

POLICING AUTHORITY ASSESSMENT OF POLICING PERFORMANCE



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
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Contents

Chairperson's Foreword	1
1. Introduction	4
1.1 Report Structure	4
2. Planning and Assessing Performance	5
2.1. Policing Plan	5
2.2. Authority Oversight and Assessment of Performance	5
3. Policing Plan 2021	6
3.1. A Changed Approach	6
3.2. Impact of COVID-19	6
3.3. High-level Performance Against the Plan	6
3.4. Challenges Arising	8
4. Enabling Performance	10
4.1. People	10
4.2. Information and Technology.....	14
4.3. Estate Management.....	15
4.4. Finance	16
5. Calls for Service from the Public	18
6. Conclusions	20
6.1. Public Service	20
6.2. Internal Management	20
6.3. Looking Forward	21

Chairperson's Foreword

It is encouraging that the revised form of the Policing Plan introduced for 2021 is yielding fruit. The reduction in the number of objectives or priorities has sharpened the focus and has brought greater clarity in the reporting of the year's activities. Happily, there is greater progress to report as well. It is not certain whether the reduction in targets and the improvement in performance are causally related; that will require evidence over a longer period. But it is right that improved performance should be acknowledged and recognised.

A word of caution is necessary lest the welcome focus and emphasis on the reduced number of targets may represent a lessening of attention to the other elements in the Plan. They may be at risk of being perceived as less directly relevant to the provision of a policing service and their significance thereby diminished. But those dimensions of the work of the Garda Síochána, to which further reference will be made later in these words, are centrally linked to and inseparable from the provision of the highest quality of policing service.

That cautionary note does not, however, detract from the appreciation of the progress made thus far in 2021. The more central the Policing Plan is in the life of the organisation, the closer the link that individual members of the Garda workforce see between the Plan and their own work, the more fully that Divisional Plans reflect the National priorities and animate the work of Divisional teams, the better the service to the public will be.

This progress was made while the COVID-19 pandemic persisted and while severe restrictions continued to limit the freedom of the people to live their lives as they would wish. That also affected the work of the Garda Síochána and a number of items in the Plan had to be suspended in the early months of the year. The end of year review will look at how progress has been resumed in these areas since they were reactivated and in the remainder of the year.

In the reviews of 2020 and in all of the fifteen reports to the Minister on the policing of the COVID-19 emergency, with the added powers available to gardaí, much well-deserved praise has been given to the exceptional quality of the Garda response and to the service given to the people. The overwhelmingly favourable reception by the public of this work and of the new approach has been well recorded but needs to be noticed in these words as well. A very solid foundation for the future policing of our community has been laid and the public has clearly noted its desire that it be secured and built upon. The challenge for the Commissioner and his colleagues will be to retain the spirit and approach that characterised that impressive work as the unalterable basis for the future. A related challenge will be to ensure that those whose experience of policing during this time was less positive will be kept closely in mind in the development of policy and practice for the future.

A striking feature of the past year was the growing evidence of driving under the influence of drugs as being an increasingly common feature of contemporary life. This is a reflection of the increased use of drugs throughout the country, a phenomenon that is no longer, if it ever was, confined to the cities. There are proper reservations about the use of the term 'recreational drug use' but the reality is becoming ever clearer. Whatever views may be held about the desirability or appropriateness of the practice, the implications and consequences cannot in any sense be seen as recreational.

Quite apart from the risk of the potential for cognitive impairment and its effect on driving skills, the inescapable reality in any circumstances is that the consumption of controlled substances is the end point in a lengthy process, the life cycle of which leaves many victims in its wake. The relentless laws of supply and demand have real-life consequences for very many. The illegal networks that sustain the distribution of illicit drugs bear very heavily on communities, making a misery of the lives of very many who are already vulnerable, and are the mainstay and a significant income stream for organised criminal gangs.

This is not a problem that can be dealt with by a policing response on its own. Deep societal issues are engaged here. Urgent, co-ordinated and multi-agency attention needs to be brought to bear on finding resolutions to questions that have been amply analysed and are well understood. There is a very important role for the Garda Síochána but it cannot succeed alone.

The Authority has given considerable attention over the years to the position of children and to the circumstances in which they may find themselves within the criminal justice system. It was important, then, that the Public Attitudes Survey to be undertaken by the Garda Síochána, contrary to what had been considered in the context of the COVID-19 emergency, will continue to include 16 and 17 year olds among those who will be surveyed. The Authority had strongly urged this course and the decision is welcomed. It has a particular relevance in current times arising from the Authority's outreach over the past eighteen months to those organisations who work with and support children and young people. Their experiences of policing have been well reported in the COVID-19 reports to the Minister. Moreover, and as has frequently been referred to in Authority publications, children are frequently victims themselves. They are preyed upon by unscrupulous people, their immaturity taken advantage of, lured into crime and then, frequently with their families, made subject to cruel and heartless intimidation. Developing mutually respectful relationships between young people and gardaí is a matter of considerable priority to which the Authority continues to give close attention.

The frequent calls for greater visibility of policing are well understood. Individuals, families and communities feel safer when they can see an active policing presence in their locality. This has implications for the nature of community policing, for the way in which Garda presence can be reimagined, for the differing requirements of urban and rural communities and for the confidence of people in their policing service. The Commissioner has carefully developed views on these critical issues which are, and will continue to be, regularly discussed with him by the Authority.

