

POLICING AUTHORITY ASSESSMENT OF POLICING PERFORMANCE



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
POLICING AUTHORITY

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Who We Are

The Policing Authority was established as an independent statutory body on 1 January 2016 to oversee the performance of the Garda Síochána in relation to policing services in Ireland.

The [Garda Síochána Act 2005](#), as amended (the Act), provides for an extensive range of functions for the Authority, some of which were previously the responsibility of Government or the Minister, including:

- Oversight of Policing
- Public Engagement and Awareness
- Appointments of senior members and staff of the Garda Síochána
- Research

Further details about the remit and full functions of the Authority are [available here](#).

Chairperson's Foreword

I have written before in a foreword that nothing escapes its context. And that is true for this Assessment, since an unintended delay in its publication for operational reasons means that it is published against the background of the terrible events in Dublin on Thursday 23rd November. First thoughts must be with the three children and their carer who were randomly and viciously attacked on that afternoon, with their families and loved ones and with all the children and their families who were affected that day. These terrible assaults must not fade into the background of the events that followed nor be allowed to fall into the recesses of our individual and collective memories.

These attacks reveal in a stark way that even in the most innocent of circumstances, danger can lurk and the lives of many families can be plunged into turmoil. They show us too that, as so often before, members of the Garda Síochána are the first, or among the first, on the scene to deal with the unimaginable consequences of such an assault on innocence.

What followed on the streets of Dublin challenges all of our expectations and requires us to stand back and review previous assumptions. The Authority recognises and commends the courage, public spirit, resilience and restraint demonstrated by Gardaí in the face of determined provocation, threat and violence that night. It also commends those who were injured in these events and wishes them a full recovery.

Turning to the primary purpose of this publication, the Authority's Assessment of Performance is set against the Policing Priorities. These are not arbitrary targets. The Priorities reflect what the Authority has learned from its statutory consultation with the Commissioner, from its oversight work generally and from what the public has indicated are the areas that it believes should be prioritised. These priorities are consistently identified by the public and are the areas of greatest harm, often perpetrated on the most vulnerable in our society.

In the first half of 2023 the Authority focused its oversight on performance within the community, specifically, in Dublin's North East Inner City (NEIC) and Drogheda. This was an opportunity to explore with two separate communities how the work undertaken by the Garda Síochána contributes to their ability to go about their lives, raise families and thrive. It has been useful and a privilege to engage with local Gardaí and a range of community groups and organisation to assess policing performance at its point of impact.

In the NEIC we heard of considerable challenges in terms of relationship with community and also examples of good practice. In terms of performance, measuring and determining how to deliver confidence and trust in policing is more nuanced than a list of meetings or activities that can be counted. Community policing again featured highly as a valued means by which the quality of the relationship between the community and the police service can be encouraged, not least in relation to young people.

In Drogheda there was evidence of impact, of policing having delivered an improvement in community safety arising from a time when the community felt under siege. Key to this was the integrated manner in which all the levers of policing were employed within the Garda Síochána with community policing, juvenile liaison, drugs policing and regular Gardaí working cohesively as a team. More recently, the added impact of cohesive interagency working through the Drogheda Implementation Board, recognising that community safety is not a policing issue alone.

There has been considerable public commentary on policing resources over this period and prioritisation is an even greater challenge at a time of resources being tight. The Policing Plan 2023 is ambitious and there have been notable achievements in the year to date including:

- The launch of GardaSafe (a new dispatch system designed to facilitate the most efficient and appropriate response to 999 calls) and its rollout to three of the four Regions;

- The continued rollout of the Operating Model; and,
- A continued high-level of community policing activity undertaken by Community Policing Units, the positive impacts of which are consistently identified by communities through the Authority's outreach and engagement programme.

With regard to GardaSafe – this represents a significant development in the manner in which Gardaí respond to calls for service and their ability to access information to inform that response. There have been questions raised as to whether the system represents a diminution of the relationship with local Gardaí but its purpose is to make the best use of available resources so as to provide the most immediate and effective service to the public when and where it is needed.

While discussion of resourcing and policing tends to focus on Garda member numbers, the difficulty in recruiting and retaining Garda staff has direct consequences on the policing service that is offered. Some concerns about the possible impact of the new legislation have been allayed by the Minister but some clarification for the position of new appointees is awaited. Uncertainty can influence career choices and there are vulnerabilities that could have consequences. There is, perhaps, insufficient understanding of the range of policing activity that is supported by, and, indeed, reliant on the work of Garda staff – analysis, administration, ICT, Human Resources, Finance. Much commentary seems scarcely to recognise the extent and the critical nature of the contribution that these employees make.

Against the background of so much expressed anxiety about Garda numbers, it may be counterintuitive to note that the number of Gardaí for every 100,000 people is higher now (end October 2023 numbers) than fifty years ago, 1971 to be precise. The difference is not negligible, being almost 16% higher now. But much has changed since that time. Garda conditions of employment have advanced considerably. Policing, as with most aspects of life, has become more complex. Demands on policing have become very different and more wide-ranging.

Consider the work of Protective Service Units throughout the country, whose work is so much appreciated by those affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence. Or the Cybercrime Bureau whose skills are an essential tool in the investigation and prosecution of significant criminal activity. So, too, the protection of children or the extent of the growth and impact of Organised Crime Gangs with their wide international links. All these require intense policing engagement. All that work makes a direct contribution to community safety. But none of it is visible to the people. In the same way, the critical work of Garda staff is not seen.

The desire for greater visibility of Gardaí in the community is evident in every engagement the Authority has with the public and it has featured again in our engagement and assessment of performance by communities in this period. This invisible policing is indispensable to deal with the challenges of today and to serve the needs of the public. It deserves greater appreciation. This is particularly so since it serves directly to prevent and respond to the type of harm that is consistently prioritised by communities themselves. There is much to reflect on in how best to convey these realities.



Bob Collins

11 December 2023

1 Introduction

This *Assessment of Policing Performance* is the latest in a series of bi-annual reports produced by the [Policing Authority](#) assessing Garda Síochána performance. They are provided to the Minister for Justice, the Garda Commissioner, and other stakeholders, and made publicly available through the Authority’s website. The reports are important in providing transparency to the communities that the Garda Síochána serves, the Garda workforce, and other stakeholders about policing performance, the oversight of policing, and the outcomes of that work.

Given the size and operational scale of the Garda Síochána, the report does not presume to capture the totality of Garda performance but rather seeks to highlight major, notable or important achievements, as well as the identification of areas of emergent or persistent challenge or risk.

This report offers an assessment on progress against the Policing Plan 2023 to the end of June and a mid-term evaluation of the Garda Síochána’s performance against the [Policing Priorities 2022-2024](#).

1.1 Report Structure

Following this introductory section, Section 2 provides an overview of the statutory performance framework that sets the short and medium-term strategic and operational direction of the Garda Síochána, and is used to monitor and assess performance.

Section 3 considers Policing Plan 2023, providing an assessment of the progress made and challenges faced in its implementation.

Section 3 provides an in-depth assessment of performance against each of the five Policing Priorities 2022-2024 through a high-level commentary on the key measures of success and consideration of a number of key issues arising.

Section 4 reflects on recent Authority engagements in local communities.

Finally, Section 5 presents the conclusions.

How We Assess Performance

The Authority’s primary mechanism for monitoring and assessing performance is through monthly meetings with the Garda Commissioner, a minimum of four of which are held in public each year.

The Authority’s *Policing Strategy and Performance* and *Organisation Development* committees also review performance across the breadth and depth of the functions of the Garda Síochána as they relate to policing services and the management and development of the organisation.

Staff of the Authority also engage with the Garda Síochána at national, regional, divisional and station level on an ongoing basis.

The Authority also assesses performance through a programme of stakeholder engagements. These include Joint Policing Committees and a wide range of groups and organisations at national and local level. This programme of engagement and outreach seeks to listen to and understand the lived experience of policing from both a service delivery and community perspective, as well as the perceptions in the community as to its effectiveness. The Authority published an overview of the feedback and experiences of communities with whom it engaged, during 2022, in February 2023. This ‘What We Heard’ report is [available here](#).

Throughout the year, the Authority also reviews and analyses internal and external reporting from, and about, the Garda Síochána, as well as monitoring wider international trends and research concerning policing.

2 Performance Framework

This section provides an overview of the Policing Priorities, the Garda Síochána Strategy Statement and the annual Policing Plan; which together form the performance framework against which the Garda Síochána is strategically and operationally guided and has its performance measured.

2.1 The Policing Priorities

The Policing Authority has a statutory function under the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended, to determine or revise, following consultation with the Commissioner, the priorities for the Garda Síochána in performing its functions relating to policing services.

