

POLICING AUTHORITY ASSESSMENT OF POLICING PERFORMANCE 2020



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
POLICING AUTHORITY

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Chairperson's Foreword

It has become something of a refrain that any review of any aspect of 2020 has COVID-19, inevitably, as part of the year's definition. This is not a report on policing during the health emergency but it will feature with some prominence. The reader will forgive the fact that these words will reprise some of the sentiments that have already been included in the eleven reports that the Policing Authority has submitted to the Minister for Justice on the policing of COVID-19. That is inescapable but it is also right and proper.

It became abundantly clear that the pandemic would alter much of life for everyone in Ireland and that it would be disruptive, although few realised the extent to which it would become tragic for so many. It also was clear that restrictions that were designed to offer a measure of safety for people would represent a threat to those for whom their homes were not a source of protection.

This Performance Assessment has the Policing Plan as a primary focus but there is a great deal more to policing than can be contained within the pages of the Plan that outlines the Commissioner's priorities and commitments to the people. It is that combination of priority and commitment that makes it such a central document in the life of our policing service. It is that, too, that explains the Authority's sustained attention to its fulfilment and to the place it occupies in the approach of those who direct policing.

The Garda Síochána realised at a very early stage that the Plan would need to be revised to accommodate the changes that the health emergency required. But it was the speed with which those changes were appreciated and the immediacy with which the Commissioner and his colleagues directed their focus at the protection of those who were vulnerable and, in particular, to those whose vulnerability was increased within their own homes that were key statements of the quality of the Garda response. These were insights of wisdom and of consequence.

The Authority's reports throughout the year have clearly recorded the quality of the policing service and the depth of the response from the public. They have also emphasised the turning point that the experiences of 2020 can and should represent. This Assessment continues that work of appreciation and evaluation.

The Authority has frequently urged successive Commissioners to identify substantive challenges facing the organisation in the regular reports it offers to the public. That remains the case. But, equally important is the challenge to report success. The Garda Síochána, in its many engagements with the Authority, identifies visible, tangible, real measures of success that do not find expression in published documents. Why this should be so is difficult fully to understand. It may be that the successes are not fully reported internally or that their importance is not fully appreciated. Or it may be that the strategic perspective has not been sufficiently widely developed to read beyond individual noting of good outcomes.

Modesty has its virtues but finding a way to let the public know, in a measured and realistic way, what has been achieved, as well as what cannot be achieved, will give people a much better

understanding of the character and quality of, as well as the challenges for, the policing service offered to the community. Perhaps there may be virtue in reflecting on a new calculus of success.

The health emergency has told us much about the depth and quality of the relationship between community and Gardaí. It has also told us of the commitment of all in the Garda Síochána to the principle and practice of public service. It has shown us how all who have key roles in our communities, including the Garda Síochána, have shouldered the additional burdens of the pandemic as well as being attentive to their own family needs and concerns.

And people throughout the country have given a very strong indication of what they value in policing and how much they wish that new approach, the new tone, the new engagement to be the centre of the future policing service. As it did at the beginning, the leadership of the Garda Síochána must hearken to that call.

We learned also that all in the Garda Síochána serve equally. There is no hierarchy of value or importance. Where any hierarchies are perceived to exist - and they are so perceived by some - that perception must be discouraged with vigour.

Among the significant achievements in 2020 was the focus on protecting the vulnerable. The extension of the network of Divisional Protective Service Units to every Division in the country was a signal moment. That development and the sustained investment over recent years in the variety of responses to domestic violence were the foundations on which it was possible to construct Operation Faoiseamh. And that, in its turn, was a source of immense support and reassurance to very many. It will be a lasting testament in the definitive reframing of domestic violence as the crime that it is.

The recognition of the need to take a fresh approach to detections, especially to understanding more fully the dynamics that influence or inhibit the successful completion of sexual violence cases, was a further example of thoughtful self-evaluation. The fruits of this work will be eagerly awaited by the Authority.

The continuing development of the Garda Anti-Corruption Unit was to be welcomed, as was the focus on professional standards and the importance of the Code of Ethics throughout the Garda Síochána. These are indispensable guarantors of an effective, modern policing service. They are not developments to be regarded with impatience, less still with resistance.

The quality of the interventions in the activities of organised crime groups and of those who deal in drugs and the associated intimidation that is all too often visited on those who are already vulnerable was notable during the year. Considerable success attended this work that can have such an impact on the lives and safety of communities in all parts of the country.

To borrow a phrase from this Assessment, it may be churlish to identify the fact that side by side with the successes there are enduring problems and challenges. Notable among these are key areas of the organisation's life that enable a great deal of the change that the Commissioner seeks to achieve. Issues of human resource, of training, of finance, of information and technology may

sometimes be seen as opaque, bureaucratic processes at some distance from operational policing. But such a view misses the crucial, inescapable linkage between these areas of the organisation and the quality of the service offered to the people. They are of vital strategic consequence to policing, as well as being essential means to obtain the best return on the almost €2 billion of public money that is invested in the Garda Síochána each year. Crucial also is the further intensification of the work on addressing the complex of issues that arise for policing with the increasing diversity within Irish society. These, and others, are issues that will be the focus of continuing Authority engagement with the Commissioner and his senior colleagues during 2021.

Perhaps two of the early challenges will be first, to find, in common with the rest of society, the way to count a beat, to take a breath when the emergency has ended so that every individual who works in the Garda Síochána can renew and refresh and face the future with fresh energy. The second, if no less important, will be to find the way to retain and to value anew all that has shone so brightly in the service given to the public in 2020. The Authority is greatly encouraged by the Commissioner's words in his foreword to the 2021 Policing Plan where he says that 'a strong focus on community policing rightly remains at the heart of our philosophy' and that 'our relationship with the community and the innovation and agility developed to protect the most vulnerable in society are bedrocks on which we will move forward.'

They are noble, and necessary, ambitions and they represent an approach that is warmly to be welcomed.

Bob Collins

1. Introduction

This *Assessment of Policing Performance 2020* (the report) has been produced by the Policing Authority (the Authority) to provide an evaluation of the Garda Síochána's performance in the provision of its policing service in 2020, with particular focus on performance against the Policing Plan for that year. It is the latest in a series of reports which are produced annually, at the half-year mark and then at year end, assessing Garda Síochána performance. These reports are provided to the Minister for Justice, the Garda Commissioner, other stakeholders, and made publicly available through the Authority's website. The reports are important in providing transparency about policing performance, the oversight of policing and the outcomes of that work.

Any consideration of policing performance in 2020 is inextricably linked with the Garda Síochána's role in the national response to the health emergency. The Authority has produced a series of eleven reports on Garda performance, as it relates to COVID-19, which are available through the Authority's website ([available here](#)). These reports present an account over time of the hugely positive role that the Garda Síochána has played and the response of the community to that work. While the Garda Síochána response to COVID-19, including the use of the additional powers granted to the organisation's members, is intrinsic to the assessment of performance in 2020, it is not the primary focus of this Report. The impact of COVID-19 is certainly considered and commented on, but within the context of wider performance themes and issues.

The Policing Authority

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.

Our Vision

is of a society
served by a professional,
impartial, constantly
improving police
organisation which
deserves and enjoys the
trust and support of
the people.

Report Structure

This report assesses Garda performance over the following four sections.

Section 2 provides the reader with information on the purpose of the Annual Policing Plan and how it is developed, as well as an overview of the Authority's approach to assessing and reporting on performance. It also gives a sense of the impact of COVID-19 on the planning process in 2020.

Section 3 draws together a thematic assessment of performance

Section 4 sets out the Authority's assessment across the six chapters of the Policing Plan, outlining specific areas where progress has been made and those areas where it has not, and

Section 5 presents the main conclusions and looks forward to 2021.

2. Planning and Assessing Performance

This section provides an overview of the way in which annual targets are planned and set by the Garda Síochána, and how the Authority assesses performance against these.

2.1 Policing Plan

The annual Policing Plan sets out the range of commitments made by the Garda Síochána to both the community and the members of its organisation, with accompanying targets and milestones, by which performance is measured. These commitments represent the areas of primary focus for the organisation, its management, and members/staff for the year ahead. The Policing Plan 2020 is the second of three annual plans designed to implement the Garda Síochána's Statement of Strategy 2019 - 2021 ([‘the Strategy’](#)).