But there are other aspects of policing that also contribute to our safety that cannot be so clearly seen. Much critically important work is done through invisible policing and is not always taken into account in public discourse on policing service and requirements. In the world in which we live, the realities of cybercrime, fraud, and the threat to the safety of children represented by the misuse of the internet all make urgent demands on Garda time and expertise. The work done in combatting these threats, together with the work of national security, the disruption of criminal gangs and the analysis of the content of electronic devices, to name just a few examples, is, necessarily, undertaken in front of screens or otherwise away from the public view. The Garda Síochána is committing greater resources to these contemporary challenges and the Authority will look to identify ways in which there can be a greater understanding of the importance of that which makes real contribution to our individual and collective safety but cannot readily be perceived.

Reference was made earlier to aspects of the work of the organisation that might not always be perceived as central to the policing plan. Among those are finance, ICT and Human Resources and Personnel Development (HRPD). Considerable progress has been made in respect of ICT and a new Executive Director of Finance has relatively recently taken up office. However, significant work remains to be done in all three areas if the benefits of contemporary technology are to be fully available to policing, which is increasingly dependent on and focused on such developments, and if the fullest benefits of the substantial investment of public funds is to be returned to the people through a constantly improving policing service.

For an organisation changing itself in a rapidly changing society and policing environment enablers are crucially important and progress will need to be visible. While they enable so much else to grow and develop, they can often be seen as back office, administrative, house-keeping, record-maintaining, functions distant from the day to day work of policing. But they are central to the realisation of the strategic objectives of the organisation and are areas for urgent attention.

The absence of any reference to the issue of the cancellation of 999 emergency calls in the Garda Síochána's reporting on the Policing Plan in the first half of 2021 was a surprise. This work, which has been engaged in since October of last year, has represented a risk, a challenge and a source of important learning for the future. This is not the place to add a great deal to what has already been said and written about its significance. But it is a reminder of the importance of a number of key considerations - the essential value of the public's trust in the Garda Síochána, the importance of readily acknowledging a problem and being open about it, the need to understand what has happened and how, the need to recognise that it was human action or inaction, and not technology, that caused the problem, and the vital role that the organisation has in supporting people in their hours of need.

The work that has been undertaken is very important but it is but the beginning. The cancelled calls that have been examined in detail represent just 3% of the total number of cancelled or closed calls and about a quarter of the Priority 1 calls. Not every other call or incident may require the detailed work that is currently being undertaken but there is a great deal to be done. The Authority will make every effort to ensure that what needs to be done will be done. And it will support the Commissioner in every possible way in bringing it to a conclusion.

Finally, it is right and proper once again to recognise the good work that has been done, not only in response to the COVID-19 emergency but in every other area of policing. As it is to recognise the dangers to which gardaí expose themselves in the course of their duties as many can testify from their own direct experience in the first six months of this year.

Bob Collins
Chairperson

1. Introduction

This *Assessment of Policing Performance 2021* (the report) is the Policing Authority's evaluation of the Garda Síochána's performance in the first half of 2021. Performance is assessed primarily but not exclusively against the commitments made by the Garda Síochána in its Annual Policing Plan 2021.

It is the latest in a series of reports which are produced bi-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.

1.1 Report Structure

The report is structured over the following sections:

Section 2 provides 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.

Section 3 provides further insight into the specifics of the Policing Plan 2021, including the changes from previous iterations, high-level performance against the Plan during the year to-date, and the continued impact of COVID-19.

Section 4 sets out the Authority's assessment of the key issues arising and to be considered that are impacting on performance.

Section 5 provides information on the ongoing review into the unwarranted closure or cancellation of CAD 999 incidents, a key oversight issue in 2021.

Section 6 presents the main conclusions and looks forward to the rest of the year.

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 workforce for the year ahead. The Policing Plan 2021 is the third of three annual plans designed to implement the Garda Síochána's [Strategy Statement 2019 - 2021](#).

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

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](#).

2.2. Authority Oversight and Assessment of Performance

The primary mechanism for monitoring and assessing policing performance is through monthly Authority meetings with the Garda Commissioner, 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 Committee, and its Organisation Development Committee. Throughout the year the Authority and the Committees review and analyse internal and external reporting from, and about, the Garda Síochána.

The Authority also assesses performance through a programme of engagements, most of which in 2021 were facilitated by video conferencing. As well as engaging with the Garda Síochána, the Authority interacts with Joint Policing Committees and meets with a wide range of groups and organisations at national and local level. This programme of engagement or outreach seeks to listen and 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 where 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's performance is not restricted to the items in the Plan. 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.

3. Policing Plan 2021

This section provides an overview of the progress made by the Garda Síochána in the implementation of the Policing Plan 2021 and the impact of COVID-19.

3.1. A Changed Approach

In 2020, the Authority and Garda Síochána agreed that the existing approach of regularly including in excess of 100 targets in each annual Policing Plan served to lessen the sense of prioritisation that inclusion of an item in the Plan is intended to deliver. Rather, it was agreed, the organisation would benefit from a greater focus on a smaller number of key priority projects. To this end, the current Plan consists of 59 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.

The Authority welcomes this approach and has, thus far, seen an increased quality and depth of reporting against the Plan. This also appears to be translating into overall improved performance against the Plan, as elaborated below.

3.2. Impact of COVID-19

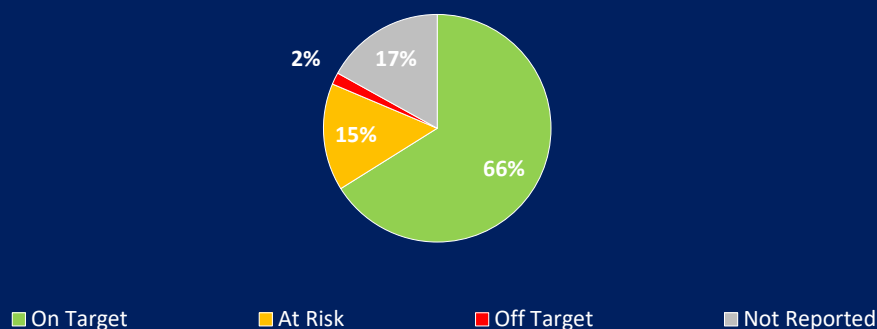
As in 2020, any consideration of policing performance in 2021 is inextricably linked with the Garda Síochána's central role in the national response to the health emergency and the policing of the associated regulations. In light of this central role and the extraordinary, temporary powers conferred on the Garda Síochána, the Authority began producing regular reports on Garda performance, as it related to COVID-19, in 2020. These reports, which total fifteen to-date, continue to be published by the Authority and are available on the Authority's [website](#).