These Policing Priorities establish what the Authority wants the Garda Síochána to give the most attention to in any given period. They assist the Commissioner in identifying areas that require extra focus and/or investment of resources to improve the service delivered to the public and the enhancement of the Garda organisation. In addition, these Priorities are required to be considered in the design of the Garda Síochána Strategy Statement and the annual Policing Plan.

For the period 2022-2024, the Policing Priorities (the Priorities) are as follows:

- Protecting and Supporting Victims and the Vulnerable
- Supporting and Ensuring Community Safety
- Tackling Organised and Serious Crime
- Rights Based and Ethical Service Delivery
- Development of the Capacity to Strategically Manage Garda Resources

The Priorities were informed by a number of factors, including:

- The results of the public consultation on Policing Priorities for the Garda Síochána carried out by the Authority in May 2021 that garnered approximately 3,500 responses;
- Consideration of the operating environment of the Garda Síochána and of international and national trends affecting policing;
- Reflection on policing performance in the years prior to 2022;
- Wider influences and demands on the Garda Síochána, including Government policy; and,
- The necessity of the key enabling functions of human resources, finance, ICT, data analysis, etc. to enable modern policing.

As detailed in the coming pages, each Priority includes: the articulation of a desired outcome; a number of key functional areas where the Authority believe there is particular attention required; and a number of measures of success, which serve as key indicators of progress.

The Priorities, as noted above and in the introduction, do not assume to cover the full range of activity taken on by the Garda Síochána and its workforce. Rather they are designed to highlight areas that require particular attention. Likewise, there is undoubtedly considerable work being done to support individuals and communities across the country that cannot be captured in this report.

Accordingly, the report seeks to highlight major, notable or important achievements, as well as the identification of areas of emergent or persistent challenge or risk. It also includes commentary on notable achievements or challenges relevant to the Priorities but beyond the scope of the measures of success themselves.

Further information on the Priorities, including key areas of focus and outputs or outcomes by which the Authority will measure success against them, is [available here](#), and throughout the report.

“20. The Authority shall, in accordance with this section and with the approval of the Minister

(a) determine, and from time to time revise, priorities for the Garda Síochána in performing its functions relating to policing services, and

(b) establish, and from time to time revise, levels of performance (“performance targets”) to be aimed at in seeking to achieve the objective of each priority referred to in paragraph (a)...”

Section 20 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended.

2.2 Garda Síochána Strategy Statement

The Garda Síochána’s Strategy Statement (the Strategy) is a statutory document that establishes the Commissioner’s vision for the organisation over a three-year period. The Strategy is drawn up by the Commissioner, in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005, and approved by the Authority with the consent of the Minister for Justice. The mission and objectives within the Strategy set out the range of public commitments made by the Garda Síochána to both the community and the members of its organisation.

The [Garda Síochána Strategy Statement 2022-2024](#) retains the mission statement to ‘Keep People Safe’ and is set across five strategic pillars: Community, Tackling Crime & Preventative Policing, Victims & the Vulnerable, Protecting the Security of the Irish State, and Sustainable Change & Innovation. These pillars are supported by five enablers, which demonstrates the intrinsic role of the key enabling functions: People & Purpose, Partnerships, Engagement, Empowerment & Trust, and Information-Led Policing.

2.3 Policing Plan

The [annual Policing Plan](#) (the Plan) is the vehicle through which the medium term objectives contained in both the Priorities and the Strategy will be realised. Each Plan sets out specific actions, with accompanying targets and milestones, concerned with providing a fit-for-purpose policing service and policing organisation. These actions represent the areas of primary focus for the organisation, its management, and workforce for the year ahead and provide a lens through which performance is to be measured for that year. As with the Strategy, the Plan is drawn up by the Commissioner in accordance with the Act, and approved by the Authority with the consent of the Minister for Justice.

Since 2019, the annual Policing Plans have also addressed the actions assigned to the Garda Síochána under ‘A Policing Service for the Future’ (APSF): an implementation plan for the recommendations arising from the Government’s [Policing Reform programme](#).

The Policing Plan 2023 is the second of three annual Plans that will give effect to the Strategy 2022-2024. It is structured around the five Strategy pillars and enablers outlined above. In his foreword to the Strategy, the Commissioner notes that it *“will give effect to our strategic priorities of strengthening community partnerships, proactively preventing, disrupting and detecting crime, supporting the needs of victims, and safeguarding the security of the State”*, supported by the rollout of the Operating Model and other key modernisation projects that will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation.

3 Progress Against the Policing Plan 2023

This section provides an overview of performance of the Garda Síochána against the Policing Plan in the first half of 2023. Given that most, if not all, of the targets within the Plan anticipate year-end delivery of their outputs or outcomes, and as such are ongoing, the assessment here is focused at a high level. A broader and more comprehensive commentary and assessment on performance against the Plan and its constituent targets will be provided in the full-year Assessment of Policing Performance.

At a high level, performance against Policing Plan 2023 at the half-year point continues a trend seen in recent years. While 13 of the 23 targets within the Plan are reported to the Authority as being ‘on-target’, there are very real impacts on the Plan arising from ongoing resourcing issues.

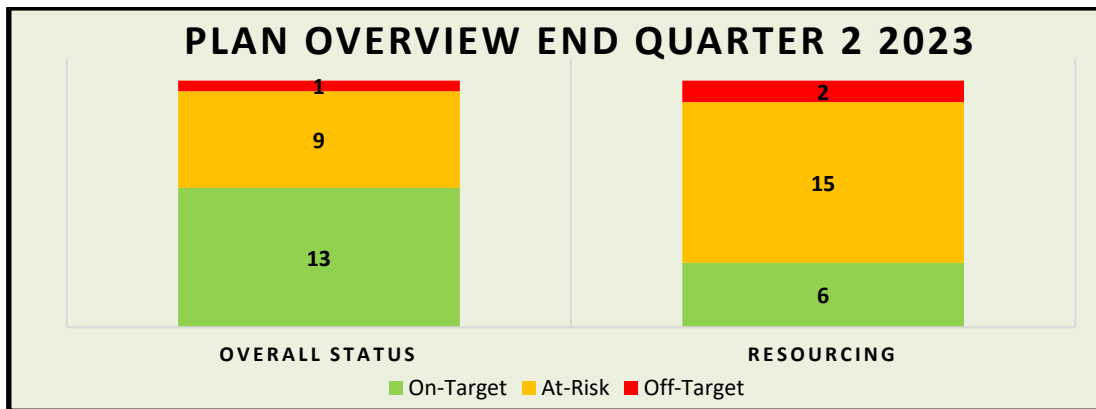


Figure 1: Garda Síochána RAG Status update against the Policing Plan at end Q2

As can be seen from the chart above, 15 of the targets are reported as ‘at-risk’ from a resource perspective, with two – the Operating Model and the ICT Strategy – being reported as ‘off-target’. This includes all 10 of the targets relating to the enabling functions (human resources, information and technology, finance and estate, etc.). These are areas that are critical to ensuring the organisation’s ability to deliver policing services and continue to improve and modernise. It is the experience of the Authority that a high proportion of targets that are ‘at-risk’ or ‘off-target’ at the mid-year point tend to end the year as partly or not achieved, in particular where these relate to resourcing issues.

As previous reports of the Authority have highlighted, these are not new challenges, although they are evolving. Nor are they confined to immediate impacts. As is detailed in the next section of the report, these resourcing challenges are having noticeable medium to long-term impacts on the ability of the Garda Síochána to meet its strategic goals and, insofar as is foreseeable, will continue to do so.

