

Oversight of Policing Response to Child Sexual Abuse 2023



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](#).

The Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024 provides for the establishment of An tÚdarás Póilíneachta agus Sábháilteachta Pobail (the new Policing and Community Safety Authority) which, when the Act is commenced, will combine the existing oversight function of the Policing Authority and the functions of the Garda Inspectorate.

Glossary	
CSA	Child Sexual Abuse
CSAM	Child Sexual Abuse Materials
DPSU	Divisional Protective Services Unit
eCANS	Electronic Child Abuse Notification System
GNCCB	Garda National Cyber Crime Bureau
GNIU	Garda National Immigration Unit
GNPSB	Garda National Protective Services Bureau
GNVB	Garda National Vetting Bureau
GSAS	Garda Síochána Analysis Service
GSI	Garda Síochána Inspectorate
IMS	Investigation Management System
LMT	Liaison Management Team
NCCIS	National Childcare Information System
NCFLMC	National Children First Liaison Management Committee
NCMEC	National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children
NCPU	National Child Protection Unit
NCSSLC	National Child Safeguarding Strategic Liaison Committee
ONCE	Online Child Exploitation unit
PULSE	Police Using Leading Systems Effectively
SCMU	Sexual Crime Management Unit
SLMLF	Senior Local Management Liaison Forum
SOMIU	Sex Offender Management and Intelligence Unit
SORAM	Sex Offender Risk Assessment and Management
STO	Strategic Transformation Office
SVI	Specialist Victim Interviewer
TCMS	Tusla Case Management System

1 Introduction

The Policing Authority regularly publishes reports assessing Garda Síochána performance against the performance framework of the Garda Strategy Statement 2022-2024, the Policing Priorities 2022-2024, and the annual Policing Plan.¹ The reports are important in providing transparency about policing performance, the oversight of policing, and the outcomes of that work.

This report includes a specific focus on Garda performance in the implementation of certain key recommendations in the Garda Síochána Inspectorate (GSI) 2017 report *Responding to Child Sexual Abuse - a Follow-up Review* ('the GSI Report'), and summarises Authority oversight in this area in 2023.

The area is a key one under the Policing Priority *Protecting and Supporting Victims and the Vulnerable*, and the Policing Authority Strategy Statement 2022 – 2024 commits to "Improve the experience of policing, especially for children and young people."

Additionally, in 2018, the Minister for Justice and Equality requested the Policing Authority, under section 117A(2) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, to monitor and assess the measures taken by the Garda Síochána in relation to recommendations.

1.1 The Garda Síochána Inspectorate (GSI) 2017 report

The 2017 Report was a follow up to an earlier 2012 GSI Report, which examined the policies and practices of the Garda Síochána relating to the investigation of child sexual abuse, and made a number of recommendations to bring Ireland's child protection regime in line with best international practice.²

The follow up Report made 24 recommendations for change, comprising 102 associated actions.³ Of these actions, eighteen (18) were outside of the remit of the Garda Síochána and five (5) were rejected. The Appendix provides a full list of recommendations and actions.

Table 1: Summary of recommended actions - *Responding to Child Sexual Abuse* (2017)

Recommended actions	Rejected	Outside of GS remit
102	5	18

1.2 The role of the Garda Síochána in child protection

Child protection work is widely disseminated across the Garda Síochána, involving frontline Garda members at all levels, as well as members and staff in a variety of specialist units both nationally and at divisional level. Garda members may be called upon to respond to issues relating to child protection in a range of very different circumstances. These can include incidents where a crime of child sexual abuse is reported, either involving a current or a historical case of abuse. Additionally, in

¹ See the Policing Authority website [here](#).

² Garda Síochána Inspectorate [Responding to Child Sexual Abuse - a Follow-up Review](#) (2017)

³ Sub actions are not numbered in the Garda Inspectorate report, but were numbered for the purposes of Garda Síochána implementation and reporting. Not all recommendations have sub actions – see Appendix for full list.

the course of their day-to-day work Garda members may come across incidents where they have concern for the welfare of children, for example, if they are called to attend a domestic incident where children are present. Increasingly, online child sexual abuse and exploitation is also a feature of this child protection work.

Additionally, while the focus of their roles differs, joint working between Tusla - the Child and Family Agency and the Garda Síochána forms an integral part of the child protection and welfare system in Ireland. Tusla has primary responsibility for child protection/welfare, and the Garda Síochána has responsibility for crime investigation.⁴

The recommendations in the GSI Report address working arrangements throughout the Garda Síochána organisation, as well as recommendations aiming to develop more effective multi-agency working arrangements at both strategic and operational level.

The Policing Authority has been tasked with monitoring and assessing the measures taken by the Garda Síochána in relation to the GSI recommendations, insofar as these are directed exclusively or primarily at the Garda Síochána.

1.3 How the Authority assesses policing performance

Assessment of policing performance in implementing the recommendations in the GSI Report is in line with the Authority's primary mechanism for monitoring and assessing Garda Síochána performance.⁵ Performance is assessed through a number of approaches, in particular through monthly meetings with the Garda Commissioner and his senior team, a minimum of four of which are held in public each year. The Authority's committees⁶ also review performance across the functions of the Garda Síochána as they relate to policing services and the management and development of the organisation.

Staff of the Authority engage with the Garda Síochána at national, regional, divisional and station level on an ongoing basis. This includes engagement with national bureaux, specialist units and frontline Garda members and Garda staff concerning child protection.

The Authority also assesses performance through a programme of engagements with stakeholders, including a wide range of groups and organisations at national and local level. 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, and in this case, the policing of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

The Policing Authority is not an inspection body, and does not review case files, access Pulse records, or otherwise engage directly with Garda Síochána investigative processes as part of its performance assessment.

⁴ [Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children.](#)

⁵ See for example [Policing Authority Assessment of Policing Performance 2022](#)

⁶ *Policing Strategy and Performance* and *Organisation Development* committees

1.4 Progress in implementing the recommendations in 2023

There is continuing progress on implementing the recommendations, and considerable energy is being expended by the leadership of the GNPSB across a number of areas. From this progress, it is the Authority's view that the crucial area of child protection is being given high importance at strategic leadership level in the Garda Síochána.

Several important achievements in 2023 include the implementation of an electronic child abuse notification system (eCANS), and agreement on a data sharing MOU, both of which indicate strong interagency working relationships.

Despite the ongoing positive progress there is however, more to be done. The area of interagency working is a key area where continuing challenges present. Ensuring swift responses to child victims by specialist interviewers from both Tusla and the Garda Síochána, as is their right, is a matter which cannot be resolved by the Garda Síochána alone.

The Authority has previously welcomed the Barnahus model in Galway which brings together forensic, child protection, medical, therapeutic and policing services in a child-centred way, when sexual abuse has occurred or is suspected. The planned establishment of two additional centres (Barnahus South in Cork and Barnahus East in Dublin) should mitigate some of the delays being experienced, as well as promoting an improved child centred service and therefore this should be prioritised and accelerated.

Additionally, an effective inter-agency response to the problem of vulnerable children in State care at risk of sexual exploitation is of key importance, and the outcomes of the ongoing review of Operation Cosnaím⁷ should be monitored in 2024 and beyond.

Resources are, as always, an important element in delivering improved service. The Authority is aware that there is competition for resources in all areas, but would hope that the investment in IT resources might be prioritised as an approach which seems likely to be effective in mitigating resource constraints in the GNPSB while also contributing to safeguarding member welfare.

As in all aspects of Garda Síochána work, ongoing governance at local level is fundamentally important to ensure consistent effective work in this important area.