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 and its members, is intrinsic to the assessment of performance in 2021, it is not the primary focus of this Report. The impact of COVID-19 is certainly considered and commented on as appropriate, but within the context of wider performance themes and issues discussed.

3.3. High-level Performance Against the Plan

At the half-year point, the Garda Síochána is performing strongly against the Plan as a whole. Approximately two-thirds of the targets are reported as being on-target at the end of June with only one off-target (2%) – as seen in the graph below. This marks a considerable improvement compared to previous years. By comparison, at this point in 2018, 47% of targets were already marked as being off target. In 2019 that figure stood at 17%. This gives some sense as to perhaps a greater realism and focus in the ambition articulated in the Plan for 2021.

Policing Plan Target RAG Status - 30 June 2021



As is further illustrated in the chart on page 8, the chapters that relate to the provision of the policing service to the public (chapters 1-3) are predominantly on target. Key achievements in the first half of 2021 include:

- The policing response to the pandemic which has persisted into 2021 requiring the Garda Síochána to be agile in its response to changes in the restrictions while still maintaining a high-level of community engagement, in particular with the vulnerable and with minority communities. This has been a challenging environment and there is much to be positive about in terms of policing performance.
- Progress in the roll out of the Operating Model, which sees at half-year point the business services function fully operational in 6 of the 19 divisions and is advancing in those remaining.
- The continued high level of contact with, and support of, victims and those at risk of domestic violence. Operation Faoiseamh has now seen over 35,000 contacts between the Garda Síochána and victims. Additionally, the Garda Síochána is currently reverting to 80% of victims by way of a call back within 7 days of them reporting a crime – up significantly in recent years.
- A record level of seizures of drugs, currency and assets/proceeds of criminal activity through work undertaken with national and international partners. Relatedly, a significant increase in the level of detections of those driving under the influence of drugs has been achieved.
- The resourcing and formal launch of the Garda Anti-Corruption Unit and the underpinning of its functions through the ratification and publication of a number of anti-corruption policies: an overarching Anti-Corruption Policy; the Professional Boundaries and Abuse of Power for Sexual Gain Policy; and, the Substance Misuse (Controlled Drugs) Policy. This was an early public commitment of the Commissioner following him taking up his position and is critically important to public confidence and trust in the Garda Síochána.
- The commencement of a review of sexual crimes to identify barriers to detection. Early findings have been discussed with the Authority and the full results are anticipated later in the year. It is hoped that the findings will allow the Garda Síochána to improve its policies, procedures and approach to these crimes and achieve a higher detection rate.
- In excess of 90% of targeted members and staff trained in the use of the Schengen Information System (SIS) prior to its rollout in March 2021.

- The delivery of human rights training to approximately 500 members of the organisation, including 70% of senior managers, in conjunction with their delivery partners, University of Limerick.
- Significant preparatory work has been undertaken to allow the completion of targets that are scheduled for the second half of the year, such as:
 - the rollout of the Community Policing Framework;
 - the delivery of actions/recommendations arising from a number of strategies and reviews in the areas of diversity and inclusion, roads policing and child sexual abuse; and
 - the provision of key training courses on hate crime and domestic abuse.

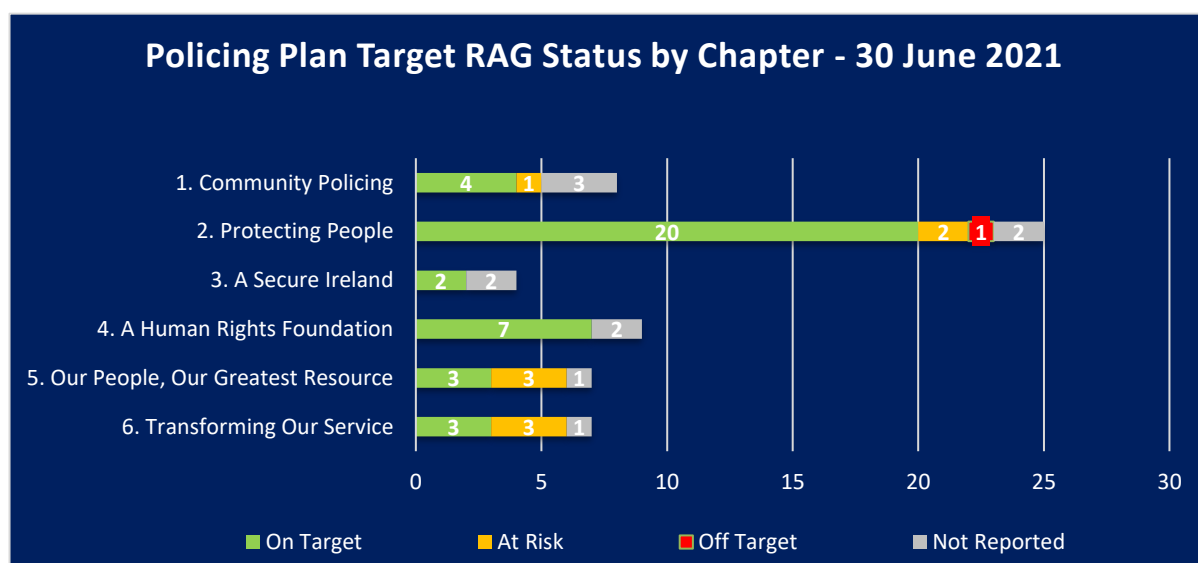
The Authority will be closely monitoring these projects, and more, to ensure that the progress made to-date translates to the achievement of the targets in the Plan.