That notwithstanding, there continues to be considerable and tangible results delivered by the workforce of the Garda Síochána against the Plan in spite of these challenges, including:

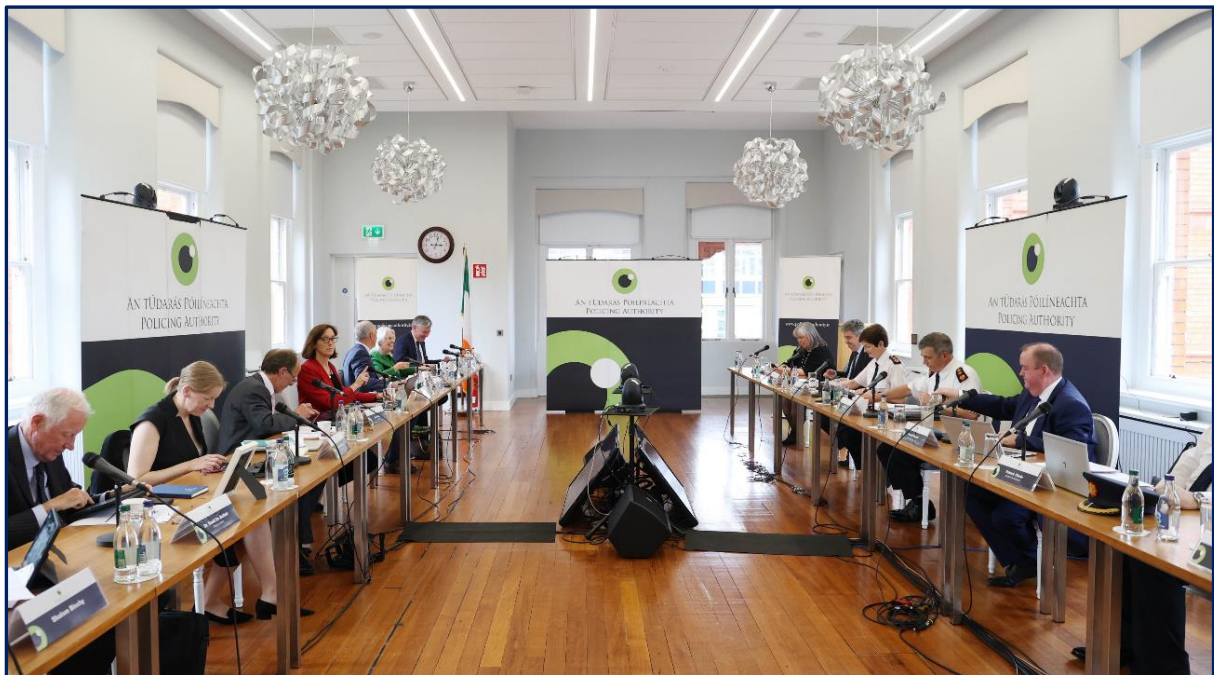
- The launch of GardaSafe (a new dispatch system designed to facilitate the most efficient and appropriate response to 999 calls) and its rollout to three of the four Regions;
- The continued rollout of the Operating Model; and,
- A continued high-level of community policing activity undertaken by Community Policing Units, the positive impacts of which are consistently referenced by communities through the Authority’s outreach and engagement programme.

4 Performance Against the Priorities

This section provides an assessment of Garda Síochána performance against the Policing Priorities 2022-2024 at the mid-term point of their implementation.

For each of the five Priorities, the desired outcome and key measures of success – established by the Authority to support the Priorities – are provided and there is an assessment provided on a number of the key areas of progress or challenge against each.

This assessment is provided in the context of quite significant resourcing challenges that are facing the Garda Síochána. The scale and impact of these challenges were detailed in the Assessment of Policing Performance 2022, published in April 2023. In that report, the Authority concluded that the issues pertaining to recruitment and retention were “...having a constricting effect on the organisation’s ability to meet the commitments set by the Commissioner to the public and to its own members in providing a fully modern policing service” and that this “...influence(s) the ability of the Garda Síochána to manage and achieve change with the necessary pace and thereby improve the service provided to all communities”. The issues highlighted at that time remain relevant and are commented upon again in this report. The priority ‘Development of the capacity to strategically manage Garda Resources’ is therefore given primary focus in this half-year assessment.



4.1 Development of the Capacity to Strategically Manage Garda Resources

Desired Outcome: To ensure that resources – finance, ICT and capital assets – are appropriately and strategically managed and deployed to support Garda members, Garda Staff and Garda Reserves.

To ensure that this workforce is appropriately trained, skilled, managed and supported to provide a service that responds to the crime environment and needs of the public.

Success will be measured by:

- Strategic workforce plan agreed by the leadership team and being implemented
- Operating Model being rolled out and functioning consistently and effectively across the country
- Increased financial capacity that allows for detailed financial management information and analysis to assist decision making
- A comprehensive estate strategy agreed by the leadership team and being implemented in conjunction with statutory partners
- Performance management system in place for every member of the workforce with evidence of active engagement
- Comprehensive training strategy in place and implemented with the necessary structures for delivery
- Governance reporting gives confidence that processes and policies are uniformly implemented across the organisation

High-level Assessment Against This Priority

Resourcing remains the most significant and impactful challenge on all functional areas. The Policing Plan reporting is a notable indicator of this. Critically the foundational, medium-to-long-term strategies concerning workforce planning, comprehensive estate management, and training remain outstanding. These are key elements to have in place so that the organisation can ensure it has the right people with the right skills and training in the right place at the right time. It is noted however that progress has been made on these, and the Authority hope to receive and engage on the final strategies in the coming months. While the Workforce Plan is awaited, there have been positive changes and progress made in the past 18 months that have offered greater insight into the enhanced HR planning and activity. Consideration has also been given to strategies that will allow for a greater pace of recruitment.

Financial capacity continues to be severely depleted and impactful on day-to-day requirements and the ability to implement necessary change.

While systems and policies for performance management are in place for members, meaningful progress is yet to be made in respect of embedding a culture of performance management in the organisation. This includes the continued lack of a performance management system for Garda staff. Deficits in such a culture are central to ongoing Authority work on workforce discipline and integrity.

In the main, it is difficult to offer confidence in the uniformity achieved in external service delivery or internal process and policy delivery at this this time. However, there has been progress in the tracking of recommendations, the development of outcome based reporting and internal assessment, and the capacity improvement of internal audit – all key elements of providing such confidence.

Ultimately, as has been seen in the performance reporting and commented on in all Authority assessments, this priority also impacts significantly on the other four which reemphasises the need for prioritisation of Garda Síochána attention.

Key Matters for Consideration

The limited capacity of the key enabling functions – namely, human resources (HR), training, ICT, finance and estate – to support policing service delivery and the effective and efficient management of the organisation of the Garda Síochána has been at the heart of all Authority assessments to-date. This is commensurate with the role that such enabling functions play in ensuring that the Garda Síochána and its workforce is in a position to provide the necessary services and to meet demand. In keeping with previous years, progress against this Priority and its constituent key areas continues to provide significant challenge for the organisation.

The main challenges in the current Priority period continues to be the ability to recruit members and staff at the necessary numbers and pace required to grow the organisation and to retain Garda staff.

Recruitment and Retention of Garda Staff

In respect of Garda staff, the organisation is experiencing both retention and recruitment challenges similar to the wider civil and public service. However, the necessary, but lengthy vetting and security clearance process creates a particular constraint. There are also considerable challenges being faced in recruiting staff at clerical grades due to the competitive employment market. At present there are approximately 500 staff vacancies concentrated at clerical grades, approximately 14% of the 3,650 approved Garda staff positions.

Compounding these issues is the primary challenge of retaining staff in the context of the uncertainty over staff terms and conditions in respect of the imminent implementation of the of the Policing, Security and Community Safety Bill in 2024. This Bill seeks to classify Garda staff as public servants of the Garda Síochána. These staff are currently civil servants of the Department of Justice and as such there are concerns that staff may lose access to terms such as access to mobility and certain promotion opportunities. Discussions on the details of the changes and impacts on staff are ongoing between the Department and staff unions. However in the interim this has resulted in an uncertain situation for staff who, as reported to the Authority, feel there has been a lack of clear and coherent information available.

As such, a high number of staff at the clerical grades are applying for transfers to other civil service roles – approximately 850 staff have formally registered their interest in transfers on civil service mobility (of which three-quarters are currently eligible). While the number of staff leaving on mobility so far in 2023 has been reduced compared to 2022, due to a six-month freeze on transfers in the first half of this year, this has now ended and it is anticipated that there could be a significant rate of attrition in the second half of the year. While earlier in the period and in numerical terms this mainly affects the clerical grades, increasingly it is leading to the loss of experienced and long-serving staff in critical senior roles.

Garda Staff Transfers Out 2020-23				
Transfer type	2020	2021	2022	2023*
Civil Service Mobility	7	42	115	43
Transfer on Promotion	13	47	66	39
Transfer (open competition)			6	2
Total	20	89	187	84

Table 1: Garda Staff transfers out to other civil/public service roles (to 31 May)*

These issues affecting the recruitment and retention of Garda staff is most notably having an impact on the ability of the wider enabling functions, including finance and ICT, to maintain the necessary pace of development and ability to respond to organisational demand. In respect of ICT, it is notable that the organisation continues to progress and deliver on key ICT projects such as the rollout of the new GardaSafe dispatch system. However, the ability of the organisation to maintain its previously articulated required pace of change in this area, and its ability to maximise the recent €21 million increase in its ICT budget is constrained by the significant staffing shortfalls it currently holds. In this vein, the Authority welcomes the move to utilise external partners to support the HR function in the recruitment of these critical roles.

A reduction in Garda staff numbers also threatens a reversal of the workforce modernisation project which saw in excess of 800 Garda members being released from back-office functions to front-line policing roles. The Authority understands that a number of these crucial roles have by necessity had to be reallocated to Garda members to cover staff vacancies.