1.5 Structure of the report

The Report is structured as follows:

- **Section 2:** Brief descriptive overview of Garda Síochána Child Protection services;
- **Section 3:** Summary overview of key elements of performance in 2023;
- **Section 4:** Detailed analysis, organised thematically;
- **Section 5:** Conclusion; and
- **Section 6:** Appendix: List of GSI Recommendations

⁷ Operation Coisnaím is a joint strategy between the Garda Síochána and Tusla to proactively identify and respond to concerns over children in State care who are at risk of sexual exploitation and/or child trafficking.

2 Overview of Garda Síochána Child Protection services

This section briefly describes current working arrangements between the Garda Síochána and Tusla for the management of child protection concerns, and also outlines the main national and divisional resources in the Garda Síochána that are involved in child protection. Child protection notifications lie at the heart of joint agency working.

Child protection notifications

The process for referring child protection or welfare concerns between agencies is called a notification. Tusla is required to notify the Garda Síochána in child protection and welfare cases where it considers that a criminal offence may have been committed. Notifications from the Garda Síochána to Tusla include cases where a Garda member may have a welfare or protection concern, for example, if they attend a domestic incident where children may be present. The process is set out in some detail in a Joint Working Protocol.⁸

The bulk of notifications are sent from the Garda Síochána to Tusla. The Garda Síochána reported that in 2023 they made 29,090 notifications to Tusla, while Tusla made 8,278 notifications to the Garda Síochána (Figure 1). This is a large increase on the numbers captured in the GSI report.⁹

Figure 1: Child protection notifications 2023



Chapter 2 of the GSI Report examines in detail the processes and practices that happen on a day-to-day basis in the Garda Síochána and Tusla for exchanging such notifications, and Recommendation 2 and the associated actions address this process. The Report expressed concern around the risks arising from the then largely paper based system for the two-way exchange of notifications concerning children between Tusla and the Garda Síochána. Consequently, it recommended developing a joint single electronic notification and tracking system (Recommendation 2.3 (1)) and the development of a unique reference number for each case (Recommendation 2.3 (2)). The recommendation is essentially concerned with ensuring that there is an appropriate response to every reported child protection and welfare concern.

Garda Síochána services at national level

The Garda National Protective Services Bureau (GNPSB) provides strategic leadership and high-level expertise, and provides advice, guidance and assistance to Garda members investigating sexual offences against children (including online child exploitation). Additionally, the Bureau leads the investigation in cases that are more complex.

⁸ Joint Working Protocol for An Garda Síochána/ Tusla - Child and Family Agency

⁹ The GSI 2017 report pointed to a large increase in the number of notifications sent by the Garda Síochána to Tusla, increasing from 11,472 for the period 2007 to 2009 to 13,324 in 2014.

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There are a number of specialist units within the GNPSB, in particular the National Child Protection Unit (NCPU), which has a key role in evaluating and monitoring child protection investigations in conjunction with the investigating member and senior management in local stations, to ensure that such investigations are in accordance with best practice.¹⁰ Additionally the Online Child Exploitation Unit (OnCE), and the Sex Offender Management and Intelligence Unit (SOMIU) also play important roles.

Other Garda Síochána national bureaux assist with various elements of investigations:

- The Garda National Cyber Crime Bureau (GNCCB) is the national unit that is responsible for the forensic examination of computer media seized during the course of any criminal investigations, including child exploitation offences;
- The Garda National Vetting Bureau (GNVB) is responsible for the vetting of persons carrying out relevant work with children or vulnerable persons.¹¹ The GNVB received the highest ever number of vetting applications in 2022 with 549,198 vetting applications being received¹²;
- The Garda National Immigration Unit (GNIU) cooperate with US Customs and Border Protection (US CBP) in managing US convicted Sex Offenders who may be travelling into Ireland, and has a role in monitoring human trafficking, including children.

Divisional level

At divisional level, Divisional Protective Services Units (DPSUs) are specialist units intended to provide a consistent, dedicated and professional service to victims of sexual crime, including child sexual abuse and exploitation. A number of DPSUs were first established in 2017 on a pilot basis. The national roll-out of the DPSUs was a recommendation in the GSI Report (Recommendation 3), as well as in the Report on the *Review of Protections for Vulnerable Witnesses in the Investigations and Prosecution of Sexual Offences* (the O'Malley Report).¹³ The rollout was completed in 2020, and there is now a DPSU in every division.

However, substantial child protection work also takes place outside of the specialist units. With some very limited exceptions, sexual offences involving children are investigated by DPSUs. However, other child protection issues are investigated by frontline members at local level. The exact structures for managing and governing this work within the Garda Síochána differs somewhat across divisions.

Joint agency working

As the two statutory agencies mandated to respond to child protection issues, the Garda Síochána and Tusla require close working relationships, as is set out in *Children First - National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2017). A Principal Social Worker from Tusla has been seconded to the GNPSB for a number of years.¹⁴

A Joint Working Protocol ('the Joint Protocol') establishes joint governance structures, aiming to ensure good practice in respect of notification of child protection issues, information sharing, case

¹⁰ See Garda Síochána website [here](#)

¹¹ Under the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016.

¹² [Garda Síochána Annual Report 2022](#)

¹³ [Review of Protections for Vulnerable Witnesses in the Investigations and Prosecution of Sexual Offences](#)

¹⁴ Reply of the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Mr Roderic O'Gorman T.D. to Parliamentary Question Ref 2761/24, 23 January 2024 available [here](#).

management, and policy and procedure implementation.¹⁵ The Joint Protocol was in draft form at the time of the publications of the GSI report, and formalised shortly thereafter.

The Joint Protocol sets out structures aiming to ensure strong liaison between the Garda Síochána at all levels (see Figure 2). It also sets out requirements for regular meetings, which includes signing-off joint working documents, and reviewing complex child protection cases as required.

Figure 2: Multi-Agency Liaison in the Joint Protocol

<p>National Child Safeguarding Strategic Liaison Committee (NCSSLC)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Assistant Commissioner Organised and Serious Crime and CEO of Tusla
<p>National Children First Liaison Management Committee (NCFLMC)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Tusla National Manager for Garda Liaison Management and Superintendent GNPSB (Child Protection)
<p>Senior Local Management Liaison Forum (SLMLF)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Principal Social Worker of each Local Area office and nominated senior Garda officer
<p>Liaison Management Team (LMT)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Area Office Social Work Team Leader Tusla and Designated Inspector/Sergeant of relevant Garda area

Other agencies

There is additionally a certain amount of inter-agency working with agencies other than Tusla, particularly in regard to the management of sex offenders, again at both local and national level. SORAM (Sex Offender Risk Assessment and Management) is a multi-agency approach to assessing and managing the risk posed by convicted sexual offenders. At a national level a SORAM Steering Group comprises of representatives from the Garda Síochána, the Probation Service, Tusla, the HSE, the Irish Prison Service and Local Authority Housing.

At local level, SORAM Teams consist of representatives from the Garda Síochána, the Probation Service, Tusla, and Local Authority Housing. The enactment of *the Sex Offenders (Amendment) Act 2023*¹⁶ places the current SORAM process for sex offenders on a statutory footing, and is expected to increase the number of sex offenders to be managed on an inter-agency basis, among other outcomes.

Barnahus

The Garda Síochána also participate in the Barnahus model in Galway, which brings together forensic, child protection, medical, therapeutic and policing services in a child-centred way, when sexual abuse has occurred or is suspected. Two further locations in the East and South are planned to provide national coverage and access for victims and families to the service.

¹⁵ Joint Working Protocol for An Garda Síochána/ Tusla - Child and Family Agency

¹⁶ See [here](#) for background on the Act.