Of the ten targets that are not reported against, eight are linked to the Garda Síochána Public Attitudes Survey (PAS). The survey was suspended during COVID-19 and there has been a change in service provider. The survey is due to recommence reporting in Q3, 2021. The Authority looks forward to the recommencement of the survey as its results provide an important indicator of public sentiment and perception. The Authority sees the retention of 16-17 year olds within the survey as a matter of particular importance so that the views of younger people can be gathered on a representative basis. The expansion of the survey to make results available, for the first time, at a divisional level is an important step forward for the organisation in assessing its own impact and performance.

The remaining two targets not reported on relate to the work of Divisional Drug Policing Units and the related seizures of drugs, firearms and currency. Both of these areas of activity are reported on through other means and are considered on-target but a comprehensive reporting against the target is awaited.

3.4. Challenges Arising

While considerable progress had been made, there are a small number of targets that are at-risk or off-target within the front half of the Plan. Rather than discuss these individually, it is perhaps more



useful to consider the common features of these targets. It is also important that the impact of achieved or missed targets is not considered purely in percentage terms. Each one of the targets in the plan represents an action or initiative designed to improve the policing service received by the public and to keep people safe. So it is consequential when a target is missed - it represents an improvement to the service that has been delayed.

As can be seen above, targets presenting as at-risk predominately appear in the later chapters of the Plan (chapters 5-6). As the graph shows, when the targets not reported on are excluded (both PAS dependent), half of the targets in chapters 5 and 6 are at risk. These are the chapters in the Plan that cover the initiative and actions relating to Human Resources (HR).

Of the targets across the Plan that are reported as at risk or off target, half of these (5 of 10) have maintained this status for 3 months or longer. This further highlights the longer-term systemic nature of the issues faced in respect of what the Authority terms the key enablers – information technology (IT), human resources (HR), finance, estate management and training.

The Authority has in previous reports articulated its strong views as to the importance of these enablers to the policing service the public receives. These are not back office functions but strategic enablers of policing and when these areas are underdeveloped or underperform the impact is not experienced in a 'back office', the impact is on day to day policing and the Garda Síochána's ability to keep people safe.

4. Enabling Performance

In the Assessment of Policing Performance 2020 the Authority concluded that: *“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.”*

In this report, the Authority again emphasises the enabling functions, but in doing so, attempts to draw out explicitly the impact on day-to-day policing. This is not only in respect of the targets that may currently be at risk or off target, but also in terms of the resulting sense of consistent uncertainty that influences the ability to plan and to respond with agility.

4.1. People

The Garda Síochána, as a strategy pillar and Policing Plan chapter, describes its workforce as “Our People, Our Greatest Resource”. The Authority accepts this definition of the workforce within the Garda Síochána. To maximise the resource there are three key foundations: that the workforce is strategically used; meaningfully supported and supervised; and, equipped with the necessary skills.

Strategic Planning

The Garda Síochána currently has a workforce of approximately 18,000 people – 14,500 members, 3,000 staff and 500 Reserves – and is in the midst of upscaling, as described in the panel on the right, to reach a ceiling of 21,000 in the coming years. In the operating context of changing crime environments, increasingly sophisticated organised crime activity and a large-scale modernisation programme, it is vital that the organisation ensures the effective deployment of this workforce through the development of a strategic workforce plan. This document – which will assess the future needs and staffing levels required across the organisation’s functional areas and provide a roadmap to ensuring that the right number of people, with the right skills, are in place to undertake same – has been awaited by the Authority since 2019. While early, shorter term templates and drafts have been furnished and offer a sense of progress the continued lack of a strategic workforce plan is a persistent concern. The commitment to produce such a document in tandem with the Strategy Statement 2022-2024 and covering the lifetime of that

Garda Workforce

A 2016 Government Decision committed the Garda Síochána to increasing its workforce to 21,000, consisting of: 15,000 Garda members, 4,000 Garda staff, and 2,000 Garda Reserves (volunteer members) – from approximately 13,000, 2,000 and 650 respectively.

This ongoing, multi-year plan consists 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.

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

document is a self-set target that it is crucial the organisation meets.

The effects that the lack of strategic workforce planning have is evident in the Policing Plan outcomes at mid-year. The targets relating to the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau (GNECB) and the Garda National Cyber Crime Bureau (GNCCB) are at-risk and off-target arising from workforce issues– this is a continuing multi-annual trend. These issues are longstanding and have been subject to frequent discussion as far back as 2018. The Garda Síochána has not succeeded in addressing this, despite signalling its intent to do so as a matter of priority in 2019.

This has significant impacts on the organisation's ability to respond effectively to economic crime and corruption– and to respond to cyber crime and cyber-enabled crime. These are crime types that are increasingly significant in modern society and are increasing in volume and prevalence. They are also areas of crime (for example online child sexual abuse) that are high risk, can result in a severe degree of harm to victims and which the public has indicated it regards as a priority area for policing. Practically, this impacts significantly on the ability of the Garda Síochána to efficiently and expediently investigate these and other crime types, for example delays and backlogs existing in the examination of seized mobile and computer devices.