Garda Numbers

As has been widely reported, there has also been a slight reduction in the number of Garda members. While this is in part due to an increase in resignations, the rate of resignations in 2022 was approximately 0.8% (109 members) and is envisaged to be similar in 2023. More significant is the rate of retirement (3.2% or 339 members in 2022) which is projected to rise in the medium term as a growing number of members become eligible for retirement or face compulsory retirement on age grounds. The Authority welcomes the current consideration being given to the age of compulsory retirement in this context.

Concerning Garda members, the more significant challenge is the ability of the organisation to recruit and train new members at sufficient pace, whilst retaining the high quality necessary. The impacts of COVID-19 on the capacity of the Garda College continue to be felt, with an estimated shortfall of approximately 1,350 new recruits and 1,000 new graduates in the period 2020-2022. These impacts continue to be felt in 2023, exacerbated by other factors including the aforementioned competitive employment market. It is estimated that new graduates from the College will amount to approximately half of the members leaving the service this year. The organisation is unlikely to achieve its target of 1,000 new recruits in 2023 due to these challenges, with 463 having commenced up to the end of September with a further two intakes of up to 225 planned by year end. Despite this intake at the College should exceed the number resigning and retiring and therefore, looking forward, the return to annual levels of intake to the College at a higher rate than those leaving the service offers encouragement for the return to increased Garda numbers in the coming years. However, it may take another 2-3 years before this impact is felt at a front-line level.

In this context, the development of a Recruitment & Retention Strategy is welcomed as is the recently announced increase in the Garda trainee allowance. It is also fitting and timely that consideration be given to measures such as specialist entry, wider entry criteria, employee support, etc. Nevertheless, there is a pressing need for the strategic workforce plan to be in place as a matter of urgency. It is vital that the organisation has clearly identified priorities for the resources it currently has and a roadmap to address the needs facing the organisation to deliver an effective policing service.

Operating Model

Staffing challenges are also affecting the implementation of the Operating Model (see right). The Model, which the Garda Síochána now hopes to have rolled out to all Divisions in 2024, is under considerable pressure due to the shortage of necessary Garda staff members. Despite this, the efforts of the organisation to maintain progress is a positive sign of commitment to the rollout and of the agility of the organisation to respond to challenges in the rollout – including active consideration of adaptations that have, and those that may, be needed to ensure its impacts are experienced to the greatest effect. Notably, there has been a realignment of divisional boundaries, following review, and a decision to move to 21 Divisions from the originally envisaged 19.

The Authority is aware that both within the Garda Síochána and among communities there are concerns regarding the Model and changes it will bring – including through direct communication with internal and external stakeholders. While concern in the context of such a comprehensive change programme is understandable, it appears to the Authority, following this extensive and ongoing engagement, that there is a conflation of the Model with a number of broader, concurrent changes and challenges.

In particular, the current resourcing challenges discussed above are often referenced in the context of the Model. However, while any such resourcing challenges would have impacts on any policing service organisational model, the Model itself does not necessarily create or exacerbate these challenges, rather the nature of modern crime demands a change in approaches to policing, including increased specialisation, for example, in the areas of cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent crime. In terms of service delivery, the Model should instead offer a greater level of specialist support and streamlining of such to allow greater Garda allocation to key areas such as community policing – insofar as resourcing allows. All operating models must necessarily be designed to withstand the natural fluctuations in resourcing.

Accordingly, the Authority retains the view that the implementation of the Model, as envisaged and if provided with the necessary resourcing, will enhance the ability of the Garda Síochána to provide a modern and fit-for-purpose policing service.

Operating Model

The Operating Model is a fundamental change to the organisational structure and operation of the Garda Síochána, at all levels. It will increase the management and resource autonomy of the divisions, supported by national and regional infrastructure, to deliver a more effective policing service.

The introduction of the Model reduces the number of Garda Divisions from 28 to 21, with an emphasis on the management of division-wide functions rather than geographic ‘Districts’. This means that instead of a Superintendent having responsibility for a small geographic area, they will have responsibility for managing a functional hub (crime, community policing, governance, or business services) across the division. The rollout places each division in one of four ‘phases’.

The Business Services function will enhance the Garda Síochána’s management of finance & logistics, administration and HR services at a divisional level, using specialised staff and new business practices, under the management of an Assistant Principal.

The all-encompassing nature of the model means that not only are wider projects dependent on the changes brought in by it, but also that the model’s success is dependent on a number of the other ongoing internal modernisation projects.

4.2 Protecting and Supporting Victims and the Vulnerable

Desired Outcome: To deliver a policing service to victims of sexual crime, domestic abuse and coercive control, that is victim centred, trauma-informed, effective in preventing and detecting these crimes, vindicates human rights, and trusted by victims.

Success will be measured by:

- Increased reporting and detection of sexual crime, domestic abuse and coercive control
- The implementation of the recommendations from the Garda Inspectorate’s report on Child Sexual Abuse
- Maintenance of the organisation’s response to domestic abuse to include the levels of victim engagement, victim risk assessments and engagement with partner organisations/agencies
- Increased cyber-crime capability resulting in higher detections of child sexual exploitation
- Implementation of the recommendations of the CAD/999 review process
- Consolidation of the operation of the Divisional Protective Services Units
- The rollout and review of the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment Tool to all members

High-level Assessment Against this Priority

Sexual crime, domestic abuse and coercive control are areas of serious harm and in the Authority consultation carried out with the public in May 2021, these emerged as the areas which most people would like to see prioritised by the Garda Síochána. This is further supported by the results of the Public Attitude Survey results on areas of prioritisation.

The Authority’s oversight activity has identified significant progress made in this area of policing, however there are also significant aspects that require continued focus. These include capacity around specialist interviewing and the examination of devices as well as consistency in the level of service offered to victims. Concerning detections rates for these crime types, it is hoped that an ongoing review and analysis of incidents may offer a roadmap for the Garda Síochána and its partners to continue to improve the supports offered to, and the outcomes achieved for victims.

There continues to be a long-term trend of increases in the reporting of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence offences, despite a small decrease in 2023 compared to 2022. In particular, there has been significant increases in reporting of coercive control and domestic violence following Operation Faoiseamh and related activities. The Authority continues to view this as a positive marker of increased confidence on the part of victims to report and engage in the criminal justice process and in the investigative and victim support efforts of the Garda Síochána.

Detection rates, as previously discussed by the Authority, can take in the region of 3 years to plateau and as such it is too early to assess overall impact of the above on these rates at present. However, there have been notable successes in Court in respect of coercive control cases and others. This is a metric that the Authority will continue to engage on with the Garda Síochána throughout the rest of the period.

Stakeholder feedback continues to suggest that while the specialist Divisional Protective Services Units (DPSUs) and wider projects continue to have a positive impact, there remain concerns relating to the general level of knowledge re civil law (barring orders, family law, etc.) and the level of consistency of service. Challenges remain in the wider ecosystem around capacity of the Courts, victim supports and accommodation for victims.

There has been progress in respect of the Garda Inspectorate report on Child Sexual Abuse although further progress remains to be made around information sharing and joint working processes (see

below). Relatedly, there has been significant progress in respect of cyber-crime capacity that has resulted in the reduction of case load from in excess of 700 to below 400 cases and the closure of all cases from before 2021. A significant proportion of these cases relate to child sexual abuse material. The implementation of CAD/999 recommendations continues, as does the internal, modular review of the DPSUs and the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment Tool although rolled out awaits its own review.

Key Matters for Consideration

Progress against this Priority is largely encouraging at this point in the strategy cycle. As noted in previous reports, including at the end of the 2019-2021 period, there was a significant step-change in the approach to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV) in the period 2017-2021 with the establishment of the DPSUs, a renewed focus and cultural shift in respect of responding to DSGBV, and the introduction of important supporting legislative and policy. The impacts of this foundational work continues to be felt with increased reporting over the medium-term, most significantly in respect of incidents of domestic abuse and coercive control. There has been a small decrease thus far in 2023 in respect of reported sexual offences – compared to 2022– although it is too early to determine whether this is part of a trend of plateauing or decrease in reporting.

In line with the increased reporting of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence there has been an increase in the number of overall detections although, given the lengthy investigative and court processes that are typical of these crime types, it is not yet possible to offer definitive assessment on the impact on detection rates.

Nevertheless the production by the Garda Síochána of a report entitled *Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence: A Report on Crime levels and Garda Operational Responses* and the progression towards establishing outcome based reporting on DSGBV and other crime types by the end of 2023 is welcomed and should both offer the Garda Síochána and partners in the criminal justice system, among others, further insight to inform the strategic and operational response to DSGBV and the protection of victims.