3 Policing Authority assessment of progress in 2023

The Garda Síochána update at end of 2023 reported fifty-six (56) actions as implemented, with twenty three (23) key actions currently ongoing (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Status of recommendations*

Recommendations	Implemented	Ongoing	Rejected	Outside of GS remit
102 Actions	56	23	5	18

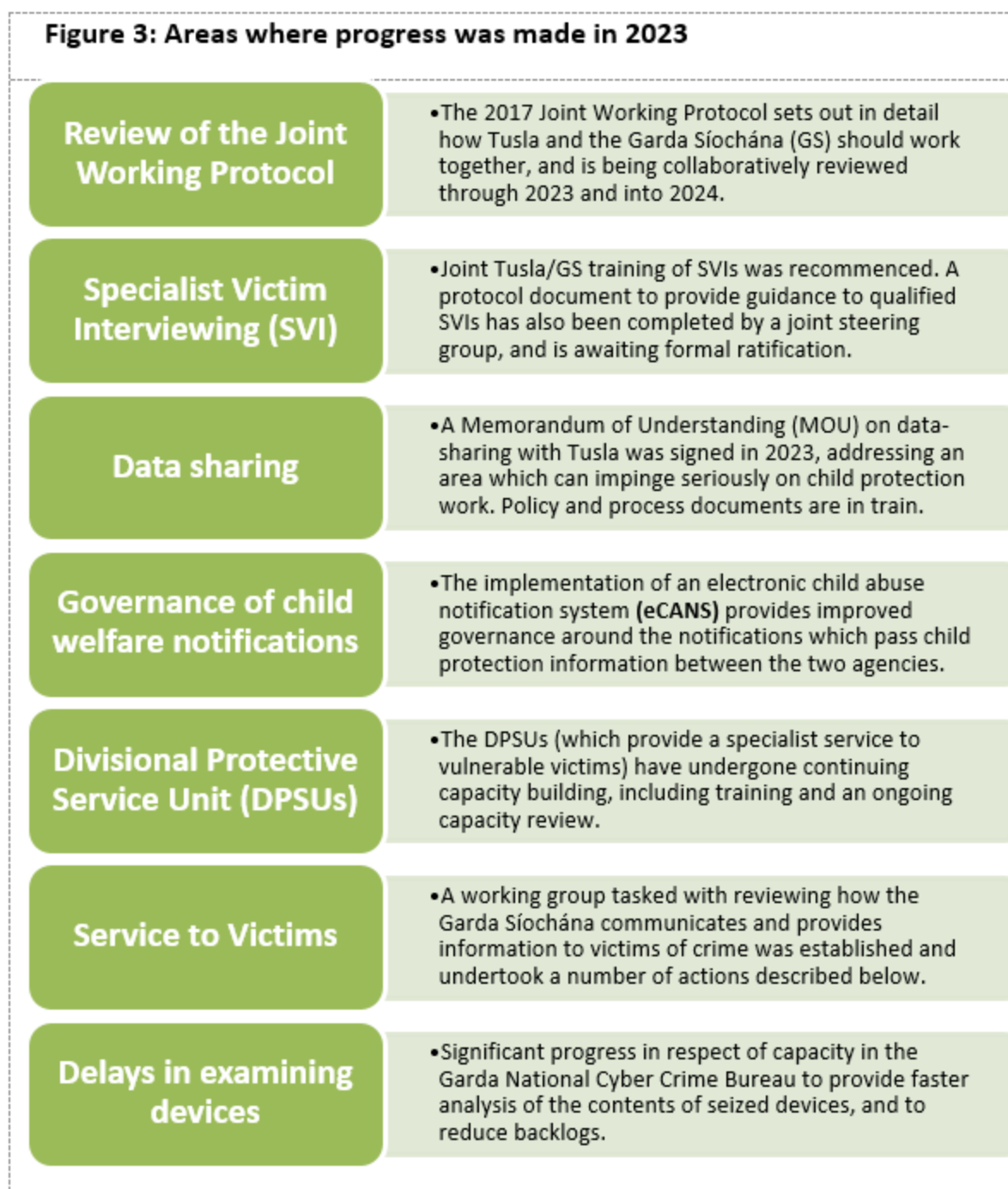
*As reported by the Garda Síochána 28 November 2023

In previous years, the Authority noted that that the Garda Síochána had made progress towards implementation in a number of important areas, and that there is substantial commitment at leadership level to ensuring that Garda Síochána processes for protecting children from sexual abuse are subject to continuous improvement.

In particular, the Authority has on many occasions commended the roll out of the Divisional Protective Service Units (DPSUs) as marking a significant development in policing where vulnerable victims are involved. Multi-agency working throughout the organisation has also been an area where improvement has been noted, and progress in this important area continued in 2023 as outlined in more detail below.

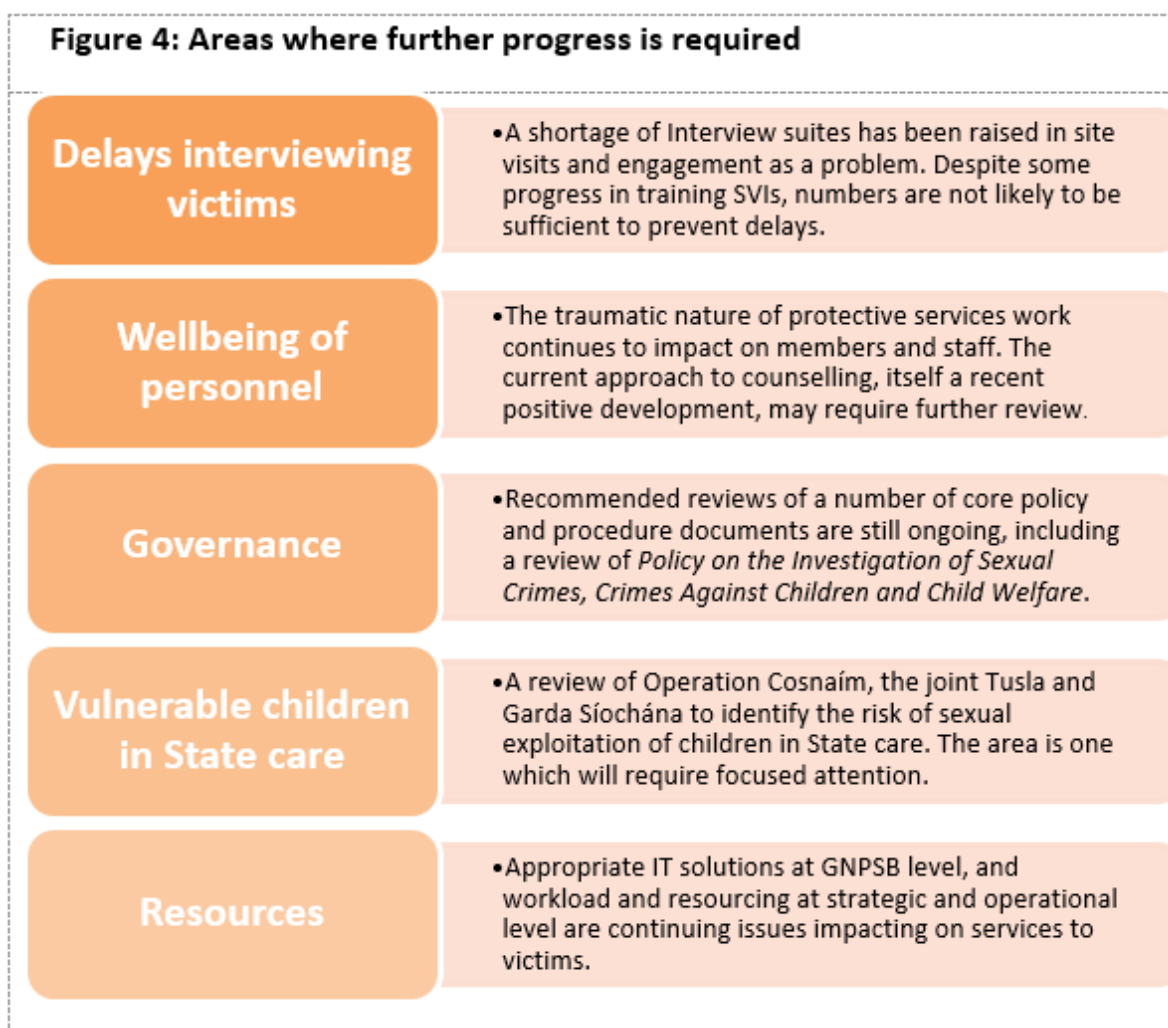
Figure 3 (over) provides a snapshot overview of areas which have progressed well. It should be noted that while there was progress in these areas last year, there may still be outstanding actions required to fully implement a recommendation. For example, while there was progress in 2023 in reviewing the training for Specialist Victim Interviewers, and in recommending joint training for Tusla and Garda Síochána interviewers, there remains insufficient numbers for joint interviewing to be standard in all cases.