Within these bureaus and across the organisation as a whole, this is not simply an issue of 'more guards'. To equate the HR issues which are impacting on the achievement of the Policing Plan with an increase in Garda numbers oversimplifies the challenges within modern policing, challenges that require the input of specialist skills. Strategic workforce planning is about anticipating the type of skills that are needed, when and where they are needed, who has them within the organisation and how they will be developed, accessed, supported and retained.

This plan should set out a strategic approach to the future workforce and also quantify efficiencies that can be made through modernisation, for example, redeployment and the roll out of the Operating Model. The Authority would like to see consideration given to the acquisition and development of key skills or supports, rather than simply numbers of new personnel required for each division or unit, in order to increase agility and flexibility and to address staff attrition through training and development. In the case of the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Cyber Crime Units, there are specialist skills required to fulfil these roles.

Other examples of areas that are experiencing staff shortages that impact on policing effectiveness include the Garda Síochána Analysis Service (GSAS) and the Garda Information Services Centre (GISC). Staff shortages in these areas impact on the organisation's ability to record, process and analyse data, to provide accurate, timely information to Garda members and staff. This impacts policing. Timely information about patterns of crimes in an area can influence how those areas are policed, analysis of incidents can assist investigations, and accurate information on PULSE can inform a Garda's preparedness as they respond to a call. Again, it is not as simple as saying 'more Guards', critical policing supports that keep people safe are also provided by Garda staff with specialist skills.

In meeting the demand for such staff the Garda Síochána is experiencing a substantial block as it has reached its limit of 500 new staff positions to 2021 as per the Government Decision of 2016 – under which 1,500 of the additional 2,000 staff positions were to be backfills (as a result of modernisation) and 500 were to be new positions. This Decision however was undertaken prior to events such as Brexit or COVID-19, which have had major impacts on policing demand. The external policing environment has also changed considerably with an exceptional increase in certain types of crimes (e.g. financial, cyber, and drug crime). Furthermore the implementation of projects to support A

Policing Service for the Future, the Operating Model, and community policing/engagement have had significant resourcing implications. Added to this has been an increase in staffing requirements within support services such as HR, IT and communications.

Given these new but important priorities, it would seem that the limit of 500 new staff positions is now posing a risk to the delivery of the Policing Plan and wider change projects. The Authority is not of the view that ever increasing resources is the answer to successful workforce planning, indeed the Authority keenly supports a greater focus on developing skills internally within the Garda Síochána, which would have the added value of improving levels of staff retention. The Authority would also like to see the impact of the existing and future redeployment of Garda members being linked into the strategic planning as these redeployments provide an opportunity to balance future recruitment of Garda members against prioritising the critical specialist needs of the organisation.

In this context, there is a recognition that there is an acute need for the Commissioner to have greater flexibility in determining the composition of the Garda workforce within the agreed target workforce of 21,000 and within the agreed pay allocation and that at present, the number of approved new Garda staff positions appears inadequate in order to deliver on strategic priorities over the next number of years.

However, it is imperative that any increase in allocation or indeed any changes to the deployment or assignment of the existing workforce is made on a strategic, and evidenced basis. Many current issues in respect of workforce pressures, particularly in relation to the use of the increased allocation of staff has arisen due to the lack of strategic underpinning – again reemphasising the need for the strategic workforce plan to be completed as a matter of urgency.

In addition to the strategic vacuum created by the continued absence of the workforce plan and the necessary recruitment of Garda staff, the workforce modernisation process is also behind target. Modernisation partly refers to the ability of the organisation to identify those roles that do not require sworn Garda powers and which can instead be performed by Garda staff. This facilitates the deployment of Garda members to front-line positions and roles that require sworn powers. This process continues to progress, although at a reduced pace.

This also impacts the provision of a policing service to the public at divisional level with reports to the Authority of workforce pressures relating to community policing and the policing of specific crime areas, such as sexual crimes and drugs, and the availability of internal specialist services including armed support, specialist interviewers, etc. It is inevitable that in a large organisation that is called on to serve a complex set of activities and demands that there will always be calls for more resources. What is being highlighted here however, is that, in the absence of a strategic workforce plan, the organisation has not considered those demands in total, considered its likely future demands and considered how it is going to respond. In the absence of that work, the risk exists that resourcing will be directed in an ad hoc immediate fashion rather than in a manner that is based on an agreed set of priorities.

The pandemic had an impact on the ongoing recruitment of members and staff. Due to COVID-19, the recruitment of members was briefly paused in 2020 before resuming at a reduced level of intake. The organisation displayed an agility and responsiveness in this altered recruitment and onboarding environment – trainees undertook blended and remote learning before deployment to front-line duties. While the rate of recruitment remains below the levels anticipated pre-COVID-19, and below the target in the Plan, the Authority is of the view that this slower pace of recruitment

offers an opportunity for the organisation to utilise the potential extra capacity to further other, pressurised training functions and also permits the strategic planning to advance, prior to receiving additional Garda members, thus providing an opportunity to assess where the need for allocation is highest.

Training

In an ever-changing operating environment there is a demand on the Garda Síochána and its workforce to constantly respond, assess, evolve and develop new skills and expertise to ensure that the service it provides meets its needs and the needs of the communities it serves. As such, training represents a key facet underpinning the vast majority, if not all, change projects, service delivery and Policing Plan targets. While COVID-19 has severely impacted the ability of the organisation to deliver training, it has also provided an opportunity to adapt and develop innovative solutions to meet the organisational need. In this vein, although it exacerbated some of the challenges already present it also gave rise to considerable success.

Most notably the organisation was able to remotely train in excess of 90% of targeted members and staff in the use of the Schengen Information System (SIS) (see p.14) prior to its rollout in March 2021. As a long-term project that represented significant investments of resources and featured hard deadlines for connection to the wider SIS the adaptation and delivery of training on this scale was a notable success for the organisation.