The Policing Plan is drawn up by the Garda Síochána, in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005 ([‘the Act’](#)) and approved by the Policing Authority with the consent of the Minister for Justice. The Plan is accompanied by a set of performance targets, which are determined by the Policing Authority in consultation with the Garda Commissioner. The Plan and targets are formally laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas.

The Plan must be flexible, recognising that the Garda Síochána needs to be able to respond to changes in the policing environment as they arise and to propose and discuss revisions to the Plan with the Authority. However, the premise of the Plan is that its preparation should be considered and evidence-based, in order to anticipate as many of these situations as possible.

Recent iterations of the Policing Plan have also addressed the actions assigned to the Garda Síochána under ‘*A Policing Service for the Future*’: an implementation plan for the recommendations arising from the Government's Policing Reform programme ([read more on the reform programme here](#)).

2.2 Policing Plan 2020

The flexibility inherent in the process to develop the annual policing plan was exercised in 2020 as the Garda Síochána responded to the needs of the COVID-19 health emergency. The Policing Plan 2020 was revised in May to account for the additional work and activity that had to be undertaken to respond to this changed operational environment. This activity involved a significant reorientation and reprioritisation of



Figure 1: The Garda Strategy Statement 2019-2021

focus and resourcing, which understandably and predictably impacted on the organisation's capacity to deliver on its prior commitments. Rather than the removal of targets the revision consisted largely of resetting timelines and specific milestones. It also introduced a significant number of additional COVID-19 related commitments in almost all areas of strategic priority, resulting in the Plan consisting of 138 individual targets across its six chapters: Community Policing; Protecting People; A Secure

Ireland; A Human Rights Foundation; Our People, Our Greatest resource; and Transforming Our Service.

2.3 Authority Oversight and Assessment of Performance

The primary mechanism for monitoring and assessing policing performance is through monthly Authority meetings with the Garda Síochána, a minimum of four of which are held in public each year. Performance is also reviewed in depth by the Authority's Policing Strategy and Performance (PSP), and Garda Síochána Organisation Development (OD) Committees. Throughout the year the Authority and the Committees review and analyse internal and external reporting from, and about, the Garda Síochána.

The Authority reviews performance through a programme of engagements during the year, most of which in 2020 were moved to video conferencing. As well as engaging with the Garda Síochána, the Authority interacts with Joint Policing Committees and conducts a stakeholder engagement programme. This programme of engagement seeks to understand the lived experience of policing and the perceptions in the community as to its effectiveness. The information gathered through these different types of engagements is drawn together, along with research when relevant, to inform discussion between Authority members and the senior leadership of the Garda Síochána.

While the Policing Plan may form the foundation for the oversight activities in any given year, the Authority's engagement with and oversight of the Garda Síochána are not restricted to those priorities that it contains. Through its regular contacts, and at meetings of the Authority and its committees, performance beyond the scope of the Plan is also assessed. Thus, issues such as crime trends, third party reports, significant developments and the progress of other key areas are carefully monitored and reviewed periodically, as required.

A review of Authority work for 2020, including detail on the performance oversight activities – published in December and [available here](#) – provides a sense of the breadth and depth of activities which inform the assessment that follows in the rest of this report.

2.4 Authority Reporting

The Authority has typically prepared two assessments of policing performance in a year. These reports focus on the achievement of the targets set out in the Policing Plan, progress against strategic crime and public perception targets, and the broader, thematic challenges faced by the organisation.

3. High-Level Assessment of Policing Performance

This section provides an overview of the Authority's main observations on the performance of the Garda Síochána in 2020. Greater detail regarding specific achievements and the progress across specific initiatives is provided in section three.

3.1 Strong Community Response

The Garda Síochána positions and understands itself to be a community policing service, and this is reflected in the language of its strategies and plans. However, there has in recent years been a notable disconnect between that language and the perception of community policing, both within and outside the organisation. That perception is that community policing was not a priority. Rather, it was perceived as an ancillary function to 'real policing' and this was reflected in the manner in which it was resourced and also the value it was perceived to have in the organisation. Within communities a sense of there being a lack of a relationship, or a distance, was frequently articulated. These issues were heightened in relation to minority, vulnerable and seldom heard communities who frequently spoke of a long-standing disconnect or lack of relationship with the Garda Síochána. The development of a Community Policing Framework was the organisation's response to the need for an agreed articulation of what community policing is and how best it can be carried out to keep people safe and engender confidence in policing in communities.

The requirement to respond to the health emergency in 2020 necessitated and delivered focused and energetic community policing that was well-resourced and clear in its purpose. As has been described in the Authority's reports on policing of COVID-19, community policing became enlivened during this period, resulting in a reconnection with the community and a reorientation of the organisation towards engagement focused on the identification and response to need. Much has been said about the manner in which the Garda Síochána reached into communities at a time when many of the vulnerable could not reach out. This was typified by the wide range of activities undertaken, from shopping and collecting prescriptions to checking in on the isolated. At a time when health restrictions precluded many agencies and organisations from working, the Garda Síochána became key in identifying need and vulnerability and providing a link between people and the services they required.

The approach and tone of community policing during this period has the potential to leave an important legacy of lasting change. That tone is characterised by an increased level of understanding, respect, empathy and meaningful engagement and this has also been felt and experienced by groups that traditionally would not have enjoyed such a relationship. It is arguable that this is not a function of, or guaranteed by, the provision of increased resources, but rather reflects a new and more explicit intent and orientation towards all members of the community as worthy of such service.

The Garda Síochána's response to COVID-19 saw the large scale redeployment of both Garda members and broader resources into community policing across the country. This redeployment was emblematic of the agility and responsiveness that the Garda Síochána has shown throughout the period of COVID-19. It was a significant achievement on the part of Garda members, staff and reserve that had a very significant impact on the experience of the health emergency for communities.

Building on progress

In considering the policing plan commitments in the area of community policing, the rollout of the Community Policing Framework and the review of partnership working have been understandably delayed. Yet, it would seem churlish to focus on that as an indication of what has been achieved in this area.

The health emergency provided a large-scale, live opportunity to test and experience what community policing might be and to get a sense of the response of the community and indeed the Garda workforce to that experience. There is huge opportunity to now consider how the rollout of the Community Policing Framework can build on what has been learned and achieved. In some ways, in revising the Policing Plan, the Garda Síochána failed to see the COVID-19 response as an opportunity to reframe policing plan commitments in a manner that might take cognisance of their relevance to what it was doing in responding to COVID-19. Rather than requiring the deferral of these commitments, the work it has undertaken in 2020 was a means of their furtherance.

A formal review of community partnerships was not delivered but the Garda Síochána has been required to work with the full panoply of agencies and organisations. The Authority understands from its outreach how much that engagement was valued and also what it delivered in terms of keeping people safe. Emerging from this period of heightened engagement and urgency - when the resilience and efficacy of community partnerships was tested - these organisations now have important stories to tell. It is questionable whether any formal review might have been capable of delivering more than what the Garda Síochána is now positioned to learn by listening and understanding this feedback on issues such as the sharing of information, the development of relationships and protocols, and improved joint working. There is an opportunity to develop a shared language of risk; one that recognises that the Garda Síochána is often the first to encounter risk and vulnerability but that the competence to deal with that risk may lie with another agency or organisation.

There is also work to be undertaken to retain the tone of policing that emerged during 2020. For some communities, it was a welcome shift in their experience of policing that began to suggest the possibility of building confidence in that relationship. The continuance of this improved tone is important to communities, however it cannot be assumed. Indeed some communities report that there has already been a felt diminution in confidence that it will endure. It will require that the organisation understands how the tone and approach was engendered in the workforce, and what it will take to consolidate that tone in business as usual. It was not a performance commitment for 2020 or an expected outcome of the COVID-19 response and yet it may be something more significant. It may represent one end point of what the Community Policing Framework, Code of Ethics and Diversity and Integration Strategy are ultimately trying to achieve.