Additionally, it might be noted that some Actions or Recommendations while implemented, will require ongoing or focused oversight to ensure that, not only are the necessary policies or procedures in place, but that they are also fully and meaningfully embedded in the day-to-day work of the Garda Síochána so as to have real ongoing impact. Governance of inter-agency work at local level is one such area.



There are a number of areas where the Authority consider that progress continues to be required, and these are summarised briefly in Figure 4 (over). The Authority has stressed over a number of years the need to recognise the potential impact of strategic enablers, such as workforce planning, ICT, accommodation and training, on the organisation’s ability to implement the recommendations in full.

As described further below, strategic enablers continue to impact on successful delivery of the full set of recommendations in particular in regard to resourcing at both strategic and operational levels. Additionally, not all issues in the child protection arena are amenable to Garda Síochána action alone.



4 Thematic Overview of Performance

This section provides a detailed overview of Garda Síochána performance in implementing the recommendations of the GSI report. Information is grouped thematically under the following headings:

- 4.1 Inter-agency working;
- 4.2 Services to victims;
- 4.3 DPSU capacity building; and
- 4.4 Governance and strategy.

4.1 Inter-agency working

The centrality of inter-agency working to effective child protection has been outlined above. The Authority has previously noted evidence of enhanced attention to inter-agency working in this area.¹⁷

In 2023, there has been continuing progress, particularly in areas where progress had been slow to date. However, the Authority notes that continuing attention and strong governance at local level in particular is required to ensure that effective, efficient work practices are the norm.

Governance of child protection and welfare notifications

Recommendation 2.3 and the associated sub actions concern the development of joint approaches between the Garda Síochána and Tusla for the assessment and management of child protection notifications. Child protection notifications sent between the two organisations have historically been exchanged via post or email (varying locally), and there has been no unique reference number for ease of reference or for tracking.

The Inspectorate recommended addressing the risks arising (for example, that a notification would fail to be recorded and actioned) by creating a joint single electronic notification and tracking system, integrating information between PULSE and TUSLA's National Childcare Information System (NCCIS) [now the Tusla Case Management System (TCMS)].

However, while this recommendation was accepted, there have been very significant delays in implementing it, due to ICT resourcing issues in both organisations. The delay, and the risks arising from it, has been an area of enduring concern for the Authority. The Authority engaged extensively with the Commissioner and the Garda Síochána organisation during 2022 and 2023 on how the organisation might best assure both itself and the Authority that the risks in this very important area of child protection were being adequately addressed.

Full integration of the two systems is still outstanding. However, in December 2022, following a pilot, the use of the Tusla portal for transmitting electronic child protection notifications between the Garda Síochána and Tusla was rolled out nationally in a joint electronic child abuse notification system (eCANS). Key features are set out in Table 2 (over).

The full implementation of eCANS in 2023 is very significant, as the system provides improved governance and assurance that notifications received by the Garda Síochána from Tusla are appropriately recorded and actioned.

¹⁷ See for example Policing Authority Assessment of Policing Performance 2022

Table 2: Joint Tusla/Garda Síochána (GS) electronic child abuse notification system (eCANS)

- eCANS is a system which utilises the Tusla Portal to allow Garda Síochána access to the Tusla system for the purpose of sending and receiving notifications;
- The system allows for immediate transmission 24/7 of information between the two organisations;
- On submission of a notification, an automatic acknowledgement is sent so that each agency is assured that their notification has been received. It is also possible to see when a notification has been read, and if there is a concern about a delay, a message can be sent within the system asking for follow up;
- Each notification is assigned a Tusla Portal number, which can be used by both organisations in place of using the separate Tusla TCM number and Garda Síochána Pulse number;
- The system allows for seeing real-time statistics, including notifications that have not been accessed/opened;
- Figures to the end of Q4 2023 are as follows:
 - Garda Síochána to Tusla - 29,090 notifications;
 - Tusla to An Garda Síochána - 8,278;
- While it is used by both organisations, as it is part of the Tusla system, encryption and security is provided by Tusla.

The Authority is satisfied that while eCANS does not fully achieve the GSI recommendation that the systems be integrated, it has achieved the key aim of a robust and secure system for managing the exchange of notifications between the two organisations. This is an important achievement.

However, an important proviso is that its operation be subject to appropriate ongoing governance at local level in the Garda Síochána. For example, the assignment of full time Sergeants with a role in managing Tusla liaison seemed a promising approach under the Operating Model, ensuring strong governance of this area. It is also hoped that the findings of the Joint Working Protocol Review will contribute further to effective Garda Síochána work at this level.

The Authority understands that that a pilot is commencing in April 2024 to add retrospective notifications to the eCANS, with a national roll-out to be completed by end Q.2 2024. This has the potential to be a valuable additional step to provide assurance that there are no remaining risks to be addressed in the notification process.

As outlined above, eCANS is restricted to managing notifications, and is not an end-to-end system. For example, outcomes are not included, and Joint Protocol meetings and forms are not stored on the Portal system as these relate to the stage after notification. However, it is understood that these might separately be handled on the Investigation Management System (IMS) and this is discussed below in relation to governance.

The larger project to provide a linkage between An Garda Síochána PULSE and the equivalent Tusla system remains a project for Garda Síochána ICT. However, a number of other projects were prioritised ahead of it in 2023.

Review of the Garda Síochána - Tusla Joint Working Protocol

As outlined in Section 2 above, the Joint Working Protocol specifies in detail how the Garda Síochána and Tusla should cooperate and interact with each other around child welfare concerns (See Figure 2 above for key structures). A collaborative review between the GNPSB and Tusla on the Protocol commenced in Q1 2022.

The review explores the current joint work practices in respect of strategy and current joint practice between the Garda Síochána and Tusla-Child and Family Agency in respect of the following specific areas:

- Front-line strategy meeting interaction and engagement process, along with associated recording process;
- Liaison Management Team meeting structure and procedures; and
- Joint Action Form review.

A joint report was compiled and submitted to the members of the National Children First Liaison Management Committee (NCFLMC) for discussion and approval. Interagency meetings between the National Liaisons took place throughout 2023, and policy and procedure documents have now been drafted.

While the full findings are not yet available, the Authority understands that the effectiveness of liaison arrangements at divisional level was part of the review, and it is understood that the review found that these were now working well, with the appropriate people attending meetings.

As this is the frontline of joint agency engagement on a day-to-day basis, it is crucial that both agencies maintain good governance of these processes, to ensure consistent, effective, and timely responses to all child protection matters. It will be important that there is continuing internal and external oversight to ensure that this is and continues to be the case.

Data sharing

The conclusion of a data-sharing agreement between Tusla and the Garda Síochána has to date been a seemingly intractable issue, and one with significant impact for joint working. However, a Data Sharing MOU was signed between the Chief Executive Officer of Tusla and Assistant Commissioner Organised and Serious Crime in Q1 2023.