Similarly, the delivery of human rights training to approximately 500 members of the organisation, including 70% of senior managers, in conjunction with their delivery partners University of Limerick, was a notable milestone in the rollout of this training.

Counterbalancing this success there have been setbacks in the rollout of a number of prioritised training courses due to issues with the Learning Management System (LMS) which hosts the e-learning materials. In particular, the long-awaited training for members on Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment; and the training central to the rollout of the Diversity and Integration and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategies have both been delayed. Given the rapid and substantial increase in demand on the LMS, the Authority has, and will continue, to engage with the Garda Síochána on capacity and related concerns.

There has been a lack of capacity to engage in necessary, foundational training. Driver training, specialist interviewing, and other skills that form part of the skillset required in every division and unit have been delayed. In respect of the former the long-running inability to meet training demand for specialist driving skills – exacerbated but not caused by COVID-19 – results in approximately 5% of the organisation driving Garda vehicles without adequate specialist training, but rather on the basis of permission of senior divisional management. While the Authority has sought assurances as to the identification and management of risk with regard to this there remain outstanding questions and concerns that will continue to be engaged upon in the latter half of the year.

Similar to workforce planning, the weaknesses outlined indicate a lack of strategic direction, leadership and prioritisation concerning training. Within the organisation there remains no finalised, overarching training strategy and a longstanding vacancy remains in respect of a Learning and Development Director.

The risk for the organisation is that without a clear sense of direction, prioritisation and planning the existing demand, which currently outstrips supply, will only increase and place greater pressures on

the organisation and impact the ability of it and its members to provide the necessary level of service.

4.2. Information and Technology

As part of the ongoing modernisation of the Garda Síochána, there is a significant body of work being undertaken in respect of IT systems to support front-line policing and the increased use of data – see sidebar. As in 2020, the Authority continues to see the benefit of the recently-developed ICT Strategy and related planning and is satisfied that there is a clear sense of medium/long-term direction for the IT function. However, the challenges remain, that as an enabling function it is under significant levels of demand that are a recurrent issue.

As noted under training, the successful rollout of the SIS represented a significant achievement for the Garda Síochána. As a long-term project the organisation has been preparing for this rollout from an IT systems perspective for a number of years and has invested in excess of €25 million. From its launch in March this system has had notable policing successes for both the Garda Síochána and its partners throughout Europe.

Combined with the continued rollout and success of the Mobility devices – the provision of mobile devices that allow members to connect to the Garda network and undertake certain activities such as checking driver licensing and vehicle tax, and issuing Fixed Charge Notices – it highlights how the investment in IT systems can provide a better policing service. In respect of Mobility, it has allowed instant remote access to members but also in the current year has seen approximately 80% of Fixed Charge Notices issued through the devices, reducing the need for manual processing and increasing the overall efficiency of the system.

The rollout of other key systems such as the Investigation Management System (IMS) and the Roster and Duty Management System are reported as at-risk, following delays in 2020. There are key inter-dependencies on these systems and impacts on policing. The IMS is frequently referenced by management as being intrinsic to efforts to improve the detection rate of crime through increased quality, management and supervision of

Major IT Projects

The Garda Síochána is currently rolling out a number of major IT projects, including:

Schengen Information System

The Schengen Information System (SIS) is a Europe-wide information sharing system for police services in 30 countries. It allows the Garda Síochána to access and share information on persons or objects, including: persons wanted for arrest; missing persons; and, objects for seizure or use as evidence.

Investigation Management System

The Investigation Management System (IMS) is a large scale IT project to provide the organisation with access to a system that automatically generates and tracks progress against specific tasks for certain crime types. It aims to improve tracking and accountability in investigations.

Roster and Duty Management System

The Roster and Duty Management System (RDMS) is an IT system that is used for planning the duties that Garda members and staff will be assigned to. It is also used to record time off or rest days, and to calculate overtime and some allowances. The system is being piloted and is expected to be rolled out over a number of years.

investigations. Accordingly, it is central to the implementation of recommendations arising out of reviews of areas including child sexual abuse and homicide.

The Roster and Duty Management System is regarded as an important support for the rollout of the Operating Model.

Investment in information and technology is fundamental to the transformation of the Garda Síochána to becoming an information-led policing service. The existing business-as-usual costs are significant but the transformation programme will cost substantially more than the current levels of funding permit. As long as that persists, the Garda Síochána organisation will remain in catch-up mode.

On an operational level, the front-line impacts are consistently reported across the organisation with backlogs for IT equipment, long delays in receiving specialist equipment, and service level issues, such as access to social media for investigative or intelligence purposes.

4.3. Estate Management

The Garda Síochána estate is managed and maintained in partnership with the Office of Public Works (OPW). Under the ongoing government programme of policing reform, it is intended that the Garda Síochána will assume full responsibility for this function, however until such time as this occurs it will continue to be managed in partnership with the 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.

In this context there has been notable evidence in 2021 that the Garda Síochána have engaged proactively with the OPW and developed a fully-costed plan for estate management over the coming years, which has been submitted to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) as it relates to the National Development Plan. There have also been some positive developments in respect of the operational arrangements relating to the budget for estate development and management, which has seen the Garda Síochána begin to assume a somewhat greater level of responsibility setting out its own requirements. However, the governance and responsibility for the Garda Estate is complex and more will need to be done to have timely and effective alignment between need and provision.

