

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Minutes of the County Galway Joint Policing Committee Meeting held on Monday 12th September 2022 in the Council Chamber

I LÁTHAIR:

Council Members: Cllr. Jim Cuddy (Cathaoirleach)
Cllr. Mary Hoade
Cllr. Karey McHugh Farag
Cllr. Andrew Reddington
Cllr. Liam Carroll
Cllr. Gerry King
An Comh. Dáithí Ó Cualáin
An Comh. Pdraig Mac an Iomaire
Cllr. Peter Roche
Cllr. James Charity
Cllr. Michael Moegie Maher
Cllr. PJ Murphy
Cllr. Colm Keaveney

An Garda Síochána: Superintendent Sean Glynn
Supt. Paudie O'Shea
Sgt. Sinead Cunniffe
Sgt. Mick Walsh

Commissioner Drew Harris
Sgt. Paul Minogue

Oireachtas Members Deputy Catherine Connolly

Community Reps: Mr. Aodán Mac Donncha
Mr. Gerard Larkin

Oifigigh: Mr. Michael Owens, Director of Service
Ms. Úna Ní Eidhin, Meetings Administrator

Other Officials: Ms. Liadhan Keady, Corporate Services
Ms. Noreen Moughty, Corporate Services

Apologies: Cllr. Joe Byrne
Cllr. Shelley Herterich-Quinn
Mr. Tom Madden
Mr. Martin Ward
Ms. Aileen Heverin

Item No. 1 – Address from the Garda Commissioner Drew Harris

The Garda Commissioner, Mr. Drew Harris, was welcomed by the Cathaoirleach of the County Galway Joint Policing Committee, Cllr. Jim Cuddy and thereafter by the Cathaoirleach of the County of Galway, Cllr. Michael 'Moegie' Maher. A presentation was given by the Garda Commissioner (a copy of which has been circulated to all members of the JPC Committee for their information) mainly regarding the service across the county, resources available and the new policing model. Cathaoirleach Cuddy thanked the Commissioner and opened the floor to questions.

All of the speakers below welcomed the Commissioner and thanked him for his presentation.

A number of Councillors raised particular concerns and questions in relation to the new Policing model. Cllr. Reddington read out the following questions:

- What Model is this new system based on? Who planned it out?
- Where was the Model piloted and what were the results of those pilots, if any
- What are the underlying metrics by which this Model can be evaluated
- What Cost Benefit analysis was carried out, if any.

These questions were also raised by Cllr. Hoade. She acknowledged the excellent work that Gardaí are doing but stated that there have been significant reductions in the number of Gardaí and that stations are closing. She stated that we need to connect with Gardaí again and that we need more Gardaí on the streets and more stations opened again.

Cllr. King stated that he is worried about what the model is based on, that it is focused at a national level. He questioned on a county basis, if this best practice model is going to work. He mentioned that an area like Conamara has 18 rural stations, some that are part time, some with only one Garda and that there is massive void there, with Gardaí on the ground feeling a little isolated. He stated that Community needs to come first and that Gardaí need to be more connected with the Community.

Cllr. Maher indicated that he had concerns, as Gardaí are covering huge areas. He did express however that it was great to hear about the recruitment drive. He commended Sgt. Mick Walsh on communicating with the local communities and on his great work.

Cllr. Reddington raised grave concerns regarding the lack of manpower on the ground and the response times of Gardaí. He stated that people are living in fear in their own homes and that it is also not fair on the Gardaí who are out there, as they need more feet on the ground.

Chuir an Teachta Dála Catherine Connolly in iúl freisin go raibh inní uirthi féin faoin easpa Gardaí ar an talamh, go raibh sé easnamhach. The Deputy indicated that she is also concerned regarding the lack of manpower on the ground. She stated that there has been a significant

drop in levels of Gardaí on the ground, all across Conamara except Maigh Cuilinn, and that more Gardaí are needed. She also indicated that the Commissioner's predecessor stated that there would be a headquarters in An Cheathrú Rua. She acknowledged RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta for their reporting and expressed that she always wants to work with the Gardaí and have interaction that is meaningful, rather than just a press event. She also referred to the Irish language issue in certain areas and amongst the Gardaí.