It is the Authority's view that work to achieve the Policing Plan commitments in the area of community policing - many of which will continue into the 2021 plan - should not be divorced from the experience of 2020, but should emerge from it. In tandem with the completion of ongoing work in relation to identifying and divesting non-core duties undertaken at present by the Garda Síochána, the Authority encourages the identification of a community policing approach that is efficient in its use of resources through strategic deployment and allows the improved use of partnerships and inter-agency work. This is particularly pertinent when combined with the strategic planning and deployment aspects of community policing envisaged within both the Community Policing Framework and the Operating Model.

The response of communities has given a strong indication of what it values about community policing – contact, accessibility, tone, and presence rather than visibility. The challenge is to ensure that the measurement of success henceforth is cognisant of what the community needs, what it views as effective performance and what it understands as successful outcomes.

3.2 Protecting the Vulnerable

The mission statement of the Garda Síochána, as outlined by the Commissioner through its Strategy Statement and the Policing Plan is ‘Keeping People Safe’. Central to this has been the protection of the most vulnerable in Irish society. In 2020 the Garda Síochána made significant progress in relation to its organisational infrastructure around victims with the provision of Divisional Protective Services Units in every Division, alongside existing Victims’ Services Offices. It also, through Operation Faoiseamh, pre-empted and provided - and continues to provide - a critical policing service to victims of domestic abuse that seeks to keep them safe.

Protective Services

A focal point in previous iterations of this report, other Authority publications, and engagement generally with the Garda Síochána has been performance in the area of protective services and the long-term building of effective policy and infrastructure. Central to this has been the design, pilot, review and rollout of Divisional Protective Services Units (DPSUs), which are dedicated, specialised resources for the investigation of certain serious crimes, including sexual offences, offences against children, and domestic abuse. While engagement will continue on the exact nature of the scope and adequacy of resourcing of these units, the Authority recognises their significance and welcomes the achievement of having a DPSU established in every Garda Division. It represents a significant milestone in ensuring that these crimes are approached in a consistent, expert and victim-centred manner.

Although early in the lifetime of these units, the Authority notes that early indicators of success, such as feedback from rape crisis centres, victim groups and other state agencies has been overwhelmingly positive, as has the internal Garda feedback provided to the Authority. It is also testament to the Garda Síochána’s performance in this area that cases of coercive control are currently before the courts, including the first successful conviction, following the introduction of this offence type in 2018. These indicators will hopefully, in time, be supported by improved detection rates for sexual offences, which remain low, more positive court outcomes, and other quantitative measures. However, in advance of these metrics, the Authority retains a positive assessment of their impact in delivering on the Garda Síochána’s mission of keeping people safe. The Authority looks forward to the continued development of these units, and awaits with interest the outcome of the post-implementation review planned for 2021.

Operation Faoiseamh

Operation Faoiseamh was established by the Garda Síochána in anticipation of an increase in domestic abuse incidents during COVID-19. Its primary aim was to prevent loss of life and to ensure that victims of domestic abuse were supported and protected in light of the unprecedented circumstances. Resources and focus were allocated to the operation, which had a clear purpose and intent. From a strategic point of view, Operation Faoiseamh was a natural evolution from a longer-term investment that the organisation has made in infrastructure, policy, training and resources in the area of domestic abuse. It was also built on strong leadership and key relationships and partnerships with stakeholders

that had been established, and which could be mutually leveraged to deliver an agile, confident and thoughtful response. There have been in excess of 21,000 contacts or attempts at contact made with people who are in abusive environments during the lifetime of the operation, with the commencement of in excess of 200 associated prosecutions. This work was complemented by a strong and consistent message, amplified through the media, which created an atmosphere of support for victims and a parallel warning message to perpetrators.

The significance and impact of Operation Faoiseamh, as expressed by those agencies and organisations that support those enduring this crime, has been detailed in the Authority's reports on COVID-19. Its significance is not only in terms of the protection and safety it is offering now but also in terms of the catalytic impact it has had in shifting the policing mindset within the Garda Síochána towards domestic abuse. Operation Faoiseamh, combined with the investment the Garda Síochána has made in recent years in this area of policing, has seen domestic abuse firmly framed as a crime deserving of a policing response and sanction, rather than as a private domestic matter. Agencies now make reference to 'pockets of bad practice', whereas in the past good practice was at times the exception rather than the rule.

Operation Faoiseamh offers much in terms of a model for the development of policing in specialised areas. As with community policing, the Garda Síochána must now work to ensure that there is a lasting legacy from the work in this area in 2020. It would appear, however, that the organisation is better placed to continue to improve the services it offers to the vulnerable, given the solid foundation that existed prior the health emergency.

3.3 Tackling Drugs and Organised Crime

The response of the Garda Síochána to the activities of organised crime gangs (OCGs) in 2020 was an area of considerable success and offers a clear example of medium-to-long-term strategic planning and adequate resourcing, resulting in sustained policing successes for the Garda Síochána and the communities it serves.

The Authority is aware, through its engagement with the Garda Síochána, that the area of Organised and Serious Crime had received significant increases in resources over a number of years to tackle the rising activities of OCGs. While success has been evident in recent years, 2020 saw: record levels of seizures of drugs and assets by the Garda Síochána and its partner agencies; significant inter-jurisdictional work to tackle organised crime; a number of significant court outcomes and trial commencements; and, the continued successful intervention in threat-to-life incidents.

This high level of performance is particularly welcome in the context of a trend in recent years of rising levels of drug crime in Ireland. This crime environment gave rise to the design and planning of a dedicated drugs policing operation, Operation Tara, in early 2020. Despite being halted due to COVID-19, the Garda Síochána proceeded with a number of operational and structural aspects of the Operation, including the significant increase in the strength of its Divisional Drug Units across the country. This allowed for a renewed focus on high-volume, low-level crime such as possession and possession for sale or supply, as well as the dismantling of OCG networks at the local level. While this remains a significant policing priority for the organisation, the early success has been notable for its impact on communities. Local stakeholder groups have reported to the Authority the increased presence of these units and the positive outcomes for communities. In particular, communities have

reported that the Garda Síochána is more responsive to drug-related crime issues raised in the community and have responded with agility to the changing environment brought on by COVID-19. It was also reported to the Authority by a number of community representatives that Garda members are being seen patrolling areas that had long been void of a policing presence and that this has had significant benefits for communities.

The above notwithstanding, the Authority is cognisant of the challenges in tackling drug and drug-related crime nationally for the Garda Síochána and the challenges faced by communities, with particular reference to drug-related intimidation, which is reported by the Garda Síochána and other stakeholders as a prevalent and growing issue given the pervasive nature of drugs issues in all communities. The Garda Síochána report significant challenges in responding to this issue in particular.

Relatedly under the auspices of Organised and Serious Crime, progress has been made in relation to cybercrime in 2020, which similarly has seen an increase in resourcing for the Garda National Cyber Crime Bureau (GNCCB). This is an area that has been previously raised as a particular area of concern for the Authority, given not only the trend of increases in cyber-dependent crime nationally and internationally, but also in the context of the cyber-enabled aspect of modern criminality. In particular the Authority notes the establishment of three cybercrime units across the country to augment the capacity of GNCCB, a long-standing target of previous policing plans.

Concerns remain however as to the strategic approach and operational performance in responding to economic crime, notably in the context of longstanding trends of rising economic crime and the findings of the *Review of structures and strategies to prevent, investigate and penalise economic crime and corruption* (published by the Department of Justice in December 2020 and [available here](#)). The Authority understands that the Garda Síochána plans to increase the capacity of the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) and will continue to engage on this area in 2021.

3.4 Key Enablers

In its oversight of the Garda Síochána, the Authority maintains a persistent focus on the key enablers of performance, namely: HR, training, information and technology, finance, and estate management. These areas have been of longstanding concern to the Authority. It might appear at first glance that these matters are at a remove from the effectiveness of day-to-day policing but they are intimately connected. The Authority has consistently placed significant emphasis on this point and it bears repetition here. To understand the emerging demands on policing; to know the skills that will be required to meet them; to be able to develop related strategies on training, professional development and policing presence; to know what various policing options will cost; and to be able to make informed choices on priorities are all central to providing the public with the best possible service and, in their turn, require the same application of senior management attention as the essential daily work of policing in our contemporary society. Performance in these areas in 2020, however, has done little to alleviate these concerns.