While this is strongly welcomed by the Authority it must also be noted that there are ongoing impacts in the short-term that affect the delivery of the targets in the Policing Plan and also the wider provision of service. As has been widely covered in the public arena, there are pressures to be resolved in respect of accommodation arrangements relating to the new build at Military Road and the vacating of Harcourt Square. This occurs in tandem with existing pressures to refurbish the estate – including in response to COVID-19. Specifically, estates-related issues are reported as affecting the full delivery of facilities for the Garda Anti-Corruption Unit, the rollout of the Roster and Duty Management System and, most significantly, poses a risk to the rollout of the Operating Model. In respect of the Operating Model – as explained below – there is an urgent need to address estate dependencies in respect of phase 4 divisions, to ensure rollout can take place as planned in coming years.

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, they will have responsibility for managing a functional hub (crime, community policing, governance, or business services) across the division. The rollout places each division in one of four 'phases'.

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

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

4.4. Finance

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". Since the establishment of the Authority this function has largely been frustrated and action against it undermined by a lack of sufficient financial information and insight from the Garda Síochána.

This was directly correlated with the organisation's lack of financial capacity and a failure to recognise the finance function as a crucial, strategic enabler of policing. However, there was noted progress in 2020 – whereby more detailed information in support of the Garda Síochána's view of the financial resources required for operational purposes and for the implementation of the constituent elements of its reform programme in 2021 was provided. This formed part of a wider positive change in the approach of the Garda Síochána, including an enhanced understanding of the strategic centrality of finance as an enabler to wider policing performance and of the need to enhance the management capacity in relation to the financial resources of the organisation.

While the positive experience of 2020 has continued into 2021 there is still a significant amount of work to be done by the organisation to enhance its strategic financial capacity, to ensure that it can identify efficiencies and deploy its resources to best effect throughout the organisation.

It is noted that despite its initial reluctance, the Garda Síochána has now accepted the recommendations of the Mazars report with regard to building financial capacity within the organisation and an implementation plan to affect these changes is in place, overseen by a steering committee made up of representatives of the Garda Síochána, the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) and the Policing Authority.

The Garda Síochána manages a budget which has risen in recent years to approximately €2 billion annually. This covers both current and capital expenditure. At present, the organisation does not have an ability to cost the Policing Plan or the projects within it. This lack of overall budgetary planning results in resources not being in place when and where they are needed. While it is difficult to identify the projects or targets that are most directly impacted by this or the extent to which they are, the reliance on HR, IT, training and estates means that lack of proper financial costing and planning in respect of these functions and the targets that they support results in ongoing challenges and delays.

The Authority will continue to support and challenge the Commissioner and his senior management team to enhance its strategic financial planning capacity. It is envisaged that over the course of the next 18 months as the recommendations of Mazars are implemented this will be realised and further strengthened by leveraging the expertise of the recently appointed Executive Director of Finance and Services and the backfilling of the position of at the head of the Strategic Transformation Office. The organisation should then be better placed to sufficiently articulate its resource requirements for the medium term.

5 Calls for Service from the Public

A fundamental element of the policing service provided to the public is the timeliness and appropriateness of response a person receives when they call for service – for assistance – in what is typically a moment of anxiety, fear, vulnerability or at the very least concern for themselves or another person. The response received can have repercussions, both positive and negative. It can serve to bolster or reaffirm confidence in the police service or it can diminish that confidence, which in turn can dissuade a victim of crime from further engagement.

When a member of the public calls 999 or calls their Garda Station for emergency assistance, that call for service is managed through the Computer Aided Despatch (CAD) system, an incident is created and, as appropriate, a member of the Garda Síochána allocated to respond. Based on severity, calls are graded on a decreasing scale as Emergency, Priority 1, Priority 2 and Priority 3 incidents.

In December 2020, the Garda Síochána made the Authority aware that it had discovered that there were issues with the manner in which members of the public were responded to, specifically that calls for service had been inappropriately closed or cancelled in the CAD system.

The invalid or incorrect closure of CAD incidents is a serious matter because it can prevent a caller from receiving an appropriate service at that time and it effectively prevents both the proper recording of non-crime incidents and further mandatory steps in the investigation of crimes.

The unwarranted closure or cancellation of these CAD incidents were colloquially referred to as the cancellation of 999 calls. The change in language better reflects the full scope of what is being examined but does not in any way diminish its serious nature. As 2020 came to a close it became a priority issue for the Authority to understand the scope and scale of what was being revealed and the actions taken in respect of callers who were not responded to.

The Authority welcomes the fact that the issue arose as a result of proactivity within the Garda Síochána to review its performance in this area. The challenge in such instances is for the organisation to recognise the risks attached to what has been identified as poor performance and to provide an agile response that will prevent its continuance. An early technical fix was implemented, however it is important to note that very early on it became clear that the issue was not one of technology, and that while the system was old, it in no way prohibited the correct handling of calls for assistance. This is primarily an issue of service.

The work commenced by the Garda Síochána to understand the scope and scale of the issue is ongoing. At the time of writing, the total number of CAD incidents (including 999 calls to the Garda Síochána, calls to Garda Stations and referrals from other emergency services) in the period under review – 01 January 2019 to 31 October 2020 – was 1.4 million. Of these, some 202,931 were closed or cancelled of which 23,361 were Emergency and Priority 1 incidents. From that more serious group, the Garda Síochána properly identified those involving domestic violence, sexual assault, missing persons and health emergencies as those meriting earliest consideration and review. These three categories that they selected for initial review amounted to 5,871 incidents.

Once that initial review is completed, consideration will be given to how to assess the remaining 17,490 Emergency and Priority 1 incidents and the nearly 180,000 closed or cancelled Priority 2 and Priority 3 incidents. These latter incidents, by their nature, may be of lesser harm or risk but as their

comparative volume suggests, they are also the type of incidents most likely to be experienced by members of the public. If there were to be a significant rate of unwarranted closure or cancellation of incidents within this population, this is not insignificant in terms of their impact on the individual who requested service and assistance and the confidence they subsequently had in the police service. The Authority is of the view that the Garda Síochána will need to develop an approach that is realistic but will deliver a robust assessment as there are likely to be lessons to be drawn from further examination, even on a sample basis, of the Priority 2 and 3 incidents.