The Authority understands that Garda Síochána documentation on underlying policies and procedures is close to completion, subject to approval by the Senior Leadership Team.

It is understood that Tusla documentation is still in process.¹⁸

¹⁸ Policy and procedure documents address matters around why data is shared, what data is needed and how to share and store data.

4.2 Services to victims

Delays in interviewing children

The Authority has previously expressed considerable concern to the Garda Commissioner about unacceptable delays reported concerning the timeline from the initial reporting to the Garda Síochána of an incident involving a child to when the interview takes place with that child. Garda representatives confirmed to the Policing Authority's Policing Strategy and Performance Committee in December 2023 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.¹⁹

Joint training for Specialist Victim Interviewers (SVIs) recommenced between Tusla and the Garda Síochána in 2023, with an additional 47 individuals across the Garda Síochána and Tusla trained by end of Q4 2023.²⁰ However, it does not appear that these numbers will be sufficient to address the current capacity deficit. A report published in March 2023 cited Tusla as indicating that a functioning inter-agency system of child specialist interviewing requires in excess of 100 such specialists within their organisation.²¹ At that point, the report stated that there were approximately 16 within the Child and Family Agency.²²

A Joint protocol for Joint Specialist Interviewing between the Garda Síochána and Tusla is complete and the document is currently going through ratification in both agencies.

A shortage of Interview Suites has also been raised in site visits and engagement as a problem across the country. Engagement with the GNPSB suggests that the availability of additional interview suites is expected to improve the times taken to conduct interviews. New approaches to the technology used to record interviews is also expected to improve this by reducing occasions where suites are out of operation due to equipment failure.

Better information and communication

The Garda Síochána commenced outcome based recording of all crime incidents in Q4 2023. This will see incident details recorded to allow for outcomes beyond simply being detected or undetected. This offers benefits in understanding the reasons why an incident may not be detected, e.g. the suspect has died, the victim has withdrawn from the process, etc. It is hoped that this will allow for greater insight into the barriers to detecting crime or securing convictions, with particular value hoped to be achieved in understanding challenges in sexual offence incident investigation. The work offers an opportunity to identify if there are improvements that, if made, might improve the victim experience for child as well as adult victims.

Additionally, the GNPSB has participated in a working group tasked with reviewing how the Garda Síochána communicates and provides information to victims of crime. In Q1 2023, this resulted in

¹⁹ PSP Committee minutes, 6 December 2023

²⁰ 24 from the Garda Síochána and 23 from Tusla

²¹ *A Report on the Intersection of the Criminal Justice, Private Family Law and Public Law Child Care Processes in Relation to Domestic and Sexual Violence* Prepared for the National Women's Council and the Department of Justice by Nuala Egan & Ellen O'Malley Dunlop, March 2023 (P. 54).

²² *Ibid.* The report does not clarify if this is the number of available SVIs, as opposed to the number of trained SVIs (who may for example have changed role subsequent to training).

the development of a survey by GNPSB and the Garda Research Unit, which was distributed to over 1,000 Garda Members and Garda Staff to gather the views of those who provide specific services for victims of crime. It is hoped that this will improve services to all victims, including victims of CSA.

Vulnerable children in State care

Recommendation 2.5 of the GSI Report, regarding missing children, particularly those missing from care and those who are at high risk of exploitation, is reported as implemented. A key element of the Garda Síochána response to this is Operation Cosnaím which was implemented on 28 January 2021. The Operation is a joint strategy between the Garda Síochána and Tusla to proactively identify and respond to concerns over children in State care who are at risk of sexual exploitation and/or child trafficking. Operation Cosnaím specifies the information pathways for Tusla to report concerns of child sexual exploitation and trafficking of children in State care to the Garda Síochána.

However, in June 2023, a UCD scoping study raised concerns that children and young people, and in particular girls, in residential care or who go missing while in State care, are being targeted for sexual exploitation in an organised manner by coordinated networks, or gangs, of predatory men.²³ In December 2023, media reports pointed to significant numbers of missing migrant children.²⁴ Figures provided to *The Journal* by Tusla show that the 62 children who went missing from its care since 2017 until November 2023 have not been found.

In early January 2024, it was reported that Tusla, the child and family agency, said there has been a “significant and unprecedented increase” in the number presenting to its Separated Children Seeking International Protection service, a highly vulnerable cohort.²⁵

Operation Cosnaím is currently being reviewed. The Authority understands from the Garda Síochána that the review will conclude in the first half of 2024.

The *National Action Plan to prevent and combat Human Trafficking 2023-2027* (Government of Ireland October 2023) published in October 2023 states that:

“We need better information about migrant children who go missing from the care of Tusla. A review of current arrangements in circumstances when a child goes missing from care will be undertaken and cases will be reviewed to identify potential linkages with trafficking.”

Action 2.4 (Prevention Pillar) commits to: *Review, plan and implement an enhanced and coordinated operational response from TUSLA and An Garda Síochána to ensure that the response is effective, and fully meets the needs of child victims.*

The Authority is concerned that despite the relevant recommendation being reported as implemented, continuing issues are being reported in this area. The Authority looks forward to the outcome of the review of Operation Cosnaím, and the full implementation of Action 2.4 of the

²³ Canning, Mary, Marie Keenan, and Ruth Breslin. *Protecting Against Predators: An Exploratory Study on the Sexual Exploitation of Children and Young People in Ireland*. University College Dublin. Geary Institute for Public Policy. Sexual Exploitation Research Programme (SERP), June 22, 2023. The study draws on qualitative semi-structured interviews with 21 stakeholders from 14 agencies with diverse experience of working with, and representing children across a variety of sectors including residential care, homelessness, education, social care, advocacy services and policing.

²⁴ *The Journal* 14 December 2023 ‘Over 60 migrant children missing after disappearing from State care’

²⁵ *Irish Times*, 15 January 2023, “‘Unprecedented’ increase in unaccompanied children seeking asylum in Ireland”

National Action Plan to prevent and combat Human Trafficking, to ensure the safety of this highly vulnerable group of children.

4.3 Divisional Protective Service Units

Authority engagement with Divisional Protective Service Units (DPSUs) suggests that as the units mature, and as a result, more cases that the units investigated are brought to court, this can result in significant abstraction of unit Members sometimes for weeks and months at a time. While abstraction of personnel for court cases is an issue for the Garda Síochána generally, within DPSUs it has exacerbated resourcing as a continuing issue. On a wider level, DPSUs are subject to constraints regarding resourcing of specialist units, when Garda resources generally are under pressure.

Executive engagement with stakeholders has indicated that resourcing is a significant and visible problem for DPSUs. While a public perception may exist that the units cover all kinds of sexual crime and domestic abuse, in reality many are limited to dealing with child sexual abuse and serious sexual assault. Some units by virtue of geography have a large number of historical child abuse cases.

The Policing Plan 2023 contains a commitment to a post-deployment review of the DPSUs. The Strategic Transformation Office (STO) in conjunction with the Garda Síochána Analysis Service (GSAS), GNPSB and the Garda Research Unit are continuing the review of DPSUs and the project is ongoing. Activities have included workshops with DPSU Detective Inspectors, surveys of operational Superintendents, a workload analysis, and surveys and interviews with NGOs and advocacy groups. A first draft of the report was completed in March 2024 and is being reviewed by the GNPSB.

Engagement with the Garda Síochána indicates that there may be a need for clearer guidance on the criteria for the acceptance of cases into the DPSU. While this is not yet consistent, the GNPSB hopes to be in a position to give guidance on this shortly.

