

Minutes – Policing Strategy and Performance Committee Meeting

Date: 06 December 2022

Venue: Remote Video-Conference

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

Secretary: Mark Nother

Executive: Helen Hall, Margaret Tumelty, Cormac Keating, Linda Yeates, Barry Smith, Judy Higgins, Gráinne Curtin, Sophia Carey

1. Closed session – Committee members

The 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

The Committee Chair opened the meeting by introducing and welcoming new Committee member Gillian Imery.

An update was provided following an advance engagement with the Deputy Commissioner, Policing and Security regarding a briefing on the agenda and high-level engagement on the draft Policing Plan – including signposting matters arising and clarifications that would be sought during the meeting.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved and the Executive provided the Committee with an overview of any pertinent developments since the last meeting. A minor amendment requested to the minutes by the Garda Síochána in aid of factual accuracy was discussed.

4. Policing Performance Assessment

A number of matters relating to policing performance and the draft Policing Plan 2023 were identified for further engagement with the Garda Síochána Representatives in Part B of the meeting.

5. Child Sexual Abuse

The Committee discussed matters pertaining to the agenda item on child sexual abuse. The Executive reported on their recent experiences and engagements with stakeholders and agencies in relation to the policing of such. A number of areas were discussed and identified for discussion with the Garda Síochána Representatives in Part B of the meeting.

6. Detections

Matters pertaining to detections were discussed, including the recent Central Statistics Office annual publication. A number of matters were highlighted for discussion in Part B of the meeting.

7. GAR requests and Administration

It was agreed to defer full consideration of the Committee Terms of Reference to Q1 2023, when it would be supported with the results of the annual Committee self-assessment.

Dates were agreed for meeting of the Committee on 07 February and 13 April 2023, with the former to be held in-person.

Part B – Meeting with Garda Síochána representatives

Authority: As previous.

Executive: As previous.

Garda Síochána: Deputy Commissioner Anne Marie McMahon (Policing and Security), Deputy Commissioner Shawna Coxon (Strategy, Governance & Performance), Assistant Commissioner Paula Hilman (Roads Policing and Community Engagement), Assistant Commissioner Paul Cleary (Organised and Serious Crime), Andrew O’Sullivan (Chief Information Officer), Detective Chief Superintendent Colm Noonan (GNPSB), Eiméar Bourke (Executive Director Strategy and Transformation), Deirdre Morris (Strategic Transformation Office), Sara Parsons (GSAS), Gráinne Shortall (Policing Authority Liaison Office)

8. Closed session

The standing option to conduct a closed session was not exercised. It was acknowledged that a minor request had been received relating to the factual accuracy of the minutes of the previous meeting and that these would be considered by the Executive.

The Committee Chair outlined that dates for upcoming Committee meetings had been agreed as 7 February and 13 April, with the former to be held in-person.

9. Policing Performance Assessment

There was a discussion surrounding the draft Policing Plan 2023 and the supporting information received by the Authority. The Garda Síochána representatives clarified that a draft document provided was not intended to replace the previous draft of the Plan but rather was provided to relay additional context to the Authority on what impact it was envisaged that the constituent targets within the Plan would have at both a national level and sub-national level. The Committee expressed disappointment at the proposed approach and requested that the Garda Síochána consider the inclusion of this additional detail within the final Plan to allow for an enhanced level of information to be made available to the public, stakeholders and members of the Garda Síochána workforce as to the organisations priority goals for the year. More broadly it was provided that the draft was improved on previous iterations and that there had been positive advancement in the process in preparing the Policing Plan but that further work and engagement would be needed on the supporting milestones. This work, the Garda Síochána representatives outlined, would continue into early Q1 2023 in line with ongoing processes to finalise budgets, etc.

The Garda Síochána representatives spoke about the challenges faced with regard to the recent East Wall protests, the varying degrees of disruption arising, and the balancing of the right to protest with wider public order and public safety considerations. The Garda Síochána representatives outlined their approach to engagement with the organisers of the protests, and that the early success of this approach saw efforts continue to maintain open dialogue despite challenges. The Garda Síochána representatives further explained that the on-the-ground response saw the continued use of the four E’s method of engaging with protestors, explaining pertinent information to the controls put in place for the safety of all parties, encouraging courses of action to maintain public safety, and using enforcement activity as a last resort. The Committee heard that the potential for escalation of both

the activity and the scale of the protests remained a concern, and was being closely monitored. The Garda Síochána representatives could not confirm whether the recently introduced Public Order and Public Safety model of incident command was being used to help police the protests. However, they further advised the Committee that at present they were content that the management of protests at local Superintendent level remained sufficient at this juncture.

The Committee queried if there had been any change or anticipated change on the part of senior management concerning the policy of arming members of the Garda Síochána. The Garda Síochána representatives confirmed that there has not, and they are simultaneously continuing efforts to reduce the overall number of firearms holders and increase the capacity of the specialised Armed Response Units at a Regional level. The Committee heard that in respect of the former the number of firearms holders have been reduced by 1,030 since 2017.

The introduction of the new roadside drug tests was discussed, in particular any foreseen governance issues that may be faced due to the manual nature of the test recording, as opposed to the electronic recording of the previous devices. The Garda Síochána representatives noted that there are risks associated with the change but that there is work ongoing around IT governance in this space. In the short term, the Committee heard, positive tests will be recorded on the PULSE system, and oversight will be provided by the Superintendents in the Garda National Roads Policing Bureau.