The Policing Authority has appointed Mr. Derek Penman¹ to conduct an independent, external preliminary examination of the adequacy of the review being undertaken by the Garda Síochána of the unwarranted closure or cancellation of CAD incidents. Advice on this point has been included in the [terms of reference](#) for Mr. Penman's initial work.

How the Garda Síochána deals with calls from the public is an issue of service but also of performance, at an organisational and individual level. It highlights the importance of a performance culture in which there are clear expectations articulated of the standards of service to be provided and the individual behaviours which give them effect. Those standards require that performance is managed and supported through appropriate training and ongoing supervision.

This matter is one which will remain a priority for the Authority for the remainder of the year, and likely beyond.

¹ Mr Penman is a former Chief Constable within the U.K. with over 34 years policing experience and former Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland, who has undertaken a similar review into issues pertaining to CAD systems in Scotland in 2015.

6. Conclusions

In the main, the Garda Síochána's performance in the first half of 2021 has been strong against the Policing Plan. Significant milestones have been met in relation to protecting the vulnerable, rolling out the Schengen Information System, establishing the Garda Anti-Corruption Unit, the rollout of human rights training, and the continued operational success of operations established to respond to issues pertaining to the ongoing health emergency.

This report does not seek to undermine, or insufficiently credit the organisation and its people for these achievements and their high level of performance, but rather to draw attention to the urgent need to not only maintain the momentum gained but to inculcate it with a greater still sense of urgency. As articulated throughout there appears to remain, in the view of the Authority, an organisational under-appreciation of the central importance of advancing the enabling functions, the scale of the effects that are currently being experienced due to shortcomings in respect of these functions, and an inattention to the urgency that is required in addressing these shortcomings.

Any inattention to these key enablers impacts on service. It serves to undermine the dedication and effort of those working to provide the service on the front line.

6.1. Public Service

The Policing Plan is but one measure of performance. The performance of a policing service is perhaps more importantly measured in terms of the way in which policing is experienced. This is made up of the timeliness of response to someone in trouble or need, the nature of that response and the belief that the service provided is effective. At the heart of that experience is the first principle that policing is a service. The issue of service emerges tangibly in the matter the unwarranted closure or cancellation of CAD incidents. The Garda Síochána has striven in recent years to improve its service to those suffering from domestic abuse, in the main it has achieved this through the production of new policy and procedures, updated training, the establishment of Divisional Protective Services Units (DPSUs) and the efforts of all those responsible for the success of Operation Faoiseamh. However, this is somewhat undermined by the recent issues of unwarranted closure and cancellation of incidents and the discovery that people seeking service from the Gardaí were responded to inappropriately at a moment of intense vulnerability.

Similarly, the excellent work done in undertaking investigations and the support of victims – another area that has been subject to reform and improved service in recent years – across all crime types, is undermined by aspects such as the continued delays to the rollout of IMS, unavailability of sufficient specialist interviewing capacity and significant delays in receiving analysis of seized electronic devices. These impact on the experience of policing, the effectiveness of policing and its ability to keep us safe.

6.2. Internal Management

Prioritisation is at the heart of not only the Policing Plan but also many of the key enablers that have been discussed. These resources will always, in any organisation, be in high demand particularly one as ensconced in change as the Garda Síochána. They also represent areas of significant investment

and cost. As such it is critical that there is information available to management to prioritise the allocation of these resources and ensure their effective management and that this need is effectively serviced. Based on the Authority's experience, there is a question over the extent to which this information is available to management and therefore the extent to which there is active consideration and an ability to identify need and priority. This in turn raises questions as to the impact that potential lack of key enabling-function awareness has on decision making, including the management of risk and performance assurance. The Authority is engaged on these key issues concerning the awareness and management of risk, performance assurance and governance of these substantial areas of investment and will continue to engage with Garda management on same through the remainder of 2021.

At a more local management level there are also related, active oversight considerations. As spoken about under the estates management heading in the last section there are specific risks to the Operating Model rollout that may impact on timelines. Aside from this, there are also concerns that the full impact and benefit of the Operating Model may not be realised unless it is ensured that rollout is undertaken in connection with the rollout of other modernisation projects. There appears to be a disconnect at present between the manner in which the organisation is upgrading its systems and processes in IT, HR, finance, etc. and embedding these within the divisions, with many still relying on paper-based processes. In respect of IT, this has been described to the Authority as holding back the full potential of the Model.

To ensure effective sub-national management – a concept intrinsic to the Operating Model – there is a need to ensure that these align and that the Model is supported to achieve all it is envisaged to. In particular there needs to be an assurance that the divisions are sufficiently empowered not only to receive the delegated management of responsibilities, but that they possess the infrastructure to meaningfully do so.

6.3. Looking Forward

Despite the challenges outlined there has been progress in respect of the key enablers in the first half of the year. This report seeks to highlight the importance of that and to highlight the need to ensure it continues and where possible serves to build further momentum and a sense of urgency, which has been conspicuous by its absence.

The Authority has had regular engagement with the Garda Síochána business owners for the strategic enablers of human resources, IT, estates and finance. This will continue in the latter half of the year.

This is not a challenge unique to the Garda Síochána. Police services across other jurisdictions are also grappling with the strategic use of workforces and other resources. To learn from experiences here and elsewhere it is clear that this challenge must be met with a synergy that will be achieved through the utilisation of all of these key enabling functions in tandem, and not an over-reliance on any one.