By way of exception, considerable progress had been made in the area of information and technology in 2020 and while challenges remain, there is a sense that a firm vision and plan exist for its development. That, in itself, demonstrates that rapid change and improvement, while they may be elusive, are not impossible.

The failure to adequately seize and address strategic issues within the enablers continues to impact on the short and long term performance of the Garda Síochána. Aside from the barriers this presents to the management and performance of the organisation at present, there is an inescapable and severe dissonance in the move to the autonomous functioning of Divisions under the Operating Model and the continued failure to establish the key enabling structures on which this will depend.

Workforce Planning

Since the first half of 2019 a strategic workforce plan – that will assess the future needs and staffing levels required by the organisation and provide a roadmap to ensuring that the right number of people, with the right skills are in place – has been overdue. A strategic workforce plan is an opportunity for a reimagining of the manner in which Garda members, staff and Reserve members might be deployed to deliver effective policing. The urgency around the need for a workforce plan has not diminished with time, but rather heightened. The continuing rollout of the Operational Model and its interdependencies with other reform projects provides a particular context in which a workforce plan is required. It remains a barrier to effective performance and impacts on the potential for the organisation to utilise its existing resources to their full potential.

There has been some positive engagement on this issue in 2020, and the Authority has a sense of a renewed focus on strategic HR, including the workforce plan. However, the lack of effective progress is continuously problematic for an organisation that is in the midst of a wide-ranging change programme, a significantly increasing workforce, and ever-present demands on resources. The Authority expects to see a finalised workforce plan delivered early in 2021 and in particular continues to be of the view that, to be meaningful, it must contain a clear sense of prioritisation and planning that is informed by a professional evaluation and articulation of the likely future demands on the organisation based on the reasonably foreseeable external crime environment, as well as on the needs of a changing society.

Training

Training, as a key enabler within the organisation, remains a concern for the Authority. While COVID-19 was a substantial barrier to the provision of training in 2020, in the main it merely exposed and compounded the weaknesses already present.

As an organisation of approximately 18,000 people and in a time of substantial change and modernisation, the training demands are high. This is evident in the inclusion of training to some extent in practically all plans, strategies and change projects – not to mention the presence of training in third party reports and their recommendations. This has caused a significant bottleneck for business owners and management in terms of prioritising and providing training to meet these ever-growing needs. The Authority has long questioned the ability of the organisation to prioritise and deliver all the training required in a timely, effective manner. At its most basic, there are change projects that cannot be delivered in the absence of the associated training.

Commitments made in relation to the organisation's strategy, governance and prioritisation in the area of training remain outstanding. A Learning and Development Director has not yet been appointed by the organisation. While the establishment of an expert group on learning and training, and the provision of a draft strategy are cautiously welcomed, the continued vacancy in this role and the associated uncertainty as to the locus of real responsibility leave a significant gap in the leadership and governance of training in the Garda Síochána. There are also concerns as to the effectiveness of

the strategy given its interim nature and pending the arrival of an appointment. The Authority is steadfast in its view that this position must be filled with a remit that covers all training activities from entry to retirement, if the organisation is to ensure these issues are addressed. In this absence, the concern remains that training is considered in an ad-hoc manner as the need arises, which is not sustainable in an organisation with the inescapable and continuing training demands of the Garda Síochána.

A positive outcome in this area in 2020 however is the greater utilisation of online delivery and e-learning. In particular, the Authority welcomes the adaptation of community policing training for online delivery and the design of human rights training with this medium in mind. While the standing start provided by a failure to progress such a transition up to this point has no doubt delayed training significantly, the progression of certain training to include e-learning, and the indication that culturally this is being embraced, is encouraging.

Information and Technology

In contrast to the above, information and technology has seen important milestones being met in 2020 and is an area of significant progress. The Authority has previously placed on the record concerns as to the establishment of a Chief Information Officer role with responsibility for both data and ICT, rather than the maintaining of two separate, and distinct roles. These concerns originated in the scale of the data and ICT challenges that the organisation was confronted with. However, at this juncture it is clear that the creation of a role with responsibility for both portfolios, and their alignment under information and technology, has had significant advantages.

The delivery of improvements in data quality, including the provision of a data vision and an accompanying plan for the organisation, represents the meeting of a long-standing need and alleviates a number of concerns held by the Authority. The recent commentary by the CSO on the improvements made in relation to data on the part of the Garda Síochána is testament to the progress being made, and is vitally important to public perception and confidence in the crime figures provided by the Garda Síochána.

The test of this progression will be the ability for the Garda Síochána to ensure that these systems are utilised to their fullest, with a cultural shift to appreciate the value and importance of data. The Authority's experience in relation to this is that there are pockets of best practice and good performance in the utilisation of data to inform strategic planning and the internal evaluation of performance. This appreciation and effective use is not mainstream at present, although indications are that this is shifting in a positive direction. The challenge is to arrive at the point where data is central to the management of the organisation and policing at all levels, with pockets of underutilisation being the exception.

Infrastructure that enables easy recording and access to data will be an important element of this culture shift. The continued issues in relation to the operational capacity of both the Garda Information Services Centre (GISC) and the Garda Statistical Analysis Service (GSAS) impact this potential. The former takes calls from front line members to input data onto the Garda systems, it also reviews and validates data and, as such, is crucial. The latter then uses this, and other, data to analyse trends, hotspots, etc. and provides management with information that is used to guide policing. Both of these services are reported as being under-resourced to the extent that they are operating below

minimum capacity and cannot meet the internal demand. This poses risks to data collection and quality, and the ability of the organisation to direct itself using an evidence base.

On information and technology more broadly, the provision of a comprehensive, costed, and articulate plan is an important display of intent that provides confidence in the future direction of this vital enabler. There is a sense that increasingly, information and technology development is contextualised in terms of what it can deliver for policing. This is reflected in tangible examples of proactive cooperation and problem solving between information and technology personnel and Gardaí. This is important not only in terms of what it can, and has already been seen to, deliver in practical measures, but also represents a shift in recognising an enabler function as being central to the delivery of policing. The Authority is of the view that this has not yet been similarly grasped in terms of the strategic relevance and impact of the finance and HR functions on matters of policing.

Finance

The Garda Síochána budget in 2020 was approximately €1.88 billion. This money is used to maintain the provision of a policing service to the public but also to enable the ongoing reform process. At a high level, particularly in relation to the former, the Authority holds the view that the Commissioner appears to be strongly managing that budget – recent years have seen an attempt to better understand and thus manage aspects of it at a senior management level. This is tempered by the belief that there is nevertheless potential to get a broader range and quality of policing service from the same money and that the organisation retains a significant weakness in this area at present when it comes to planning and supporting the ongoing reform.

The crux of the issue is that an appreciation of finance as a key operational and strategic capability, rather than a support function, does not yet exist at all levels of the organisation. Rather, as previously commented upon by the Authority, financial management is not embedded in the day-to-day planning, decision-making and performance management of the Garda Síochána. The provision of policing is seen as separate to this, rather than dependent on it. As such there is a significant inability to fully articulate and understand the organisation's resourcing needs. The targets within the Policing Plan frequently face barriers to implementation through insufficient resources. In this vein, the long-running failure to establish an ability to fully cost the annual Policing Plan continues to be a significant barrier and area of underperformance. Given the centrality of the Plan to the organisation's policing service and reform process, this must be established as a matter of urgency.

In tandem with this financial planning capability, the Garda Síochána must ensure that the management capacity in relation to the financial resources of the organisation continues to be advanced at all levels and to ensure that financial literacy in particular is ingrained at Regional and Divisional level. Although much work is still to be done on this, it has commenced.

The Authority, as part of its statutory functions, is required under section 62H(2)(b) of the Garda Síochána Act to *"...provide advice to the Minister [of Justice] before each financial year with regard to the resources that are likely to be required by the Garda Síochána to perform its functions in that financial year"*. In previous years the Authority has been compelled to cite the lack of availability of financial and management information from the Garda Síochána as a limitation on its ability to offer the nature of advice that the statute envisaged concerning the adequacy of resources for the organisation. It has been an ongoing source of frustration for the Authority that it has been difficult to realise the full potential of the statutory provision.