Similarly, the Authority has heard from front-line units that the significant increase in resourcing to the Garda National Cyber Crime Bureau (GNCCB) and the Bureau's resultant success in reducing the caseload of devices awaiting their examination has resulted in notable improvements for investigations. Given the centrality of this aspect of investigative work in the identification of children who may be victims of sexual abuse offences in Ireland or abroad this is notable and important progress. Locally, the capacity of investigating units, in particular Divisional Protective Services Units, continues to present a challenge as there are considerable workload pressures on members undertaking these investigations. In this vein, the Authority welcomes the ongoing review of the DPSUs, including analysis of their workload, and will continue to engage on the outcomes of this work as well as on related matters of Garda workforce wellbeing.

Victim Support and Engagement

In terms of victim engagement, for domestic abuse the Garda Síochána are maintaining a national monthly average above 70% for follow-up contacts with victims of domestic abuse within 7 days in the 2022-2024 period (up from 44.4% in the 2016-2021 period). More broadly, there has been an

increase in the average contacts undertaken with each victim in this period and the Public Attitude Survey results for 2022 indicate that although there are still notable levels of dissatisfaction among victims on the level of information provided to them and their overall perceptions of the Garda Síochána, improvements have been made. It is important that this progress is built upon in the remainder of the strategy period to ensure that victims receive an appropriate response and ongoing service.

Supporting Children as Victims

Regarding children, the Authority welcomes the progress made so far in the period in implementing the recommendations from the Garda Inspectorate's report on Child Sexual Abuse, including the introduction of a Memorandum of Understanding regarding information sharing with TUSLA, and the related commencement of an enhanced, electronic notification system of alerts between the organisations. However, there are considerable concerns held by the Authority in respect of the capacity of the organisation to work with partners to ensure a timely response to reports of child sexual abuse, primarily the prompt undertaking of joint-agency interviews. The Authority has been informed of timelines extending into weeks before necessary interviews with children take place following initial assessments. While capacity constraints in respect of suitably trained interviewers from the Garda Síochána and partner agencies and the availability of appropriate interview suites have been outlined, it is intolerable that such delays can take place in respect of the investigation of these cases. The piloting of the Barnahus model in Galway – a child-friendly, interagency response model to child sexual abuse that is trauma informed and designed to provide a more efficient and protective response – is welcomed and feedback from all stakeholders appears to be positive, although a recent interim report has identified issues pertaining to information sharing and communication between partners.

In the coming 18 months the Authority will continue to monitor the above and engage with the Garda Síochána and stakeholders on the impact of the completed rollout of the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment Tool and the any changes that are prompted by the ongoing review of DPSUs. In particular, the Authority is eager to see progress made in respect of child-interviewing, consistency of service to victims of DSGBV, and Garda members concerns regarding the capacity and resourcing of DPSUs.

4.3 Supporting and Ensuring Community Safety

Desired Outcome: To understand and respond to anti-social behaviour, crime, and associated quality of life issues for communities. To address these in conjunction with its partners in a way that prevents crime, reduces fear, and results in a better quality of life for communities.

Success will be measured by:

- Rollout of the Community Policing Framework, including a review of its effectiveness and impact
- Policing with communities builds on the learning and retains the approach and tone of contact achieved during the COVID-19 period
- Fear of crime being lower with increased confidence in the policing response to crime
- Strengthened interagency working at strategic national level and at local level as reported through the Authority’s stakeholder engagement with NGOs, community groups, and statutory bodies
- Positive engagement in the establishment and commencement of activity of the Community Safety Partnerships
- Implementation of the Garda Reserve Strategy
- Continued rollout of the Divisional Diversity Forums and facilitating of the National Diversity Forum.
- Increased reporting and detection of hate crimes

High-Level Progress Against this Priority

Progress against this Priority has been subject to a number of delays and challenges in the first 18 months; including the rollout of the Community Policing Framework which has been impacted by the resourcing issues and Operating Model delays. Central engagement with the Divisions is reported as underway to better understand the barriers to implementation within divisions. The Garda Reserve Strategy is also behind target owing to resourcing and legislative requirements and the National Diversity Forum has paused its operation since mid-2022 owing to the need to redraft the terms of reference.

Anti-social behaviour, high-volume crime such as shoplifting and assaults and fear of crime remain significant issues for communities. There is, in the Authority’s experience, a shared acknowledgement of the multi-agency nature of the necessary response. In this vein the feedback from the Garda Síochána and other stakeholders concerning the Local Community Safety Partnership pilots has been positive.

Reviews into COVID-19 period engagement and practice were never meaningfully progressed by the organisation. Notwithstanding the extraordinary demands placed on the Garda Síochána to undertake non-policing duties, this measure was provided to capture the need to reflect on the tone and approach undertaken during COVID-19, in particular with minority communities.

The Diversity Forum, as established, remains paused as discussions continue on the Terms of Reference. The Divisional equivalents have not progressed but are included in the draft Plan 2024. The online reporting of hate crime has been a notable success with high levels of use – similar to the level of reporting to the Irish Network Against Racism. Improvements to response and ultimately detection in this area remains to be fully assessed.

The high-rate of reporting of hate crime to the Garda Síochána following the launch of the online reporting facility is welcomed and will hopefully lead to the improved recording incidents and crimes motivated by hate and allow for a greater level of response.

The engagement of the Garda Síochána in the pilots of the [Community Safety Partnerships](#) (CSPs) is also welcomed. The CSPs are local authority area based forums that bring together local representatives, the Garda Síochána and partner agencies (such as the local authority, other state agencies and community groups) to respond to local issues of crime and anti-social behaviour.

Key Matters for Consideration

Community policing and engagement consistently is cited as a priority for communities during Authority outreach meetings. In this regard, there is a clear appreciation for the work undertaken by members in Community Policing Units and those that are assigned to the role of Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs). Indeed, there is a huge demand for more community policing among communities and a considerable level of praise for the work done in this area. Although visibility and resources in community policing remain frequent issues for communities.

The Specialist Role of Community Policing

The Garda Síochána organisation has consistently maintained that every member of the Garda Síochána has community policing responsibilities. While this is true, the organisation has, through the introduction of the Community Policing Framework, recognised that community policing is a specialist function delivered through dedicated community policing units within Divisions, guided and supported by the Garda National Community Engagement Bureau, and the creation of Community Engagement hubs within the Operating Model.

Highlighting the impact of community policing as a specialist function, the Authority has repeatedly heard that communities believe community policing is the key element from a policing perspective in creating safer communities. It is the main focal point for their interaction with the organisation, and it has a key role to play in combating serious crime and ensuring and building public confidence and trust. There is a notable appreciation for the skills, knowledge and expertise that these members have developed to the benefit of the local community; traits that are also clear to the Authority in its engagements with these units.

Nevertheless, there has been a consistent concern relayed to the Authority, both internal to and external from the Garda Síochána, as to the level of resourcing available to and ring-fenced for community policing. The Authority has heard consistently over its lifetime that the impacts of the economic downturn in the 2008-2011 period and the subsequent effects on Garda resources had a significantly detrimental impact on these dedicated community policing, particularly the transfer of members in these units to other duties. Similar pressures are currently being experienced by the Garda Síochána in the context of the current resourcing challenges and it is clear that community policing can often be one of the first areas that loses resources.

However, if the organisation is to maintain the relationships it has built with the communities it serves and continue to achieve community level impacts then this must be reflected in the strategic positioning and resourcing of community policing. This should include the reflection on the Community Policing Framework – following engagement with the Divisions – and the ways in which this can support a greater consistency to the way in which community policing is resourced and operationally positioned within Divisions.

Link between Community Policing and the Wider Organisation

Feedback from stakeholders, supported by observed experience of the Authority, is that there can be a disconnect between community policing functions and the rest of the organisation, with community policing units becoming siloed. There has also been a sense of a perception within the organisation that community policing is seen as a 'softer' side of policing, that there is a hierarchy whereby it can be perceived as having lesser importance than other policing functions, and that community engagement is the sole preserve of community policing units. However, as stated there is an expectation that every member of the Garda Síochána has community policing and engagement responsibilities.

This is not universal, and there are examples of strong collaboration and integration between units – leading to considerable policing success and outcomes for communities. However it is clear to the Authority that as a result, the perception and experience of many communities, in particular minority or socio-economically deprived communities is of two contrasting policing services.

As mentioned, there appears to be an almost universally positive experience of community policing members and members holding the role of JLO, including in instances of where these members are engaged in the cautioning, searching, or arresting of individuals. There is, in the main, a stated recognition of these members managing to balance their roles of engaging with communities with their roles exercising their policing powers of search, arrest, etc.