The target to reduce the number of electronic devices to be reviewed within the Garda National Cyber Crime Bureau (GNCCB) was discussed. Garda Síochána representatives provided an overview of medium-term efforts to address same, including an increase in GNCCB resourcing and the aligned establishment of four cyber-crime satellite hubs at a regional level, with two further hubs planned. The Committee were advised that the 400 device target by year-end cited in the October meeting has been revised upward, but that current levels (at approx. 530 from a high of approx. 750) represented significant progress and it is hoped this can be further reduced by year-end. It was outlined that there had been further progress made in relation to the efficiency of operational activity and capacity in this area, including:

- an increase of 49% in cases closed year-on-year
- increased capacity in recent years of first responders throughout the organisation to assist at local level with basic device investigation skills to do an initial sweep when a device was seized; and,
- new processes, such as “short reporting”, to initially examine a device whereby if the case was then to be forwarded to trial the device would be examined in full.

The Committee heard that priority is given to cases where an arrest is imminent and the backlog is being constantly reviewed to identify urgent cases, with a recent review and updating of the triage and prioritisation methods employed.

10. Child Sexual Abuse

Historical child sexual abuse cases were discussed, including an overview of the challenges that are faced by the Garda Síochána in relation to this area such as: the length of time passed since an alleged offence took place; the current age of the witnesses or victims; related ability to be party to

full criminal justice system processes; length of investigations; resources required; the scale of reporting); matters of public confidence; and, victim support. Challenges in respect of wider child sexual abuse cases were also discussed, including scale of cases which links to the earlier discussion on the demand and capacity of GNCCB to meet same.

It was acknowledged by the Committee that oversight work undertaken in this area indicated that there has been a lot of progress made in the Garda Síochána's organisational response to child sexual abuse, specifically in the context of the Garda Inspectorate reports on this matter, acknowledging however the lengthy timelines that were involved in respect of much of this progress.

The Garda Síochána representatives were asked by the Committee about apparent absence of reconciliation measures to ensure that notifications between the Garda Síochána and Tusla are reconciled to make sure no cases have been missed. The Garda Síochána representatives confirmed that the portal to share notifications between the organisations has now gone live across all divisions. The Committee also heard that training for the relevant personnel has now been rolled out in support of this. It was outlined that engagement continues on matters pertaining to data sharing, including the seeking of legal advices on these matters.

Relatedly the Committee enquired as to the capacity of the organisation in the interviewing of young people, and policy in this area. The Garda Síochána representatives provided that it is a requirement to have a trained specialist officer as well as a Tusla officer carry out a joint interview and that it has been agreed with Tusla that they will take part in the joint interviewer training delivered by the Garda College going forward. In aid of this the approach to training is currently being reviewed, including consideration of the respective roles of the two bodies. The Committee heard that demand for specialist interviewers is high but the Garda Síochána are constantly working to ensure resources are correctly utilised and that recommencement of specialist interviewer training will begin in Q1 2023.

The Tusla Liaison Unit within the Garda Síochána was discussed, the Garda Síochána representatives noted an assessment had been carried out and due to the extensive nature of this work, the need for members to be carrying out this work on a full-time basis as opposed to a part-time basis was one of the accepted findings.

The Committee raised considerable concern as to the unacceptable delays reported concerning the timeline from when an incident involving a child is reported to the Garda Síochána to when the interview takes place with that child. It was accepted by the Garda Síochána that there is scope for considerable variance in the timeframes for delivery of interviews around the country but that this was a matter of capacity, including the availability of interview rooms and availability of interviewers. The Committee urged renewed attention to this matter and advised it would be monitored by the Authority and the Executive.

11. Detections

A presentation was received from the Garda Síochána representatives on detections and crime trends data.

At a high-level the Committee heard that the ongoing outcomes based recording of incidents pilot was viewed as considerably successful to date and that supporting changes to the PULSE system had been made to make it easier to record these cases and outcomes, with further changes planned. It was also provided that there is high priority work that needs to be carried out on the PULSE system before the outcomes-based recording can be rolled out nationally, with this work is scheduled for Q4 2023.

The Garda Síochána outlined how in order for the information gleaned from the changed reporting to result in meaningful change in the experience of and outcomes for victims, it will need to include support from partners across the wider justice system. For example, it was outlined that a wider piece of work will be needed with partners in relation to Sexual Offences that do not proceed following the end of the pilot to ensure that impactful changes might be made to increase to likelihood of progression of such cases. The Committee heard finalising the outcomes in cases gives a formality to the conclusion of the criminal investigations, so while a detection may not be possible, other outcomes which have a negative impact for the suspect are possible.

The Committee also heard, from an internal policing perspective, often cases that take months or even years of work do not end up in prosecutions, which can be very disheartening, so to have the ability to measure the work that is carried out in different types of investigations is very useful, and can be used to motivate.

A copy of the outcomes of the pilot project was requested, so it was advised that it was hoped to be ready for the Deputy's monthly PAF meeting in January or shortly thereafter, at which point it would be made available to the Authority. The Committee advised of the intention to return to this matter at its February meeting, specifically a more detailed overview of the results of the pilot.

12. AOB

No other business was raised.