However, 2020 marked a clear departure in this regard. The Authority took the view that, notwithstanding the limited strategic focus on financial planning within the service, it should offer specific advice in respect of a number of areas that it had identified as key priorities. The Garda Síochána helped in this process by providing to the Authority more detailed information in support of its view of the financial resources required for operational purposes and for the implementation of the constituent elements of its reform programme in 2021. Although the process must continue to develop, this was a positive step-change by the Garda Síochána and the resultant discussions on the submissions made enabled the Authority to engage with the Minister in the way that the statute envisaged, on a number of priority areas, in advance of the 2021 budgetary process.

Estate Management

Currently, Garda Síochána buildings ('the estate') are managed and maintained by the Office of Public Works (OPW). In the last iteration of this report the Authority articulated the necessity for the Garda Síochána to produce a comprehensive plan for assessing and addressing the condition of the estate in addition to finalising a proposed approach to estate management. Under the ongoing [government programme of policing reform](#) it is intended that the Garda Síochána will assume this function. If that objective is ever to be realised, both of these complementary elements are needed urgently in order not only to plan for how the function should be managed and funded, but also to aid in the prioritisation of maintenance and remedial works, through evaluation and addressing of current and emerging issues. The expectations of the Authority, based on this need and on commitments made by Garda management, have not been met this year and there remains an absence of these key strategic policy positions.

Of particular concern is the potential impact on the rollout of the Operating Model (an overview of the model is provided on page 26). The Garda Síochána has identified estate needs that are crucial to the rollout and at present the latter half of the rollout to Divisions appears at risk if the estate needs are not urgently planned for and addressed. This is indicative of the current approach to estate management that fails to plan estate in tandem and as a critical strategic element of any policing decisions. The Operating Model represents the most significant structural change to policing in the history of the Garda Síochána but the planning of what the implications might be for accommodation was carried out sequentially rather than in parallel with these important decisions.

3.5 Investigative Systems/Supports

The Authority, in the 2019 iteration of this report, outlined the expectation that "a robust, evidence-informed review of the effectiveness of the current approach to detections" was required in 2020. Particular concern exists with regard to detection rates in respect of sexual offences. A number of engagements with the Garda Síochána have focussed on this issue in 2020, and while the Authority has been advised as to issues that can affect these crime types – and while understanding that certain crime types are characterised by longer investigation times which can affect detection rates in the short term – there remain substantial questions on the part of the Authority as to why these rates remain low. In this vein, the Authority welcomes the proposed examination of policing outcomes in relation to sexual crime in 2021, which will also include a review of the investigation process as it relates to sexual crime. This will hopefully provide a solid basis from which to develop strategies designed to increase detections in this area.

A key support in modern policing, the timely examination of ICT devices for evidence, has been an issue the Garda Síochána has grappled with in recent years, with insufficient internal capacity to process the high number of devices seized, resulting in an approximate 2-year backlog for devices to be examined. While the Authority has been given assurances as to the effectiveness of the prioritisation and triaging system in place for the investigation of devices, it nevertheless is an issue that has the impact of delaying investigations, as has been previously commented on by the Authority. As such, the establishment of the three cybercrime units outlined under the previous heading is noteworthy in this context as a necessary support to ensuring comprehensive and thorough investigations.

Of vital importance to the future management of investigations for the Garda Síochána is the Investigation Management System (IMS). This is a large scale IT project designed to provide the organisation with access to a dedicated system that automatically generates and tracks progress against specific tasks for certain crime types. It aims to improve tracking and accountability in investigations and has been mooted as central to a wide range of initiatives such as the detections improvement plan, improved supervision and the rollout of the Operating Model. The Authority is aware of the delays caused by COVID-19 in relation to the rollout and training of members in the use of the system, as well as reported issues with user experience.

While each of these items are separate commitments within the Policing Plan, their cumulative impact is potentially a concern for the Authority with regard to investigative performance. The Authority has maintained an interest in both detections and the quality of investigations over the past number of years in its oversight work. Within its own work plan for 2021, the Authority intends to put focus on the area of investigative performance, drawing in all the various policing factors that contribute to the successful detection of a crime.

3.6 Evolution of the Policing Plan – Planning, Reporting and Monitoring

The current framework for the planning, monitoring and reporting on the Policing Plan is the result of an evolving process that began in 2016 between the Authority and the Garda Síochána and has adapted based on the needs of both organisations year-on-year.

As has been discussed bilaterally in public and in private throughout 2020, and in relation to certain aspects over a longer period, the opinion is held that the current format of the Policing Plan needs to be updated to meet present needs and demands. From a statutory position and from the point of view of good, effective governance, a Policing Plan is required that is central to the Garda Síochána's operations. The performance of oversight by the Authority requires monthly reporting against this Plan. However, outside of these parameters there is an opportunity and scope to design a Plan and reporting structure that is practical, while meeting the needs not only of the Garda Síochána and the Authority, but also of the public and other stakeholders. The Policing Plan 2021, when finalised, will reflect the outcomes of these discussions during 2020.

At a high level this will result in a Plan that is more concise and features a much reduced number of targets. Both the Authority and the Garda Síochána are of the opinion that the current approach of including in excess of 100 initiatives as standard serves to lessen the sense of prioritisation. Rather, the Plan will focus on a smaller number of key priority projects.

With regard to reporting on performance to the Authority, in some areas there has been an absence of detail, inconsistencies in reporting, and the underreporting of risks and issues that act as barriers to performance. In other areas performance reports result in a narrative that undersells areas of good practice. Both approaches frustrate the ability of the Authority to fully assess performance. In relation to the latter, there is a sense that positive performance, such as is reported to the Authority through engagements and outreach work with organisations throughout the country, is not adequately reflected in the written reporting received from the Garda Síochána. This potentially lessens the ability of the Authority to provide a balanced and reflective assessment of performance.

Roads policing, for example, is an area that has seen considerable attention from an oversight point of view in recent years, and which has shown considerable improvements in performance, but unfortunately typifies some of these issues in 2020. On a number of occasions the Authority has been frustrated in its attempts to receive timely and comprehensive information from the Garda Síochána on this topic. The issues in reporting hamper the ability of the Authority to finalise and close off areas of long-standing engagement. Thus the engagement and reporting periods elongate, and act as a drain on the resources of both the Garda Síochána and the Authority, while not reflecting the progress being made.

With the above changes, it is felt that the Plan may, as has been previously urged by the Authority, become more central to the running of the organisation and will have a relevance to and resonance with the members and staff, while offering a more robust and useful method of reporting.

4. Assessment of Performance against the Policing Plan

This section provides an overview of the Authority's main observations on performance by the Garda Síochána in 2020 across each Policing Plan chapter.

4.1 Chapter One: Community Policing

Strategic Objective: *Agree, communicate, resource and implement a new approach to community policing.* There are two strategic key initiatives in this chapter of the Policing Plan: the implementation and evaluation of a Community Policing Framework; and engagement with communities and stakeholders, listening to their needs and working in partnership to address them.

As provided in section two, there have been considerable successes in the area of community policing throughout 2020. The Community Policing Framework is the Garda Síochána's articulation of its understanding of, and approach to, community policing. The organisation has stated that community policing is at the heart of its work and the Authority has commented during 2020 on the enlivened nature of the relationship between the Garda Síochána and the community as it responded to the health emergency. The challenge as identified by the Authority is for the Garda Síochána organisation to understand, capture, retain and embed the progress it has made in engaging with communities during this time.

On the specifics of the targets in this chapter, the implementation of the **Community Policing Framework** – see sidebar – has seen considerable progress made with the completion of the mapping of all Divisions into policing areas, exceeding the target of completing four pilot Divisions only. In addition, training to support the framework has been designed, and adapted to incorporate e-learning where possible. It is currently being rolled out to members. The assignment of Garda members to these policing areas is understandably paused due to COVID-19 with the necessary diversion of resources to the community response.