Of concern to the Authority are the reported widespread examples of where members in other units fail to adequately appreciate and understand the dual role, with allegations of aggressive and inappropriate verbal or physical behaviour on the part of Garda members of wider units, in particular towards young people. While it may be anticipated that there is a perception of inevitability of such complaints on the part of individuals or communities, particularly those that are engaged in or experience a high-level of criminality, in fact there are many in these communities that have articulated a support for the Garda Síochána generally and a want of increased policing interventions and preventative actions. Crucially however, this is expected, as it should be, in a manner that is proportional, fair, non-discriminatory and consistent with the rights and responsibilities that come with the extraordinary powers conferred on members of the Garda Síochána.

These are challenges and experiences that highlight the need for a coherent and fit-for purpose strategic approach and operational structure that enable effective community policing, including a clear sense of the roles and expectations of all members and staff of the Garda Síochána, not just those in community policing roles. It also highlights the need for a robust performance management system.

4.4 Tackling Organised and Serious Crime

Desired Outcome: To prevent and disrupt the activities of organised criminals, including those of international networks engaged in national and transnational crime and reduce their impact on communities.

Success will be measured by:

- Organised Crime being disrupted as evidenced by preservation of life, seizures of weapons, drugs and assets and successful convictions
- At community level, attempts by organised criminals to engage young people in criminality and drugs intimidation being increasingly disrupted
- Increased capacity to prevent and respond to cyber-crime including a reduction of the backlog of seized ICT devices leading to increased detections and convictions
- Increased capacity to prevent and respond to corruption, fraud, and other economic crime types.

High-Level Progress Against this Priority

The continued priority placed on these areas for communities is significant. The impacts of drug and drug related crime are consistently cited as the main challenge for communities regardless of geographic location, socio-economic background, or other factors. This includes the grooming of young people into organised crime activity. Beyond this, the activities of organised crime groups (burglary, theft, online fraud, etc.) continue to be areas of community concern.

At a high-level there is continued success in respect of the response to organised crime with major national and international groups being disrupted (Drogheda Feud, Kinahan Group, Black Axe, cyber-crime groups, etc.). This is seen in particular in the metrics regarding seizures on the part of the Garda Síochána as well as Revenue and the Criminal Assets Bureau. The increasingly international activity of Irish groups, and activity of internal groups in Ireland highlight the importance of retained focus on these matters despite progress.

The impact at community level remains to be meaningfully felt in many communities, although the success achieved in Drogheda must be noted (see Section 5). Drug related intimidation (DRI) and local dealing remain ubiquitous. The Garda Síochána and community groups have spoken to the significant challenges and impacts of DRI. A pilot for DRI in Dublin Metropolitan Region North Division and a pilot approach to targeting fraud/monetary offences of known drug gangs have indicated success through charges and prosecutions. The backlog in the Courts remains a significant issue for the Garda Síochána, including impacts arising from the number of offenders released on bail.

As noted, cyber-crime is an area of considerable success however there has been little progress in respect of enhancing the capacity of the organisation to respond to economic crime trends and the implementation of Hamilton recommendations. The Authority understands that the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) and senior management are redrafting a resourcing plan for GNECB and looks forward to engaging on same. Engagement with frontline members and with international research continues to reemphasise the central role of fraud and money laundering in practically all other criminal activity. Similarly, technological devices are a key feature of practically all investigations. As such, a continued high prioritisation of capacity and capability in these areas appears warranted.

Key Matters for Consideration

As noted in previous reports there have been considerable successes in the response to organised crime in recent years, in particular the response to the Kinahan and Hutch organised crime groups. This success has continued in the last 18 months with: significant international partnership working to disrupt organised crime groups engaged in drug, economic and cyber crimes; the arrest, charging and sentencing of key individuals engaged in organised crime activity; the continued interception and seizure of drugs, assets and cash; the maintaining of no threat-to-life incidents related to the activities of organised crime groups recorded; and the engagement at local level with partners to examine approaches to disrupt criminal networks engaging children in crime.

Drug and Drug Related Crime at Community Level

Nevertheless, there continues to be a very prevalent level of drug and drug related crime – in particular street level drug crime and drug related intimidation (DRI) – and engaging of young people in criminal activity. This is consistently the areas of concern that are raised with the Authority by communities. While the Garda Síochána continues to respond to these issues there is an enduring and unyielding challenge in the embedded nature of drugs in society – a challenge that is confronting police services worldwide.

While there is a requirement for a policing responses, such as those listed above, it is an established fact that policing cannot prevent or tackle the impacts of drug and drug-related crime in isolation, in particular where it comes to ensuring the prevention and diversion of children of becoming engaged in criminal activity.

For example, the Garda Síochána has recognised public support has been and remains vital for the success achieved given the role of communities in providing reports/information but there is also acknowledgement that either out of fear or perceived lack of outcome, there remains a challenge in reporting for many within communities – in particular when it comes to DRI. In recognition of this, the Department of Health led [DRIVE \(Drug-related Intimidation & Violence Engagement\) programme](#) was commenced in 2022 as an interagency project (on which the Garda Síochána is a partner) to provide support victims of DRI and their families through the provision of confidential support, advice and access to services. At time of writing, DRIVE projects have been established 13 of the 24 Local Drug & Alcohol Task Force areas across the country. The Authority will continue to engage with the Garda Síochána to understand the impacts of the project in supporting victims and policing responses.

More broadly, the Garda Síochána is also working with statutory and non-statutory stakeholders, including community groups, sports organisations, schools, etc. to respond to drug and drug related crime, including as it relates to children. However there are broader societal trends, influences and factors that require addressing, as reflected in the National Drugs Strategy. A key challenge faced by the Garda Síochána is reported as being the inconsistent nature of wider service provision and the capacity of those services, including addiction services, youth services, etc. Another significant barrier reported by Garda members is the backlog of cases before the Courts. This raises a particular issue whereby those arrested and charged on offences, such as drug offences, are released on bail pending trial. This process that can take up to a year or longer which allows the individual to potentially return to engaging in criminality and also presents the Garda Síochána with a level of bail supervision activity that is unsustainable.

Economic and Cyber Crime

Regarding economic crime, the medium-term resourcing plan for the GNECB, as required under the Government implementation to respond to the recommendations of the Hamilton review into economic crime, is now two years overdue. However, the Authority understands that a revised resourcing plan is being prepared in the context of the recommendations and economic crime trends but also the current resourcing pressures faced by the organisation. The Authority is on record as to the importance of a clear strategic vision for the Garda Síochána to meet the increased demands posed by economic crime, including money laundering activity as an essential function of broader criminal activity, and address the deficits identified by the Hamilton Review. In the context of the ongoing resourcing challenges, the Authority recognises that the scale of increase in resources to GNECB may not be to the extent that the Garda Síochána may have originally wanted, nor to that which was envisaged by Hamilton, however it is critical that nevertheless there is a commitment and focus given to capacity building insofar as is possible; accordingly, it looks forward to engaging with the resourcing plan once received.

In the interim, the progress made in 2023 in addressing GNECB backfill vacancies and continued efforts to provide training at divisional level is noted and it is hoped this provides a foundation for growth in line with the above, awaited resourcing plan. Given the critical resourcing issues reported to the Authority, it is vital that this momentum is maintained, including the resultant constraints on the operations of the bureau and support it can offer the divisions, and the fact that Ireland's approach to financial crime remains a subject of international scrutiny.

In respect of cyber-crime, as noted under the previous priority, front-line units engaged with in recent months have noted the positive impact of the establishment of the regional cyber-crime hubs in locations throughout the country and the overall increase in Garda National Cyber Crime Bureau (GNCCB) resources. Notably, it is reported that the case load in GNCCB in June 2023 was representative of an approximate 50% decrease from the same point in 2022 and that the bureau has achieved a number of targets in respect of closing cases from previous years. This is a significant success in a short timeframe for the Garda Síochána and it is hoped that further progress can be made by the end of the period with further specialist staff recruitment planned and two further cyber-crime hubs to be established. This should allow the further development of other functions within the bureau and the continuance of the enhanced support offered to crime prevention and investigation, in particular child sexual abuse material cases.

4.5 Rights Based and Ethical Service Delivery

Desired Outcome: To deliver a policing service in a manner that ensures that all those who come into contact with the Garda Síochána are dealt with in a way that: understands, respects and embodies diversity; vindicates and protects their human rights; is consistent with the Code of Ethics; and, is centred on the Garda Decision Making Model.

