

Meeting of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice and Equality - 28 September 2016

Opening Statement by Josephine Feehily, Chairperson of the Policing Authority

**Chairperson**

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with the Joint Committee so early in your work programme. You have asked me to address issues and challenges for the Policing Authority in the short and medium term. In keeping with the Committee's guidance I will keep them brief and at a high level in this opening statement, and will be happy to develop the themes further in our conversation.

The role of the Authority is best captured by the long title of our Bill which is "*...to provide for the establishment and functions of a body.....for the purpose of overseeing the performance by the Garda Síochána of its functions relating to policing services....*" and we have been given a long list of specific functions. By way of a general remark, the Authority is not quite nine months old so I'm quite certain that we have not yet identified all issues and challenges we are likely to encounter.

**Start up and Statutory Imperatives**

We have all the issues and tasks you'd expect a start up to have – staff, logistics, Authority governance, providing basic public information - too much to do and not enough time or people to do it. Headway has been made under all those headings, but will probably always be work in progress.

Start up issues for the Authority were compounded by a set of statutory requirements with fixed or implicit timelines for our first year of operation, and at its first meeting, the Authority decided that meeting these requirements was not optional for a whole variety of reasons, not least public confidence in the Authority. These include the following "*must dos*" – all of which are either already achieved or well advanced

- having meetings with the Garda Commissioner in public. The fourth such meeting will take place tomorrow with another in November;
- developing and publishing the Authority's own Strategy Statement, laid before the Oireachtas in July and circulated to Committee members recently,
- approving the Garda Strategy Statement, recently consented to by the Tánaiste;
- developing policing priorities for 2017 which will shortly be sent to the Tánaiste for approval;
- working with the Garda Síochána to develop the Policing Plan for 2017 which must be formally submitted to the Authority before November; and
- developing a Code of Ethics for the Garda Síochána by 31 December 2016.

I will return to the latter two topics later in my statement, but would like to assure the Committee that thanks to a huge personal commitment by Authority members and by the Chief Executive and staff, we have achieved a lot in a very short time as, I hope you will agree, that summary shows.

### **Other Priorities**

At the outset, the Authority also decided as a matter of principle, to be as transparent as possible in everything we do and to develop the public facing parts of our functions quickly. So we have had two rounds of public consultation on the Code of Ethics, we invited public comment on our Strategy Statement, we hosted the first meeting of Chairs of Joint Policing Committees for many many years, and will do so again, we held a very successful consultation day with stakeholder representatives and we have published all our governing documents and minutes. Since our establishment we've also been given a number of formal referrals from the Tánaiste.

## Challenges

- Establishment

Turning to challenges for the Authority, there is a fairly long list but I will mention four important ones. An ongoing and understandable challenge is to “establish” the Authority, in the fullest sense of that word. By this I mean to register the Authority as a legitimate stakeholder in the realm of policing, including in the mind of the public, and to establish its authority. The statutory framework for Garda oversight and accountability is complex with many actors. Clarifying where the Authority fits and developing an understanding among stakeholders of the full scope of our functions and an appreciation of the value of a more transparent and timely oversight regime, will be work in progress for some time.

- Policing Performance

Overseeing policing performance is the core of our statutory remit. Probably our biggest challenge in the short and medium term is to establish a performance framework to enable the Authority to assess the performance of the Garda Síochána. We are working with the Garda Síochána using the statutory cycle of the Policing Plan to begin to establish performance targets which are more specific and measurable than in the past. It is our intention that next year’s plan will have some targets and that in future years we will build from there. We will need in future to understand the links between policing priorities and resource deployment, and we consider it essential that progress is made in deepening organisational and individual performance management and accountability. The importance of having robust performance management systems in place has been emphasised in recent reports by Mr Justice O’Higgins and the Garda Inspectorate.

A functioning performance framework will also be essential to oversee the implementation by the Garda Commissioner of the recommendations of a wide range of third party reports such as O'Higgins , the Garda Inspectorate, GSOC, the Commission for Public Sector Appointments to mention a few. This is not just a mechanical process with numbers and dates. Victims experience, public confidence and public perception of Garda performance will be very important measures of performance.

- Code of Ethics

At a recent consultation day, a number of people observed that the draft Code of Ethics which we had published for public comment was 90% there, but not everyone agreed on the same 90%! However, since a Code that satisfies everyone is probably not achievable, that wasn't too bad. We will deliver a revised final text soon, but the medium term challenge which we foresee will be embedding the Code throughout the Garda organisation. Much of this work will fall to the Garda Commissioner and her senior team, overseen by the Authority, but I expect we will make some proposals.

- Appointments

The Authority has certain functions in relation to approving civilian posts and making senior civilian appointments which have recently come into effect and we expect new regulations to commence our functions relating to senior Garda appointments. These tasks will present a logistics and resource challenge for the Authority but we regard them as contributing enormously to influencing the culture of the Garda Síochána. Related to this, we have also been asked by the Tánaiste to oversee the preparation by the Garda Commissioner of a Workforce Plan to deliver the Government's vision of a Garda service of 21,000 personnel, made up of Gardaí, civilians and reserves, including a plan to increase Garda visibility by redeploying more Gardaí to front line policing and replacing them with civilians.

## Delivering change

Chairperson, while I have spoken about challenges in terms of what the Authority has to do, we are always conscious that **THE** challenge above everything else for all of us, is to have a police service which deserves and enjoys the trust and support of the Irish people. The Garda Public Attitude Survey gives strong evidence of trust and community confidence in the Garda Síochána overall, and in that regard Ireland is very fortunate because law enforcement relies to a very large measure on voluntary compliance and public confidence.

The Authority considers that right now the combination of the recommendations for change provided in various Garda Inspectorate and other Reports, the capital envelope provided for investment in technology and equipment, the acceleration of recruitment, and the Garda Commissioner's personal commitment to modernisation and renewal provide a real opportunity for the Garda Síochána to professionalise, to build capacity and to provide a 21<sup>st</sup> century policing service.

By delivering on our mission "*to drive excellent policing through valued and effective oversight and governance*" the Authority is determined to play its part.