The review of community **partnership working** has progressed with internal stakeholders but the Authority notes the slower pace of external consultation and engagement. The partnership working necessitated by COVID-19 provides a basis for this work.

On **diversity and inclusion**, the Garda Síochána has signalled its intention to align the external diversity strategy with its internal counterpart – covered under chapter 5. This shows an appreciation for the inextricable link between the diversity of the police workforce and the approach to the policing of

Community Policing Framework

The Garda Síochána is aiming to improve the policing service delivered in communities by implementing a 'Community Policing Framework', which sets out how the Garda Síochána will engage with the community, including diverse and minority groups. This new approach will be supported by new structures, improved analysis of local crime, increased partnership working and improved training for community policing members who will be assigned to newly-mapped small areas of responsibility.

Accordingly, the establishment of this in 2021 requires the development of a training programme, the mapping of Garda Divisions into Community Policing Areas – based on population, crime trends, community needs, etc. – and the assignment of members to these areas as their dedicated community policing member.

diverse communities. These are mutually reinforcing strategies. The Garda Síochána's engagement with NGOs, individually and through the establishment of the National Diversity Forum, is a significant step in learning from the communities themselves. Similarly, engagement and networking with diversity representative associations from other jurisdictions, to learn from international best practice, has been undertaken and is a notable statement of intent.

Given its importance as a barometer of Garda performance in the eyes of the public, and the centrality of it to the Policing Plan, the reintroduction of the **Public Attitudes Survey** is welcomed. The intention to increase the sample size to allow use at Divisional level has been communicated to the Authority, although the undertaking of same is delayed.

Concerns remain in relation to Policing Plan commitments relating to the Garda Reserve. The pace of work in this area is slow, resulting in a perceived underutilisation of the **Garda Reserve** as members of the organisation. Progress was made in the latter half of the year in establishing a dedicated oversight committee, reviewing the draft strategy to ensure alignment with the Community Policing Framework, and resuming recruitment and training. The Authority welcomes this work but regards it as incumbent upon the Garda Síochána to address the systemic issues that have been raised in respect of Reserves, so while progress is cautiously welcomed there is a need for continued momentum.

COVID-19 Response

In responding to the COVID-19 health emergency, including the enforcement of the public health regulations, the Garda Síochána established a COVID-19 Co-ordination unit, operating on a 24/7 basis, coordinating operational instructions and providing guidance and assistance to frontline staff.

In addition, the organisation engaged in a series of dedicated policing operations:

Operation Faoiseamh: centred on two streams: to protect victims of domestic abuse through identification, contact, communication and support; and enforcement through the investigation and prosecution of perpetrators.

Operation Fanacht: launched in response to the travel restrictions and consisted of country-wide checkpoints to ensure compliance with public health regulations.

Operations Navigation and Treoraím: ensuring that businesses and licensed premises were following criteria for trading under the regulations.

4.2 Chapter Two: Protecting People

Strategic Objective 2019 – 2021: Protecting people from crime and keeping people safe on our roads. There are seven strategic initiatives in this chapter relating to capacity to manage and coordinate responses to crime through information-led policing; reduction in crime and fear of crime; improvements in criminal investigations; the provision of victim-focused services; and road safety and reduced criminality.

In section two, the report describes the progress made and significant policing successes in the areas of the COVID-19 response, protecting the vulnerable, and in tackling drug and organised crime.

In relation to **victims**, this chapter contains a number of specific targets that were achieved in addition to those already discussed: 81% of victims now receive a call-back within 7 days of initial Garda contact; 88% of people have an assessment of their needs relating to accessibility, language, protection, etc. completed within 3 days; and specialist, on-line training in supporting and engaging with victims for members has been developed for 2021 rollout.

Similarly, a **domestic abuse** risk-assessment tool has been developed to allow Garda members – including those outside of specialised DPSUs – to undertake an assessment of risk to potential or suspected victims of domestic abuse and where it is necessary to intervene or otherwise respond. Despite being paused due to COVID-19, a pilot went ahead and training was recently adapted to be delivered online. Training is due to recommence in early 2021.

There has been encouraging progress in implementing the recommendations of a number of reports and reviews including the **homicide investigation review**, the Crowe Horwath report on issues pertaining to **roads policing**, and the **Youth Referral Report**. While this progress is welcome, the Authority's attempts to assure itself that outstanding issues have been addressed has been frustrated by a lack of sufficient detailed information in a number of areas. The Authority will

Ongoing Reform

The Garda Síochána is currently implementing recommendations arising from a number of internal and external reviews/reports, including:

Homicide Investigation Review

Following a 2018/9 internal review arising from the identification of issues relating to 41 homicide cases, a number of changes are being made to investigative policies and procedures. These include the monitoring and governance procedures moving to electronic systems, the introduction of peer reviews on major investigations, and updates to investigator training.

Crowe Horwath Report

The Authority commissioned Crowe Horwath to undertake a review of matters related to mandatory intoxicant testing (MIT) and the incorrect issuing of summonses by the Garda Síochána instead of fixed charged notices (FCNs). Reforms to address the deficiencies identified commenced in 2017 and continue.

Youth Referral Examination Report

In 2018, a number of issues were identified in the process of referring youth offenders out of the criminal justice system and diverting them into a restorative justice programme. As a result, a number of youth offenders were not engaged with and received no punishment for their crimes. Improvements to the referral system, increased supervision and training, and enhanced governance are among the completed and ongoing changes.

continue to oversee these issues, until such time as it can be so assured.

On **roads policing**, the significant increase in detections of drug driving, while concerning as a crime trend, is welcomed. However, the continued use of the practice of vehicles being operated by drivers without specialised training by way of 'Chief's Authorisation' remains a risk to the organisation.

In **preventing crime**, the organisation responded well to a rapid change in the crime environment and produced crime prevention advice for the general public on emerging areas such as fraud, phishing, elder abuse, etc. and also adapted targeted advice for minority, vulnerable and seldom heard communities. The production of a crime prevention strategy was anticipated in early 2020 and remains outstanding.

Two areas in this chapter were removed from the Plan following its revision in May 2020. These are the areas of **offender management** and targets relating to the review of **missing persons**. The Authority is conscious of the importance of both of these areas and cognisant that, notwithstanding the removal of the targets, work in both these areas, by necessity, endures. It will be important that progress made in these areas in 2019 and early 2020 is consolidated once the exigencies of the health emergency reduce.

4.3 Chapter Three: A Secure Ireland

Strategic Objective 2019-2021: Maintain state security. There are three strategic initiatives under this objective encompassing state security, intelligence capacity and capability and contributing to national and international security.

The Garda Síochána has made significant progress in the restructuring of the Garda National Crime and Security and Intelligence Service in line with the requirements of the Operating Model. This work has been undertaken to ensure that policing of matters of security and also covert policing, related to non-security issues, is carried out cohesively with the operation of the 19 Divisions within the Operating Model.

Work has also been undertaken to further develop the **National Criminal Intelligence Framework**.

The efficacy of structures within the areas of **major emergency management** has been demonstrated in the coordinated response to COVID-19.

Security Services

Policing in Ireland is structurally different from the international standard model of countries being policed by a number of different services. The UK, for example, is made up of 48 different police services based on geography or specialised function, i.e. British Transport Police. By contrast the Garda Síochána is a sole, unitary police service. In this role it also retains the responsibility for security services in Ireland such as anti-terrorism, intelligence, etc.

As outlined in the first section of the report the Policing Authority has a statutory role only in respect of policing services. On security services the Garda Síochána reports to and is overseen by the Minister of Justice.

Accordingly the Authority has oversight of only a specific set of targets as they relate to security services, chiefly in respect of organisational governance and capacity.

4.4 Chapter Four: A Human Rights Foundation

Strategic Objective: *Human rights as the foundation upon which we deliver policing services.* There are two strategic initiatives under this chapter relating to the establishment of a human rights infrastructure for the Garda Síochána and embedding human rights and ethical behaviour into policing.

There has been progress in relation to the work of the **Human Rights** Unit, specifically the implementation of actions contained in the Human Rights Strategy. The Strategy was developed at the end of 2019, however indicative timelines contained within it have been pushed out in the context of COVID-19.