Success will be measured by:

- The embedding of human rights, the Code of Ethics and the Decision Making Model in all strategic planning and service delivery functions
- The degree to which the public believes that the Garda Síochána would treat both themselves and all members of the Community fairly
- The successful rollout of, including training of all members in the use of, the Decision Making Model
- All policies existing and new are human rights proofed, to include any policy relating to regarding the use of new technologies for policing
- The routine publication by the Garda Síochána of progressively more data and information, e.g. on its use of force and its use of any exceptional powers.
- The development of the organisational capacity and systems to publish, interrogate and respond to data and information that demonstrates the degree to which policing is fair, impartial, and non-discriminatory
- Increased diversity within the Garda Síochána workforce
- Positive improvement in the lived experience of policing within communities
- Development of the anti-corruption unit and implementation of an intoxicant testing regime and an internal vetting process
- Culture Audit outcomes demonstrate positive cultural change.

High-Level Progress Against this Priority

The Code of Ethics and Garda Decision Making Model have been fully rolled out, with training delivered and the overall impact of them are being reviewed. This is similarly true in respect of human rights training, with a large cohort of the Garda Síochána now trained in Policing and Human Rights through the University of Limerick. At a strategic policy level the embedding of human rights remains an active question, and engagement continues on this matter.

The organisation has increased its publication of data on use of force but further data or information concerning fairness in policing, community perceptions, etc. remains largely reliant on the Public Attitude Survey.

A recent Central Statistics Office publication about the diversity of the workforce has highlighted the lack of diversity of the organisation. This has been an area of focus for the Garda Síochána over the Priority period to-date and was a key pillar of the recent recruitment campaign, although data is not yet available. The Garda Internship Programme undertaken in 2022 was considered a success and is being undertaken for a second iteration.

While the culture audit was not directly comparable due to a change in supplier and methodology, there were positive indications of change. The Authority welcomes the work conducted following the publication of the results and is looking forward to the implementation plan to which the Garda Síochána has committed and the ongoing measurement of cultural change.

The Authority continues its focus on matters of discipline and Garda integrity. The implementation of an intoxicant testing regime and an internal vetting process is ongoing despite delays relating to legislative requirements and will continue into 2024. As such, despite the progress made this priority

area continues to require considerable oversight attention and is increasingly central to public confidence.

Key Matters for Consideration

In its reflection on the period 2019-2021 and the Assessment of Performance 2022, the Authority recognised the significant commitment of effort and resources that the organisation had made in developing an enhanced infrastructure of policies, processes and dedicated units to reaffirm and embed the necessary standards, ethics and behaviours within the organisation and ensure that these were at the heart of service delivery.

However, as noted in the Assessment of Policing Performance 2022 “...attention must now turn to understanding the impact of this significant investment in rolling out these initiatives. In particular there must be a reflection on the extent to which these initiatives have enhanced the understanding of ethical behaviours and human rights obligations; provided a critical mass of members and staff to enable those obligations to be embedded; effected cultural change; and, allowed delivery at a pace sufficient to equip members and staff with the appropriate skills and knowledge to allow for the desired human rights foundation in the provision of day-to-day services...

Similarly, the important delivery of a dedicated human rights unit must be followed by an assessment of the extent to which it is appropriately embedded within the organisation and is in the necessary strategic and operational position to provide guidance and influence on policy and practice”.

The Authority maintains this position and is of the view that there is considerable work still to be undertaken by the Garda Síochána in the coming 18 months to ensure delivery against the Priorities and to ensure the maximise the return on the investment made to date in the workforce for the betterment of the policing service provided to communities. It is apparent to the Authority through the wide range of stakeholder engagements undertaken in the past 18 months, and supported by research including the Public Attitude Survey and that conducted by the Irish Travellers' Access to Justice research group, that a number of minority and seldom heard communities – including those living in socio-economically deprived areas – continue to experience policing in a manner that differs negatively from the general population.

It also remains unclear to the Authority as to the extent to which the Human Rights Unit, the Human Rights Advisor and the Strategic Human Rights Advisory Committee are firmly embedded within the organisations policy drafting, formation and review processes. For example, given the critical role of the Garda Síochána in ensuring and protecting the rights of all parties in an increasingly febrile and targeted protest environment, it is vital that strategic and operational management, as well as front-line members, are provided with accurate and clear advices and orders that are robust in their consideration of human rights and the limitations of those rights if/when they impede on the rights and safety of others. These are matters that the Authority will continue to retain a keen focus on in the coming months.

5 Reflection on Local Engagements

The experiences of local communities and front-line Gardaí are central pillars to the Authority's assessment of the Garda Síochána's performance and the impacts of the implementation of the Performance Framework. To understand these experiences, the Authority undertakes regular in-depth engagements with local Garda management, front-line members, and local statutory and non-statutory partners – including stakeholder groups involved in areas such as youth services, addiction services, victim support, etc.

These engagements provide the Authority with an invaluable insight into the realities of policing within different divisions, including notable successes achieved and challenges faced, as well as into the experience of the wider community in working, interacting and engaging with the Garda Síochána. That interaction and engagement has been as partners, stakeholders, victims and suspects.

These engagements and others throughout the country with the Garda workforce at all levels and with wider stakeholders have helped to inform this report, its previous iteration (assessing performance in 2022) and the What We Heard Report – a summary of the lived experiences of policing, as reflected to the Authority.

They have also been the basis for four of the Authority's monthly meetings with the Commissioner which have been held around the country with an emphasis on discussing and exploring local policing challenges. These meetings were held in: Monaghan (May 2022), Portlaoise (November 2022), Dublin's North East Inner City (April 2023), and Drogheda (June 2023).

The Authority was struck in particular by a number of themes that emerged across its engagements in Drogheda that align with the assessment provided in the previous section. As such, this section provides an overview of some of these themes that may offer an insight in the considerable success that can be achieved for communities by the Garda Síochána and its partners and perhaps provide learnings for policing going forward.

5.1 Coordinated Response to Organised Crime

As was covered extensively by national media in the period 2018-2021, in mid-2018 there was a sudden rapid escalation in gang-related violence due to a feud between two rival organised groups involved in the drug trade operating in Drogheda which saw with multiple shootings, petrol bombings, and assaults. A number of these acts – including shootings – occurred in broad daylight as innocent bystanders, including children, were engaged in their day-to-day activities. Typically these incidents led to further violence by way of retaliation, including the frequent petrol bombing of houses. This violence continued through 2019-2021 and led to the loss of a number of lives, including the murder of a 17-year-old child in early 2020.

In response, in October 2018 the Garda Síochána increased the resources deployed to Drogheda (including 30 newly attested Gardaí) and launched a dedicated operational response – Operation Stratus – that involved local Garda units and well as the support of Divisional, Regional and National units – including the deployment of the armed Emergency Response Unit to the town in early 2019. This led to a significant increase in Garda activity, namely in excess of 7,000 patrols, approximately 4,300 checkpoints, targeted searches and operations that resulted in 119 charges, 79 arrests and 100 summons in 2018/19 alone (see table right).

Year	Charges	Arrests	Summons
2018	32	22	15
2019	87	57	85
2020	179	106	134
2021	59	18	20
2022	17	*	12

Table 2: Outputs of GS activity under Operation Stratus. As provided by the Minister of Justice to the Oireachtas, March 2023 (data for 2022 arrests and 2023 not provided due to small numbers)

While violence continued into 2020, onward through 2021/2022, and maintains a presence in 2023, it has become much reduced in this time frame as the Garda Síochána and partner agencies have achieved noteworthy success in responding to the activity or the organised crime groups – as indicated in the above table. Estimates provide that approximately 900 drug crimes were recorded, with €6m worth of drugs and €1.5m in cash seized, under Operation Stratus. The onset of COVID-19 in March 2020 and the associated lockdowns are credited with having a positive impact as they limited the movement and activity of the groups. Simultaneously, it was reported that a number of high-profile individuals central to the feud left the town in the wake of the increased violence and Garda activity.

Community Focused Approach

While the positive feedback on the operational policing response from stakeholders and community groups may be anticipated in light of this success, the Authority is struck by the extent to which the tone and approach to policing has also been praised. In the context of the siloed nature of community policing and engagement that has been experienced more broadly (detailed under 3.2 in the previous section), it is striking that in such a pressurised and volatile operating context the Garda Síochána locally have retained such positive community relations and that there has been an absence of reports of inappropriate Garda behaviours or use of force made to the Authority.

It was evident to the Authority that there is a closer working relationship between units than has been observed in other areas. In particular, the drugs unit and community policing units spoke fluently on their joint working with the former articulating well the centrality of engagement and protection of the community, including young people, in their work. The Garda Síochána at front-line and Divisional management level credit this to a strategic approach to Operation Stratus, whereby the ongoing management and planning involved extensive input from community policing units, including the Juvenile Liaison Officers.