Training has been an area where the GNPSB devoted considerable resources through 2023. When the DPSUs were established initially, training had been provided consistent with the remit of the units to provide specialised and expert service to vulnerable victims. However, during Authority engagement in subsequent years a key issue arising was that new members had not received any training, or waited a considerable time for training. A standardised national training programme for all Divisional Protective Services Unit (DPSU) personnel was rolled out in 2022, and completed in Q1 2023. A final weeks training was conducted in October 2023 for DPSU investigators who had yet to complete same.

In terms of stakeholder feedback on DPSUs, this has been consistently positive. The units are seen as professional, with trained staff whose work is directed towards the provision of a sensitive, trauma informed service to victims. Where there are issues they relate to resourcing and workload. There was also a consistent acknowledgement of the impact of this type of work on Garda Members and the need for appropriate supervision and support similar to that undertaken by NGO staff working in this area.

Wellbeing of members

Executive engagement with DPSU members raised concerns about the impact of secondary trauma and stress levels within units. There have been advances in support in this area, particularly resulting from the Garda Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2025. A Psychological Support Programme (PSP)

includes both mandatory and voluntary elements of psychological support for Garda personnel working in certain areas which are risked-assessed as particularly psychologically hazardous in nature, including the GNPSB and DPSUs. The PSP provides general psychological and wellbeing support aimed at avoiding and mitigating the risk of indirect trauma/stress through nature of work exposures. The focus is on prevention rather than intervention. PSP has in-built escalation to therapeutic intervention where this is required or identified as needed.

However, the current approach of mandatory period psychological supervision (a certain number of sessions are mandatory each year) rather than mandatory counselling is not seen as fit for purpose, and as being potentially able to be 'gamed' by members out of a fear of repercussions from owning up to mental health problems. Hence the escalation provisions may not come into effect.

The Authority believes that the current approach should be reviewed as part of the development of the next Garda Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

4.4 Governance

Roll out of the IMS (Investigation Management System)

The IMS is an electronic management tool that allows comprehensive recording of all actions undertaken during investigations, and as such offers more efficient management and governance, as well as enhanced capability to undertake reviews of cases. It also has the benefit of allowing access to supervisors and supporting investigators, e.g. detectives in the Garda National Protective Services Bureau are able to access and review investigative materials from cases within Divisions and therefore more readily offer support and/or guidance to local investigators. Having commenced as a pilot in the Waterford Division in 2018, the system is now live in nine Divisions and a number of specialist units, with full rollout remaining a priority project for 2024.

Despite challenges being experienced by members during the initial pilot and during early implementation – as is to be anticipated with any major software introduction or change programme – the Authority has received significantly positive feedback regarding the system from members and supervisors, and is aware that Garda ICT continues to develop, refine and improve the system based on user experience and feedback.

Additionally, IMS allows a user to upload documents, so Joint Working Protocol documents such as the records of LMT meetings can also be uploaded for better governance (as outlined above in reference to the electronic notifications system).

Outcomes based recording

In addition to improving services to victims, the implementation of a system of outcomes-based measurement for all crime types has the potential to provide the Garda Síochána with better metrics to support overall strategic planning.

GNCCB resourcing

The Authority has on a number of occasions, commented adversely on the backlog for the examination of electronic devices and the impact on delays for vulnerable children. The Garda Síochána continued to make significant progress in 2023 in respect of capacity in the Garda National Cyber Crime Bureau through the allocation of greater resources – building on the progress made in 2021/2022, including the establishment and operationalisation of four regional cyber-crime hubs to

provide greater national coverage. In the main this has allowed GNCCB to dramatically reduce the caseload within the bureau and provide analysis of the contents of seized devices to investigating members in a much shorter timeframe. Importantly there was substantial progress made on analysing devices that had been within the caseload of the bureau from the period prior to 2023. In addition to personnel, there has also been significant, ongoing investment in technology for GNCCB which is vital in the context of devices continuing to possess ever more sophisticated security and storage volumes. This increased capacity has also allowed for a greater presence on search activities of digital first responders, to ensure the prompt and efficient securing of digital evidence by specialist personnel. Engagement with investigating members has consistently yielded recognition for the improvements made in GNCCB and the positive impacts for the investigation of Child Sexual Abuse Materials (CSAM) cases.

Continued development of GNCCBs' capacity and capabilities is planned, including the establishment of two further regional hubs in Cavan and Dublin (in 2024/2025), which should allow for continued progress in the medium-term. It is also important to recognise the focus on and developments made in respect of the welfare of members working within the Bureau given the nature of the material they are exposed to on an ongoing basis.

The Authority notes however that GNCCB capacity for growth was hampered by challenges in recruiting specialist Garda staff given the terms and conditions on offer compared to those offered in the wider cyber industry. The capacity of the Divisional Protective Services Units also remains an issue. While GNCCB accesses and triages images in CSA investigations, the mainstay of material is provided in a package for the investigating members to further review. As such, given the significant, longstanding resourcing issues affecting DPSUs, there is a risk that delays could now simply be moved from GNCCB points in the process, to those undertaken by the DPSUs.

GNPSB resourcing

The issue of the prevention, investigation and prosecution of the exploitation of children online is a matter which had been raised by a range of stakeholders. Engagement with the Commissioner and his senior officers outlined for the Authority the huge online demand for exploitative images of children, and the various challenges presented by encrypted data for the Garda Síochána.

Resourcing within the GNPSB was raised on a number of engagements in 2023, in particular resourcing of the Online Child Exploitation Office (ONCE), which receives about 10,000 referrals per year from the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), and is in a position to action only about 10% of these. However, the Garda Síochána believes that this is a high figure relative to other police forces.

As is further detailed in the Authority's *Assessment of Policing Performance 2023*, this can result in delays in assessing reports, and therefore to fewer incidents being recorded. A competition for additional Inspectors, Sergeants and Garda members for the GNPSB is ongoing at time of writing.

Amongst the potential mitigating factors are software tools which have been identified to automate the administrative and triage processes involved in actioning online CSE referrals received. This means less time spent by Members watching the material. Barriers to acquiring these were discussed. While the tools themselves were not expensive in relative terms, there were non-financial costs including the time of getting people in ICT on board and developing ICT processes.

Four priority areas for technology in the ONCE office were reported to be:

- Minimising the amount of images needing to be viewed directly;
- Increased capacity to action NCMEC referrals;
- Having a tool to make connections between images and/or victims instead of relying on a person; and
- Victim identification.

Technological advances that assist policing are occurring in many areas of crime. They bring advantages, but also require strong governance to ensure that their use is ethical, proportionate and legal, and that any data retention is consistent with the Garda Síochána data retention policy. The Authority would stress that the retention of personal data in the area of online child exploitation in situations where it subsequently transpires that no criminal offence is involved needs to be fully compliant with GDPR and any other relevant human rights legislation and frameworks.

5 Conclusion

The Authority is pleased to report that there is continuing progress on implementing the recommendations, and that considerable energy is being and has been expended by the leadership of the GNPSB across a number of areas. As outlined above, it is the Authority's view that the crucial area of child protection is being given high importance at strategic leadership level in the Garda Síochána although progress continues to be required in a number of areas.

This report is being published following the enactment of the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024, which is due to be commenced later this year. This will see the Authority functions merging with those of the Garda Inspectorate to form a new organisation. This new body will retain responsibility for policing oversight and inspection, and it is likely that oversight of the recommendations will pass to this body.

The Authority hopes that continuing attention will be given to the areas outlined above, to ensure that all children who have been victims of child sexual abuse or exploitation receive a swift, expert, and multi-agency response at this most vulnerable times of their lives.