Cllr. Charity raised concerns regarding the closure of local Garda stations and stated that he was also concerned by the figure indicated by the Commissioner in his presentation, that less than 1.1% of new recruits assigned nationally, have been assigned to Galway.

An Comh. Ó Cualáin expressed extreme concerns regarding the number of Gardaí in the South Conamara area, stating that there is a 50% reduction in An Cheathrú Rua Garda Station. He also expressed concerns regarding response times, as calls are going through to Oranmore or Clifden. He stated that there are 12 Gardaí in South Conamara and no sergeants. He indicated that geographically that it is the same size as Louth and that there are 600 Gardaí there. He believes that Gaeltacht areas in particular need to be looked at, as vacancies not being filled there and that this is a concern.

Cllr. Mac an Iomaire also referred to the issues facing South Conamara, such as delayed response times due to the loss of Salthill Station as a 24 Station and having to depend on Oranmore Station. He believes that this is not acceptable

Cllr. Carroll stated that he believes Gardaí have a very difficult job to do. He referred to Ireland being the 3rd safest country in the world to live in according to a study and that this is due to the work of the Gardaí. He indicated that he believes that is nothing wrong with the policing model but that he does believe that there is something wrong with the release policies from prison. He stated that these need to be changed, as that they are effecting the moral of the Gardaí. He also agreed that we need additional Gardaí with boots on the ground, as Gardaí have to deal with very smart criminals.

Cllr. Murphy referred to the huge reduction in the amount of Gardaí who are living in the local stations, stating that in his area of Gort, that it is a Garda who is only there for a few hours. He went on to state that it is usually a Garda who is coming in from the outside to police them, rather than being one of their own. He believes that presence within the community and knowing the community is very important in rural areas. Cllr. Murphy also expressed concerns regarding armed response and response times, stating that similar to An Comh. Ó Cualáin and others, that calls are being directed to other stations further away.

Cllr. Colm Keaveney acknowledged the commitment of the Garda Commissioner but stated that he doesn't believe that the Commissioner can have a proper strategy in place due to the limited resources available to him.

Cathaoirleach Cuddy stated that there has to be an increase in the number of local Gardaí and that the Chief Superintendent needs to be provided with the relevant number of Gardaí required. He stressed that importance of focusing on the uniform section.

The amount of drugs, Cocaine in particular, that is available in rural areas was raised as a serious concern by a number of Councillors – Cllr. Reddington, Cllr. McHugh Farag, Cllr. Murphy. They are concerned by how easily people can access it now, how normalized it has become and that it needs to be combatted urgently.

In reply to the concerns and questions raised, Commissioner Harris stated that they have a lot of resources available to them and that over the years, that they have National Bureaus for a number of different elements such as drugs and cyber crime. He recognized what has been said regarding cocaine and that he is acutely aware of it. He stated that there is a local response regarding the issue of drugs and that this is backed up nationally and internationally. He did state however that more can be done regarding education in relation to cocaine and the damage it does.

In reply to the matter of Gardaí living in local stations, he confirmed that Gardaí have to volunteer for this and that it is a huge commitment and a lifestyle change. He did indicate however that they do try to facilitate this in so far as possible, for any Gardaí who wish to do it.

He also referred to the armed support units and confirmed the detectives are armed as well.

In relation to the new policing model, the Commissioner stated that it was very early days and that it should be given a chance. He confirmed that the model is based on work that has been done in the UK and Australia to name but a few. He also confirmed that a pilot was run here in Dublin, Cork and two other areas prior to his appointment to the role of Commissioner. The Government didn't ask them to save money, however their aim is for the model to be as effective and efficient as possible.