It appears, based on the Authority’s engagements in the town, this ensured that the community were at the heart of the response, including in complex situations where young people found themselves simultaneously as victims of grooming into organised crime activity and perpetrators of crime. This approach and the commitment that local Gardaí have shown to their engagement roles has had an evident impact and has ensured that the Garda Síochána was able to balance the achievement of the significant disruption of organised crime with the retention of a victim and community focus.

It is also noteworthy that although there were increases to the Garda resources in Drogheda there were also a number of strategic approaches taken to ensure that resources were utilised to their utmost effect. This resulted in significantly positive outcomes for Drogheda, and also provided efficiencies that allowed for a retention of these impacts when the additional national and regional resources were reassigned to support policing in other areas. Namely, this includes the establishment of a specialised digital investigation unit to ensure maximum value is gained from CCTV footage, evidence from seized phones, etc. and a move to targeting known individuals and their networks for money laundering offences, thus impacting the assets of the organised crime groups. In the years 2019 to 2021 Drogheda saw an increase from 0 to 19 money laundering prosecutions; a tactic that continues to be employed with effect currently.

5.2 Multi-agency working to ensure community safety

It must be noted that the Garda Síochána did not achieve this success in isolation, as was stressed consistently by members of the organisation.

Following the onset of the feud, and significant public protest and appeals for increased multi-agency state intervention, the Minister of Justice appointed former Director of the Probation Service, Mr Vivian Geiran, in August 2020 to *“assess the current issues in the round... identifying measures that could be taken to improve the situation and...chart a path to improved community wellbeing and related outcomes in and around Drogheda”*. The resultant final report [Drogheda: Creating a Bridge to a Better Future](#), provided 73 recommendations to improve community safety and wellbeing in Drogheda, relating to key themes including: addressing crime; drug use; specific services for children and young people; ethnic and racial issues; etc. As per the report’s proposal, a coordination structure was put in place to oversee the implementation of the recommendations - the [Drogheda Implementation Board](#) (DIB).

The DIB is the coordinator of the implementation of the recommendations and its membership includes: Louth and Meath County Councils; the Garda Síochána; the North East Regional Drug and Alcohol Taskforce; local education representatives; the HSE; community sector organisations; TUSLA; and, the Probation Service. As per the Report these representatives are at senior (‘decision making’) level: *“Board membership needs to be tight enough to be effective and just wide enough to cover necessary range of services and decision-makers. Target and outcome-focused, meet monthly, with priority on completing action plan items”*. The DIB continues to meet monthly and its continuation into 2024 was recently confirmed. It is supported by four working groups including one on Policing and Drugs, chaired by the Garda Síochána.

From engaging with the Garda Síochána and numerous stakeholder bodies in the town, it is clear to the Authority that the DIB provided crucial strategic planning and direction. Through its membership it enabled the Garda Síochána to access the multi-agency support required to not only respond to the organised crime challenges but to ensure a response to the wider, but not unconnected, crime, anti-social and quality of life issues. These include: an enhanced awareness of issues affecting communities, and clear cooperative responses; improvements in the response to issues pertaining to drug use; engagement with and support of young people; and broader community outreach.

For their part, the Garda Síochána have been quick to praise the impact of the DIB as a vehicle for inter-agency working and have been clear that without it there would be a far lesser impact achieved to-date.

There are undoubtedly considerable learnings that can be taken from the structure and approach of the DIB that would help to inform a framework within which to ensure adequate multi-agency support for the Garda Síochána. In the context of an increasingly complex range of demands on policing, such structures of mutual accountability and enhanced cooperation are increasingly vital to effective service delivery.

5.3 Ongoing Response

At a high level, the feedback from stakeholders has been significantly positive in the main as it relates to the role of the Garda Síochána in responding to the feud and the ongoing response to crime in Drogheda. There has been notable praise for local management its commitment to the implementation of the recommendations – including those tangential to policing – and the activity of the community policing unit. However, there are persistent challenges and the Garda Síochána and its partners are continuing to respond to crime and anti-social behaviour and the implementation of the Guerin report recommendations through the DIB is ongoing.

It is reported by stakeholders that there continues to be high levels of drug crime at a local level, and significant levels of drug related intimidation (DRI). As has been noted by the Garda Síochána in Drogheda and nationally, DRI is recognised as a persistent and pernicious challenge. While there continues to be a level of serious organised crime activity and violence, this is described as significantly reduced in terms of frequency and severity compared to levels seen at the height of the feud. This is reflected in the Central Statistics Office recorded crime statistics and there have been decreases since the height of the feud in 2018-2020 in the categories: Robbery, Extortion and Hijacking; Controlled Drug Offences; Weapons and Explosives Offences; Damage to Property and the Environment; and, Offences against Government, Justice Procedures and Organisation of Crime. Nevertheless, significant Garda attention and resources continue to be required to respond to organised crime groups in the town.

Similarly there has been feedback that the response to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, outside of the Divisional Protective Service Unit, can exhibit inconsistencies in approach. In particular victim engagement and the consistency with which barring orders and other civil law matters are approached. These are not specific to Drogheda and the Authority is aware of similar feedback throughout the country. Accordingly, it is subject to ongoing focus and attention.

There are also reported issues of consistency of service and engagement delivered to all communities and a universal desire for a greater level of community policing resources – feedback that is consistently provided to the Authority nationwide. Stakeholders have recognised the commitment, focus and interest among members in engaging in community policing and community engagement activities – including the provision of general policing advice through clinics and casual encounters. There was also praise for the engagement with young people's and men's groups in particular, with members described as frequently attending days out and dropping into centres. As such, the desire for more resources in community policing can be viewed as a commentary on the quality of service provided but also on the lack of capacity to fully meet the needs and wants of the

community generally. Given the crucial role that community policing had in the success outlined earlier in this section the Authority believes this is a point that warrants in-depth reflection.

5.4 Internal Learning and Reflection

As has been detailed throughout this section, the policing response to the feud and wider, connected issues of policing and community safety has been a notable success for the Garda Síochána. While policing challenges remain the lived experience in the town from the height of the feud is much improved and continuing to improve. There are therefore crucial and consequential reflections for the Garda Síochána to undertake. While each division and local policing challenge will require different approaches, there are clear learnings that must be taken from the last number of years and used to inform wider strategic and operational approaches to multi-agency working, responses to organised crime and approaches to community policing. More broadly, it is incumbent also on wider partners and policy makers to also reflect and learn from this approach to ensure that policing nationally and sub-nationally is appropriately supported.

5 Conclusions

The nature and complexity of modern crime and policing necessitates the continued allocation of resources to specialist roles. Simultaneously, the needs of communities, from a response and engagement perspective but also for feelings and perceptions of safety, require a maintained level of Gardaí on more traditional and highly visible roles, such as the regular and on community policing. The current challenge for the Garda Síochána is to ensure that a balance can be found in adequately resourcing specialist units with members and staff in areas such as protective services, economic and cyber-crime while ensuring a visible and sufficient presence in local communities.

In the context of the reduced numbers of Garda members owing to Covid-19 and the articulated issues pertaining the recruitment and retention of Garda staff, this will continue to be a tension in the short term, at least until recruitment can be undertaken at a sufficient pace. This in turn, it is envisaged, will continue to impact the ability of the organisation to meet its long-term strategic goals.

Despite these pressures, we continue to see the importance and centrality of the Garda Síochána to all communities and community life across the country and the important impacts that can be achieved by the Garda Síochána, working with partners, to improve community life. The organisation and its workforce repeatedly showcase a desire to innovate and be adaptive to the challenges faced to continue to provide these services. An increased culture of internal reflection, learning and communication of such innovations and approaches can only improve the quality and consistency of the services provided.

This assessment is provided in the context of the ongoing preparations for the enactment of the Policing, Security and Community Safety Bill in 2024. Early indications show that the Community Safety Partnership model is proving to be useful to advancing policing services and community safety through enhanced cooperation and joint working at local level. The experiences and progress made in recent years in Drogheda show the real potential that this approach can have when the resources and efforts of the Garda Síochána and wider range of statutory and non-statutory stakeholders are strategically and operationally aligned.

The Authority continues its oversight of the Policing Priorities, and of the Garda Síochána more generally, including through engagement in local communities and meetings in Mayo and Waterford. In particular, recent increases in targeted protest activity, a rise in anti-social behaviour, and trends relating to road safety matters have been of concern to a number of communities in the first period of 2023 and are subject to ongoing engagement and oversight by the Authority. These are areas that also benefit and showcase the need for and impact of broad, coordinated interagency responses as they are symptomatic of broader societal issues cannot proactively be solved by policing responses alone – although there is of course a critical policing role in the reactive response. A fuller assessment on the responses to such will be offered following year end.