6 Appendix: List of Garda Síochána Inspectorate Recommendations

The full list of recommendations from the Garda Síochána Inspectorate (GSI) 2017 report *Responding to Child Sexual Abuse - a Follow-up Review* ('the GSI Report') is reproduced below

Number	Recommendation
2.1	The Inspectorate recommends that the Department of Justice and Equality convene an interdepartmental and multi-agency representative group to develop a National Strategy for Child Sexual Abuse Child Sexual Exploitation and On line Risks to Child Safety.

Number	Recommendation
2.2	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána in conjunction with Tusla establish Local Child Safeguarding Committees at a divisional level to ensure more effective child protection arrangements in all local areas.

Actions required to implement Recommendation 2.2

➤ Ensure the remit of the local safeguarding committees includes:
• Assessing whether the agencies are fulfilling their statutory and non-statutory obligations;
• Assessing the delivery of the Children First National Guidance;
• Introducing quality assurance practices, including joint auditing of cases and identifying lessons learnt;
• Monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of training, including multi-agency training; and
• Functions identified in the Garda Síochána/Tusla Joint Working Protocol for the Senior Local Management Liaison Forum
➤ Consider whether the national and local committees should operate on a statutory footing; and
➤ Ensure senior management representation at the Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs) and at local committee meetings.
Consider whether this recommendation and associated actions should be included as part of Recommendation 2.1 to develop a national strategy

Number	Recommendation
2.3	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána in conjunction with Tusla develop a new joint approach for assessing and managing child protection/welfare notifications that adopts best practices found in Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs and Concern Hubs.

Actions required to implement Recommendation 2.3

➤ Develop a joint single electronic notification and tracking system;
➤ Develop a unique reference number for each case;
➤ Develop a standard operating procedure for the creation of quality of notifications to ensure that sufficient information is provided to allow for immediate assessment of risk and case management. This standard operating procedure should include the sending of notifications in the case of historical child abuse, missing children and domestic incidents;
➤ Develop a clear framework for strategy meetings and Child Protection Conferences to record decisions and attendance;
➤ Ensure that only specially trained personnel and professionals make key decisions on the

<i>Actions required to implement Recommendation 2.3</i>	
	➤ management of notifications;
	➤ Develop a standard operating procedure for closing cases;
	➤ Develop a national protocol for the sharing of information;
	➤ Deliver joint-agency training to improve the quality of notifications;
	➤ Develop joint-agency data/metrics on notifications and actions such as attendance rates at meetings;
	➤ Ensure that there is a full evaluation of the out of hours service provided in child protection matters.
Consider whether this recommendation and associated actions should be included as part of Recommendation 2.1 to develop a national strategy.	

Number	Recommendation
2.4	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána review the Sexual Incident and Child Welfare Key Performance Indicator (KPI) report to assess whether it is necessary in its current format.

<i>Actions required to implement Recommendation 2.4</i>	
	➤ Review the use of metrics on prosecution of sexual incidents in the light of PULSE 6.8;
	➤ IF KPI report is retained, PULSE should be updated to record additional data such as attendance rates at Child Protection Conferences;
	➤ Ensure that strategy meetings held and joint action plans arising out of meetings are accurately
	➤ recorded on PULSE for production in the KPI reports; and
	➤ Provide full access to Sexual Incident and Child Welfare KPI reports and training for those sergeants and inspectors designated to monitor and update KPIs.

Number	Recommendation
2.5	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána in conjunction with Tusla review the approach and the protocol for dealing with missing children, particularly those who are in various forms of care and those who are at high risk of exploitation.

<i>Actions required to implement Recommendation 2.5</i>	
	➤ Appoint missing persons officers in all divisional Protective Services Units
	➤ Ensure that all high-risk cases are reviewed by a detective supervisor and investigation strategies are completed;
	➤ Ensure that the Garda Missing Persons Bureau has a more intrusive supervisory role in checking the quality of investigations conducted;
	➤ Ensure that return interviews are always conducted;
	➤ Review the approach for conducting interviews with children missing from care, particularly those children who are at high risk of exploitation;
	➤ Identify those children who go missing that are at a high risk of sexual exploitation and develop early preventative actions;
	➤ Ensure that all missing persons investigation reports on PULSE contain full details of the case, including descriptions, actions taken to find persons and the locations where they are found; and
	➤ Develop a mobile phone application similar to the Australian system that allows parents and guardians to collect information that is vital for any future investigation.
Consider whether this recommendation (2.5) and associated actions should be included as part of	

Actions required to implement Recommendation 2.5

Recommendation 2.1 to develop a national strategy.

Number	Recommendation
2.6	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána, in conjunction with other Sex Offenders Risk Assessment and Management (SORAM) partners, develop a national high- level executive group to take overall responsibility for SORAM and to review the joint approach to managing sex offenders and particularly those at risk of causing most harm.

Actions required to implement Recommendation 2.6

- Ensure that the high-level executive group is made up of senior managers similar to the group that drove the implementation of the J-ARC initiative;
- Develop Violent and Sex Offenders Register (ViSOR) or a similar e-type information sharing system;
- Ensure that all SORAM personnel charged with managing sex offenders are risk assessment trained;
- Develop a standard operating procedure for managing prison pre-release meetings and to consider assignment of gardaí and probation officers to manage the release of sex offenders;
- Ensure that the National SORAM Office performs an oversight and governance role;
- Ensure full representation at SORAM meetings from relevant agencies including local authority housing and mental health services;
- Conduct research/evaluation of offender treatment programmes and develop metrics on reoffending rates;
- Provide ongoing SORAM refresher training as well as training for those criminal justice representatives involved in cases in court.

Consider whether this recommendation (2.6) and associated actions should be included as part of Recommendation 2.1 to develop a national strategy.

Number	Recommendation
2.7	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána review the procedures for managing sex offenders contained in the Policy on the Investigation of Sexual Crimes, Crimes against Children and Child Welfare.

Actions required to implement Recommendation 2.7

- Ensure that gardaí deployed to sex offender management are part of the new Protective Services Units
- Promote the updating and use of Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System (ViCLAS) as an important source of offender information
- Ensure that all outstanding booklets are entered on the ViCLAS system
- Conduct a review of the use of Sex Offenders Orders
- Provide training for those gardaí conducting risk assessments.

Consider whether this recommendation and associated actions should be included as part of Recommendation 2.1 to develop a national strategy.

Number	Recommendation
2.8	The Inspectorate recommends that the Department of Justice convene a multi-agency group to review legislative issues in connection with managing sex offenders and particularly those at risk of causing most harm.

<i>Actions required to implement Recommendation 2.8</i>	
➤	Consider extending the Sex Offenders Risk Assessment and Management (SORAM) model to include other categories of offenders who pose a significant threat to public safety;
➤	Review the process for the monitoring of young offenders who are under 18 years of age;
➤	Review those sexual offences that are currently excluded from the schedule of offences;
➤	Address gaps in the powers to deal with those who refuse to engage with monitoring gardaí;
➤	Consider legislation to remove the need for a supervision order for SORAM monitoring;
➤	Consider an obligation to request a pre-sanction report for all adult persons convicted of a sexual offence.
Consider whether this recommendation and associated actions should be included as part of Recommendation 2.1 to develop a national strategy.	

Number	Recommendation
3.1	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána develop PULSE recording practices that clearly identify child sexual abuse/child sexual exploitation incidents and other incidents involving children at risk such as human trafficking, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and honour based violence.

Number	Recommendation
3.2	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána conduct a review of PULSE incident categories to ensure that all offences of a sexual nature are recorded in a single sexual offence category and issue clear national directions on the correct recording of sexual offences.

<i>Actions required to implement Recommendation 3.2</i>	
➤	Revise the descriptions in the PULSE Incident Recording Manual to ensure that all offences of a sexual nature, including child pornography offences, are recorded in the sexual offences category;
➤	The Central Statistics Office and the Garda Síochána to agree a single categorisation system for all sexual offences; and
➤	Address the recurring theme of over-counting of sexual offences,
Consider whether this recommendation and associated actions should be included as part of Recommendation 2.1 to develop a national strategy.	