The development of **Human Rights Training**, is a notable achievement, particularly in the context of the wider training issues discussed in the previous section. A bespoke training course on ‘Policing and Human Rights Law in Ireland’ has been designed in conjunction with the University of Limerick. This 12-week programme will commence in January 2021 and will provide those who successfully complete the course with a NFQ Level 8 qualification and will also form part of the process in assigning “Human Rights Champions” throughout the organisation. It is an encouraging signal for the embedding of human rights that the course has been oversubscribed and the number of places available has been expanded. It is planned that the course material will be made available to the rest of the organisation for more informal training. Furthermore, it is planned that the programme, or relevant modules within it, would be prerequisites for members undertaking certain promotion and specialist courses.

However, the **human rights review** of five prioritised policy areas, although progressing, has not been fully completed. These are: use of force (including firearms); use of Garda vehicles in pursuit of other vehicles; victims of crime policy; arrest and detention (custody management); and public order. This has proven challenging, given that some policy areas, such as custody and use of force, have multiple policy owners and accordingly have led to more complex reviews of the relevant policies and sub-policies. Given the particular human rights concerns and obligations in these areas it will be important that the Garda Síochána completes this work.

Developments have been made to support the **reporting of the use of force** (as outlined in the sidebar above) and commencing publication of such. An interim solution was put in place in early 2020 which allowed reporting to begin, and by year end an approach was agreed, including the establishment of

Use of Force

As a police service the Garda Síochána is empowered to use force in the performance of its functions in circumstances that may require such to prevent harm and keep people safe. These powers are governed by law.

In line with international best practice, the Garda Síochána has committed to publishing its use of force figures in four primary categories covering the use of: batons; tasers; incapacitant (pepper) spray; and firearms. Following initial reporting to the Authority, and preparation of appropriate systems in 2019 and 2020 these figures will begin being made public at regular intervals in 2021.

Armed Footprint

As an unarmed police service the Garda Síochána reviewed its proportion of armed members and has in recent years been reducing its armed footprint. This decrease is occurring in tandem with the increase in resourcing of small, specialised armed units. Managed through Special Tactics & Operations Command (STOC) these units will provide specialist 24/7 support to regular front-line members.

necessary IT solutions, to allow for full publication in 2021. In keeping with these developments the Authority has routinely received reports on use of force generated using the interim solution but has not yet had sight of the new reporting. Accordingly, engagement will continue and an assessment of its efficacy will be undertaken in early 2021.

The Authority has continued to monitor the embedding of the **Code of Ethics** and previously expressed disappointment with the rates of members signing up to the Code. In the course of 2020 it emerged that the recording of those signing up to the Code was inaccurate and, throughout the year, the Garda Ethics and Culture Bureau undertook an audit to clarify how many members and staff had undertaken training and how many had subsequently signed the Code. The majority of the audit has been completed and according to the latest report 91% have attended training workshops and signed. This has in part been driven by personnel being required to sign in the course of, for example, promotions, transfers and being provided with certain equipment such as mobility devices. Beyond the sign up rates, progress on certain communication and embedding initiatives have been noted. However, training has been severely impacted in this area and planned programmes such as the Garda Decision Making Model training has been delayed as a result.

4.5 Chapter Five: Our People, Our Greatest Resource

Strategic Objective: *Invest in our people, our greatest resource, providing continuous professional development.* There are 7 strategic initiatives relating to staff engagement, workforce planning, leadership capacity, training, performance, ethical behaviour and health and wellbeing.

In section two the Authority's concerns in relation to the key enablers of the Garda Síochána were outlined. There are specific policing plan targets relating to HR and training that have seen progress in 2020, but others that have been negatively impacted by COVID-19.

The closure of the Garda College and redeployment of college staff to the policing response to the health emergency impacted the **recruitment and redeployment** targets. As a result, realising the 21,000 workforce target will now likely extend to 2023.

HR planning and support systems – including the Workforce Plan – continue to be an area of underperformance. In matters of HR planning, training and recruitment there is evidence of a continued reactive, two-tier HR function which remains significantly more effective at recruiting Gardaí than recruiting Garda staff. This has implications for the redeployment of Gardaí and backfilling of vacated positions with appropriately skilled and trained Garda staff.

The design and embedding of diversity supports in the recruitment process continues and should be in place for the running of the next wave of recruitment. This initiative and other aspects of the internal **diversity and inclusion** strategy are central to making the Garda Síochána a better place to work for members and staff of minority backgrounds. The increased understanding that the internal and external diversity targets are mutually reinforcing and evidence of collaboration between those working in these two areas is welcomed by the Authority.

Modernisation and Growth

A Government Decision in 2016 committed the Garda Síochána to increasing its workforce to 21,000 by 2021, consisting of 15,000 Garda members, 4,000 Garda staff, and 2,000 Garda Reserves. This represented an increase from approx. 13,000, 2,000 and 658 respectively.

This multi-year plan consisted of two main strands: a significant increase in Garda recruitment programmes across all three cohorts, and a Workforce Modernisation Project. A multi-year project aimed at redeploying Garda members to frontline duties and backfilling current administrative roles with suitably skilled Garda staff.

In order to ensure the maximum use of these extra resources a census of the workforce was conducted in 2019 to identify current deployment and roles. This will be used in the production of a strategic workforce plan that will assess future needs, staffing levels required by the organisation and provide a roadmap to ensuring that the right number of people, with the right skills, are deployed at the appropriate time, in line with this assessment.

The Garda Síochána is also reviewing and modernising its human resources operations, financial systems, training structures and other internal infrastructure to ensure the organisation can provide the necessary capacity across these enabling functions.

Important progress was made in relation to **health and wellbeing**, in particular the introduction of mandatory counselling for those working in roles with increased exposure to traumatic incidents and/or materials is a significant milestone. This is in addition to the initial and ongoing response to ensure the safety and protection of members during the pandemic through the provision of personal

protective equipment (PPE), moving to remote working where possible, ensuring safe working environments throughout the country, and communicating relevant information and guidance. The demands on the Office of Chief Medical Officer were understandably significant in 2020 and the finalisation of the health and wellbeing strategy, including an accompanying app, and the development of post-traumatic incident supports are commitments that have been further delayed. The Authority notes that progress has been made on both of these projects and will continue to engage with the Garda Síochána to ensure they are delivered as soon as practicable.

Long-standing issues relating to the use of **performance management** for Garda members continued in 2020 with lower than anticipated engagement by members in the Performance and Learning Framework (PALF). In tandem there has been a failure to commence use of a performance management system for Garda staff. While the Authority has been informed of system updates and renewed effort on the member front, and intentions to introduce the civil service PMDS system for staff, this area has been one of missed targets and a lack of meaningful change or progress.

The establishment of the Garda **Anti-Corruption** Unit (GACU) is a considerable milestone for the Garda Síochána with further progress made against the anti-corruption strategy. It represents the delivery on public commitments made by the organisation. The unit was established in late November and initial staffing and resources deployed are to be supplemented in 2021. Training, developed in 2020, was rolled out to the staff allocated and work, overseen by an internal steering group, continues on the development of GACU business activities and supporting infrastructure.

Culture

As described throughout the report the Garda Síochána is in a period of rapid and substantial change across all aspects of the organisation. This will continue for a number of years. In this environment, culture is crucial; described by former Acting Commissioner Dónall O'Cualáin as “...ensuring all of our people from top down and bottom up are behaving in a professional and ethical way, have the right supports to help them do their jobs professionally and efficiently, and can feel free to bring forward issues of concern”.

A culture audit undertaken in 2018 of nearly 6,500 members of the Garda Síochána found that there were concerns internally in relation to management, supervision, communication, training, etc. In the two years since, the organisation has worked to address these issues through the establishment and subsequent activities of the Garda Ethics and Culture Bureau (GECB). The Authority saw significant progress made in 2020 in aligning and directing the efforts and activities of the Bureau towards achieving the changes sought by Members in that audit. This has seen an increased alertness to the cultural significance of work being undertaken across the organisation. Work to change culture does not just happen in the Culture bureau and there appears to be a better sense of the impact of work in, for example, the areas of recruitment, supervision, internal communications and health and wellbeing on organisation culture. The undertaking of the next culture audit in 2021 will be important in providing an assessment as to the impact of this work.

