Detective Chief Superintendent Colm Noonan (Garda National Protective Services Bureau), Andrew O’Sullivan (Chief Information Officer), 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. Regarding the minutes, it was noted that the Policing Authority Liaison Office will engage with the Committee Secretary regarding a small number of matters pertaining to the minutes of the July meeting.

9. Policing Performance Assessment

The Garda Síochána representatives updated the Committee on a number of matters pertaining to the Divisional Protective Services Units in the context of the units being subject to ongoing routine review to assess impact since the commencement of their national pilot and rollout in 2018 and identify any areas of challenge. The Garda Síochána representatives reported that the modular review is progressing with a number of the constituent aspects completed, and that the current priority focus is now on the provision of training to DPSU members.

It was outlined to the Committee that there are currently 392 members assigned to the DPSUs nationally, all of which have an inspector assigned who are SIO trained. It was reported that there is an awareness of differences in approaches to the work of DPSUs between divisions – in terms of case allocation, workload, etc. – but that the Garda Síochána is satisfied that the service to victims is consistent. It was outlined that the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment tool evaluation aids in consistency as in addition to the benefits in respect of victim engagement it is used to triage cases and decide which will be led or supported by DPSUs.

The progression of cases to court – in the context of investigations in the area of protective services typically exhibiting comparatively long timelines thus meaning that investigations undertaken by the DPSUs following establishment are now more regularly appearing before court – and the manner in which this presents a test for the impact of the units was discussed. The Committee heard that in this regard there is positive indicators of the impact of DPSUs given successes in court to-date and feedback from the Director of Public Prosecutions signalling that the quality of the investigation files has improved which is leading to a greater number of, and more effective, prosecutions.

It was noted that the detection rates of sexual offences is improving over the medium term, with a recognition that while it is comparatively low compared to other crime types this is a feature of such offences given the complexity of cases and a number of other factors including the volume of historical cases, and that internationally it compares well.

There were questions put to the Garda Síochána representatives by the Committee on a recent University of Limerick report that described that lived experience of sex workers in Ireland¹, including findings that included: reported experiences of the sexual exploitation of sex workers by members of the Garda Síochána and wider abuse of power or aggressive interactions from members. The Committee expressed their concern at the findings and wider reports of experiences of poor practice in the provision of services related to sex workers. The Garda Síochána representatives reported that they are aware of the findings and that while operationally difficult in respect of the specific cases cited in the report, the thematic findings were useful in better understanding the issues raised. It was recognised that the response to the report would have to be further considered from a criminal investigatory standpoint but that the wider work of the Anti-Corruption Unit and the Organised Prostitution Investigation Unit would relate to the findings and that, in the context of the wider efforts in the area of ethical service delivery and anti-corruption, they are actively working to identify the Garda Síochána members that may be abusing their powers.

The Garda Síochána representatives also reported that the pilot project in the Galway Division to determine non-detection outcomes is progressing well and has recently been extended to all crime types. The Committee heard that there are currently 550 cases analysed and that a list of 31 different outcomes has been drafted for use in the pilot. It was provided that it is hoped to rollout these new outcomes nationally in 2023, subject to the completion of the pilot and the capacity to update the PULSE system.

In respect of Roads Policing, the Garda Síochána representatives reported that the recent August bank holiday campaign had gone well and presented an operational approach that may be used again in the future. It was outlined that in general, the day-to-day operational approach and use of resources, while guided from the national level, is largely a matter for the appropriate regional and divisional management. Regarding vulnerability on the roads the Committee heard that E-Scooters have been highlighted as an increasing concern due to rising use and as such rising accidents involving riders. It was outlined that they present a particular challenge to police due to the lack of governing legislation, but that the Garda Síochána are working with the RSA and partners to respond to these matters – including a joint Garda-RSA fact finding trip to Madrid to observe local policing responses. The Committee heard that proposed legislation on such matters was still in draft form and that the Garda Síochána has submitted proposals relating to speed limits, drink driving, minimum age requirements and the wearing of helmets.

The Committee also enquired as to the organisational response to anti-social behaviour and criminality, including assaults, on public transport. The Garda Síochána outlined the operational response, with particular reference to the national Operation TwinTracks and the, Dublin Metropolitan Region specific, Operational Saul. The Garda Síochána representatives believe that the current operational responses and assignment of responsibilities mean that there is not a current need for dedicated transport policing.

¹ <https://www.ul.ie/engage/sites/default/files/uploads/l%20must%20be%20some%20person%20-%20UL%20Engage%20Report%20Edit%20002.pdf>

10. Policing Plan 2022 – Realignment of Milestones

Garda Síochána representatives gave a presentation on the outcomes of an internal review on performance against the Plan undertaken in August and resultant proposal for the realignment of milestones relating to 9 targets within Policing Plan 2022. The Committee enquired as to the rationale behind the changing of only 9 of the milestones given the higher proportion being reported as at-risk or off-target at the half-year point – in particular due to challenges arising in respect of the key enabling functions, which the Committee acknowledged can take considerable time and effort to address. In response, the Committee heard that there had been recent improvements to resourcing in certain areas and that the decisions on realignment were made in consultation with the relevant business owners and thus there is confidence that the realigned milestones and those not being altered will be reached by the end of 2022.

11. Policing Plan 2023

The Garda Síochána representatives gave a short presentation on the current status of the preparations for Policing Plan 2023, including an overview to the approach to strategic planning and the internal consultation processes undertaken with operational and functional areas and business owners.

The Committee heard that it is acknowledged that there will be a continuing challenge in respect of resourcing and the key enabling functions however there is confidence that the enhanced planning processes undertaken, combined with operational and strategic developments in respect of the key enabling functions, will yield improvements on previous years. It was outlined that the next stage in the process is to complete the consultation process and thereafter finalise the targets, at which stage consultation will take place at Committee level with the Authority in October, followed by submission of the Plan by month-end in line with the statutory deadline.

12. AOB

No additional matters were raised.