Number	Recommendation
3.3	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána review the policy of not approaching child abuse victims as part of third party referral (including clerical notification cases) who are initially unwilling to make a complaint.

Number	Recommendation
3.4	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána take immediate action to increase the numbers of members trained to Level 3 and Level 4 interview standard and to ensure there is sufficient suitably trained members to conduct interview with suspects and take statements from adult victims of child sexual abuse.

Number	Recommendation
3.5	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána specifically include interviewing of suspects and the taking of statements from witnesses in child sexual abuse cases in the detective training programme

Number	Recommendation
3.6	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána, in conjunction with Tusla, move to a standard operating procedure for conducting joint interviewing of child victims.

Actions required to implement Recommendation 3.6

➤ Ensure that sufficient numbers of social workers are trained as child specialist interviewers to allow joint interviews to take place;
➤ Both agencies to be involved in the development and delivery of a joint interview training course that caters for the child interview requirements of social workers and garda members;
➤ Review the use and conduct of clarification interviews;
➤ Develop metrics and quality assurance processes for interviews;
➤ Ensure that all specialist interviewers are attached full-time to investigation units or are released on a rotational basis for immediate deployment;
➤ Encourage more male gardaí to become specialist interviewers;
➤ Ensure that investigating officers view the victim interviews;
➤ Develop a programme of refresher training for specialist interviewers;
➤ Remove the need for specialist interviewers to create transcripts of interviews;
➤ Review the issue of parents/guardians who refuse to allow a child to be interviewed or medically examined; and
➤ Review the referral process to units such as St Clare's and St Louise's and in particular resolve the use of credibility assessments.

Number	Recommendation
3.7	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána, in conjunction with the Director of Public Prosecutions, review the processes and develop joint protocol and approaches for the management of child sexual abuse cases.

Actions required to implement Recommendation 3.7

➤ Clarify the types of cases that should be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions;
➤ Consider the findings and recommendations of the 2015 independent review of the investigation and prosecution of rape cases by the Metropolitan Police Service and the Crown Prosecution Service; and
➤ Develop a best practice model for providing early investigative advice.
Consider whether this recommendation and associated actions should be included as part of Recommendation 2.1 to develop a national strategy.

Number	Recommendation
3.8	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána develop a mandatory welfare referral process for gardaí and garda staff carrying out child sexual abuse investigative or examination roles.

Number	Recommendation
3.9	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána complete the roll-out of all Divisional Protective Services Units by the end of 2018.

Number	Recommendation
3.10	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána assign the Divisional Protective Services Units with responsibility for all aspects of investigating child sexual abuse including taking the initial report, interviewing victims and suspects, inter-agency notification and implementation of the revised Policy on the Investigation of Sexual Crime, Crimes against Children and Child Welfare.

Actions required to implement Recommendation 3.10

➤ Following the introduction of the functional model of policing outlined in the Crime Investigation (2014) report, ensure that the superintendent in charge of crime has overall divisional responsibility for investigating child sexual abuse;
➤ Ensure that each divisional unit has a dedicated detective inspector in charge;
➤ Ensure that all investigators assigned to the unit are fully trained and complete specific training in the investigation of sexual offences and child protection;
➤ When using gardaí who are not assigned to the divisional PSU to gather evidence, ensure that they have received specialist training in the investigation of sexual offences and child protection;
➤ Identify opportunities for the assignment of garda support staff;
➤ Revise the Policy on the Investigation of Sexual Crime, Crimes Against Children and Child Welfare in the light of the recommendations in this report and deliver bespoke training on the new policy to those who have core responsibilities;
➤ Consider attachments for probationary gardaí to divisional units; and
➤ Develop a process for sharing learning and good practice between units.

Number	Recommendation
3.11	The Inspectorate recommends that the Department of Justice and Equality convene a criminal justice multi-agency working group to deliver a more victim-centred service to child sexual abuse victims.

Actions required to implement Recommendation 3.11

➤ Consider the extension of pre-trial hearings;
➤ Reduce unnecessary and repeated court appearances by witnesses;
➤ Develop joint-agency monitoring of data on case timeliness and factors affecting the outcome of criminal cases;
➤ Develop pre-trial evidence for children, vulnerable victims and witnesses; and
➤ Include the provision of special measures as part of a pre-trial hearing process.
Consider whether this recommendation and associated actions should be included as part of Recommendation 2.1 to develop a national strategy.

Number	Recommendation
4.1	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána conduct a review of the findings emanating from the response to the Garda Inspectorate's request for information on the management of referrals of child abuse material.

Actions required to implement Recommendation 4.1

➤ Examine why divisions did not respond to the request for information;
➤ Review the packages sent to divisions from 2014 and 2015 that were still outstanding at 31 December 2016;
➤ Analyse the reasons for the time taken to conduct searches by the divisions;
➤ Review the searches that took place after the request date of 2 August 2016; and
➤ Examine the delays in sending requests for examination of devices from divisions.

Number	Recommendation
4.2	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána implement a standard operating procedure for assessing, managing and investigating child abuse material referrals and for tackling online child sexual abuse.

Actions required to implement Recommendation 4.2

➤ Review the resourcing needs for pro-active operations and re-active investigations;
➤ Develop a new image categorisation system in line with international best practice;
➤ Develop a risk-based assessment process using a model such as the Kent Internet Risk Assessment Tool for use at all stages of investigations into CAM;
➤ Activate a pro-active system such as Child Protection Systems or Round-Up that generates real time intelligence on offenders accessing CAM;
➤ Ensure that Child Abuse Image Database or a derivative of this system is developed for use in CAM assessment;
➤ Develop a dedicated pro-active investigation unit to tackle online abusers operating in P2P networks and those seeking to have contact abuse with children;
➤ Develop a dedicated victim identification unit; and
➤ Develop an information pack for suspects that includes information on suicide prevention support.

Number	Recommendation
4.3	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána implement a standard operating procedure for conducting searches of addresses in child abuse material cases and other cases where devices are likely to be seized.

Actions required to implement Recommendation 4.3

➤ Implement triage technology to assist with initial assessments;
➤ Utilise the skills of forensic examiners at searches;
➤ Provide accreditation for forensic examiners;
➤ Acquire encryption technology and develop the specialist skills of examiners; and
➤ Consider the assignment of forensic examiners to the Garda National Protective Services Bureau.

Number	Recommendation
4.4	The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána, in consultation with key partner agencies, conduct an annual joint strategic assessment process on the threats posed by the internet to the safety of children.

Actions required to implement Recommendation 4.4

➤ Develop problem profiles and plans for CSE and internet-related CSA crimes;
➤ Develop crime prevention plans including opportunities to promote the use of blocking, take down and filtering;

Actions required to implement Recommendation 4.4	
	➤ Develop pro-active policing approaches to tackle online CSE;
	➤ Combat the live streaming of on-demand abuse;
	➤ Target groups that produce CAM on the Darknet; and
	➤ Tackle the misuse of legitimate online platforms for CSE-related crimes such as the dissemination of child abuse material, grooming and child sexual exploitation.
Consider whether this recommendation and associated actions should be included as part of recommendation 2.1 to develop a national strategy.	

Number	Recommendation
4.5	The Inspectorate recommends that the Department of Justice and Equality consider introducing legislation in child sexual abuse related cases to provide power to compel any person who appears to have lawful access to a computer or other device to provide a password and any encryption key or code in order to operate the computer. Failure to comply with this requirement should be an offence.

Action required to implement Recommendation 4.5	
To consider whether these powers should be provided with or without the authority of a warrant.	



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