The preparations for a follow-up cultural audit are underway and it is anticipated this will be run in Q3 2021.

4.6 Chapter Six: Transforming Our Service

Strategic Objective: *Restructure our organisation and transform how we deliver our services.* This chapter contains six strategic initiatives aimed at the development of a re-structured organisation, that is efficient, effective and responsive and that enjoys public confidence. Confidence within the organisation is also an area of focus through enhanced communications and a renewed confidence in organisational data.

As discussed in detail in the half-year assessment, progress on the rollout of the **Operating Model** continued in spite of the challenges faced in 2020. The rollout, although impacted, was characterised by an incremental but persistent advancement. The decision to adapt the approach to rolling out the model rather than suspend its rollout in light of the challenges of COVID-19 was important in maintaining the momentum of the project.

Work was undertaken to prepare for the rollout of the business services function in all Divisions by way of a readiness assessment. This identified how existing systems would need to adapt to allow the function to be introduced. The rollout commenced in 'phase one' Divisions with phase two to undergo rollout in Q1 2021.

In light of the complexity and volume of work to be undertaken within Divisions the Authority is encouraged by the strong communication and problem-solving relationship that has been facilitated and developed between the central team, responsible for the rollout, and the Divisions.

Significantly, governance across the project has been strengthened with the meaningful integration of HR, IT and other enabling functions into the planning and rollout processes. It is key that this continues and is added to by ensuring a strong integration wherever possible with other flag-ship change projects to ensure rollouts are complementary and as efficient as possible.

Integration with projects that offer immediate benefits to front-line members and staff, such as the RDMS system and the mobility project (as covered below), could aid in ensuring that the change and impact on these members goes hand-in-hand with tangible benefits and improvements to their work environments.

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 19, 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, s/he will have responsibility for managing a functional hub (crime, community policing, governance, and business services) across the Division.

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 rollout places each Division in one of four 'phases'.

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 internal modernisation projects.

The agreement of a new roster and the rollout of the **Roster and Duty Management System (RDMS)** as per the targets in the Plan were not met; with COVID-19 impacting the former in particular. However, the RDMS was deployed to DMR South Central Division and will be deployed to Cork City and Limerick in early 2021. The impact of COVID-19 also placed a heavy demand on the rollout team, who had to manually incorporate the new temporary roster – put in place to facilitate greater front-line adaptability in the face of the changed policing demands. However, the lessons learned and system-related work and preparations should stand to the rollout going forward. The success of the **temporary roster** has highlighted the urgent need for the Garda Síochána and other parties to reach agreement on a new permanent replacement to the existing iteration. Feedback from both members and management has been positive and contrasts with persistent issues raised in relation to the current roster, which is due to recommence in June.

The **Mobility Project** – a large-scale initiative designed to equip frontline members of the Garda Síochána with mobile phones containing apps that will allow them to perform their duties more efficiently – achieved considerable success. Launching in December 2019, the Garda Síochána began rolling out devices to roads policing members in early 2020 with 2,000 devices allocated. Following early success and the onset of COVID-19, the Garda Síochána committed to an enhanced rollout target of at least 4,500 devices. By year end in excess of 5,000 devices have been provided to Garda members and rollout has progressed to community policing units, with approximately 300 devices provided to members on these duties. In tandem the development of dedicated community policing apps is underway.

In the context of COVID-19 and the need for remote working solutions and social distancing the mobility devices have proved to be a substantial asset to members. Using a compatible screen and keyboard the devices can be used in place of a computer, with access to the Garda portal and thus can be used across the country, including in areas where members of the organisation has previously had connectivity issues.

Internal Communications

Policing during the health emergency demanded that the organisation be in a position to communicate clearly, quickly and effectively with its workforce in order to ensure it was clear as to how to work safely, how new powers were to be employed and to reduce any uncertainty in a policing environment that changed every few weeks. The internal communications function developed and responded to this need.

Although aspects of it have been delayed, significant progress was made against the Internal Communications Strategy and related projects. A redesign of the approach taken to communicating with the workforce focused on quick, effective communication to the frontline. This primarily involved the establishment of new channels and the streamlining of the internal newsletter, Newsbeat.

In line with industry best practice and following internal consultation the Newsbeat online publication underwent a significant redesign including: a reduction in article length; the reformatting to ensure key information was included, with click-through to other sites reduced; and the adaption of a more informal, friendly tone. This has yielded a notable increase in readership which is in excess of 90% across all members and staff ranks and grades.

Given the high volume of updates required as a result of COVID-19 this was supplemented by a daily update that provided a single source for all relevant policy and procedure updates, including health and safety guidance and updates on the introduction of new, emergency powers. Other communication channels such as video Q&A's with the Chief Medical Officer and use of signage and screensavers were utilised. The Garda Síochána was awarded the silver award in the category "Best Internal Communications during COVID-19" at the UK Internal Communications & Engagement Awards 2020. The Head of Internal Communications was also invited as a panellist at the UK Public Sector Internal Communications Conference.

This success has built on the progress made in recent years to augment the internal communications function, which now has a head of function and dedicated strategy.

The investment of time, energy and resources resulted in a consistency of engagement that has yielded high engagement metrics, positive internal feedback, and moved to address a long-standing organisational weakness.

5. Conclusion

Throughout the report, a balance has attempted to be struck in identifying and highlighting positive performance, and the showcasing of such, on one hand; and calling out areas of under-performance or areas of concern on the other. This of course, as the report shows, leads to a consideration of the multitude of influencing internal and external factors and demands a nuanced and considered view.

Accordingly, while a definitive ranking or grading of policing is not possible in this, or any other given year, the Authority is of the view that the performance of the Garda Síochána in 2020 had a positive and significant impact on the national experience of COVID-19 during 2020. It was significant not least because it impacted on numbers far beyond those that would typically find themselves in contact or in need of the effort or attention of the Garda Síochána. In an incredibly difficult and entirely unanticipated operating environment, there was a care and compassion in community policing and wider services that was combined with an effective, efficient response to help communities and protect the most vulnerable. The importance of this work cannot be underestimated. People were protected, kept safe, and lives were saved. In particular, work in the area of domestic abuse during this period saved lives. This does not take away from the issues of concern or areas of underperformance that have been described in this report, but rather it places them in a context.

As well as this, large scale change projects and internal capability were advanced in a number of areas including: through the continued rollout of the Operating Model; the considerable progress made in relation to information and technology; and the fast-tracked rollout of the mobility devices.

It is imperative that the Garda Síochána addresses the strategic deficits in terms of enabling functions in the coming year. Human resources, financial management and planning, training, and estate management have been long-standing areas of under-performance that predate 2020, but continue to impact on performance across the Policing Plan. COVID-19 and the demands this placed on the Garda Síochána organisation have been factors in delayed and missed targets this year. In some cases it merely exacerbated and compounded existing issues and weaknesses, rather than creating them.

The Authority will keep applying rigorous oversight in these key areas. Given the intended direction of the new approach to the Policing Plan – a smaller Plan with a clearer focus on the policing services – these targets may not be exhaustively articulated in the Plan but will remain present through inter-connected plans and strategies. It is imperative that these are finalised, and contain detailed implementation plans and milestones. The Authority, through its work and that of its Organisation and Development Committee, will be engaging on such throughout 2021, and beyond.

The operating context, within which the Garda Síochána enters 2021, is difficult. It is a given that the demands of COVID-19 on the organisation and its key role in the response will continue for some time.

The Policing Plan 2021, and associated guiding documents, must provide a clear articulation of the priorities for the year. Understandably this may include provision for outcomes dependent on the level of impact of COVID-19. However, they must set out the bare minimum of progress that the organisation and its leadership is willing to accept and sees as necessary to ensure that it keep progressing and modernising. This will provide a clear message and assurances to the members and staff of the Garda Síochána, but also to wider stakeholders and the public, that the progress made and improvements realised will be built upon and that this change momentum will be maintained.