He is taking the concerns regarding Gardaí and people feeling isolated, on board. In relation to the issue with the Irish language, he confirmed that a strategy has been adopted and he expects that the Irish proficiency will grow. He stated that they are very committed to the Irish language, to make sure that they can provide a service in the Gaeltacht areas.

Commissioner Harris concluded by confirming that the Chief Superintendent has sent in a request for extra personnel. He stated that they need to get the organization to 15,000 personnel and that they will thereafter look at plans.

Item No. 2 – Minutes of the JPC Meeting held on the 9th May 2022

On the proposal of Cllr. Charity and seconded by Cllr. King, it was agreed that the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 9th May 2022 be adopted.

Matters arising:

An Comh. Ó Cualáin queried if there was any update in relation to the staffing levels in An Cheathrú Rua and in relation to the Garda Station in An Spidéal. Superintendent Glynn confirmed that another sergeant is due to be assigned to An Cheathrú Rua and that the Station in An Spidéal is nearly complete.

Item no. 2. Report from an Garda Síochána

Superintendent Glynn read out the Garda Report (circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting).

Cllr. Roche stated that there seems to be a trend emerging as we are coming out of Covid, in that there is an unwelcome increase in relation to break-ins in rural areas. He also assumed that this was not just confined to east Galway and that it is happening across the County. He concluded by thanking the Gardaí in relation to their engagement with the community. In response to his concern regarding break-ins, Superintendent Glynn stated that there is no particular trend emerging and that they have local and national operations in place.

Cllr. Hoade thanked Gardaí for the report and reminded the Committee that Community Alerts are very important. She appealed for areas who don't have the alerts in place at the moment, to get them set up. She also had a concern in relation to cyclists and pedestrians on the roads, particularly when it is dark. The Superintendent responded by confirming that community alerts are a part of the policing plan and that they are very important to get information from and to the Community. Sgt. Walsh responded and agreed that community alerts in relation to burglaries are great, particularly during winter time and that there is a real need to engage with community alerts.

Cllr. Reddington recalled the issue of Cocaine again in rural areas and how widespread it seems to be. Cllr. Murphy agreed with Cllr. Reddington and stated that the stigma related to the use of drugs seems to be gone and that it is now looked at as semi normal behaviour. The Superintendent confirmed that yes it is a concern and that they have various operations in place to try and tackle the issue.

An Comh. Ó Cualáin agreed that drugs are certainly a problem and asked if drug driving was a big issue now as well? Superintendent Gynn advised that there is certainly an increase in drug driving.

Cllr. McHugh Farag stated that a lot of repeat offending seems to be occurring, as people only get a slap on the wrist. She believes that Government should be pusher to issue harsher punishments.

Cllr. Colm Keaveney stated there should be a fear of crime. He believes that crime prevention begins in the home and that we should look and liaise with the Housing Section in relation to adaption grants in substandard properties – for new windows and doors. He referred to our

security standards, indicating that they were certainly lacking, as no set standards in place. Sgt. Walsh agreed, stating that standards are very important, that we should have set security standards and that legislation is needed for this.

Cllr. Maher stated that we need to focus on communication and getting the message out there. An Comh. Mac an Iomaire agreed, stating that cocaine is a real concern and that the message needs to go out in schools in particular, to show young adults that their lives will never be the same if they take drugs. He queried was there a breakdown in relation to the percentage of drink and drug driving. Superintendent Glynn advised that it wasn't possible to give this breakdown.

Sgt. Walsh advised that there are campaigns that are being lead by the HSE in relation to drugs e.g. Electric Picnic, and that the aim of these campaigns and strategies is to reduce harm. He stated that the way we think and deal with drugs has certainly changed.

Sgt. Walsh also spoke in relation to cyber crime, stating that it is low risk and high reward, with organized crime gangs involves. He concluded that they are raising awareness on this with a weekly tele conference with the Garda Press Office.

Cllr. King queried the statistic provided in relation to domestic incidents and asked was there any particular reason for the trend. Superintendent Glynn advised that he could not comment on this.

Item no. 3: Reports for Subcommittees

Waste Management and Enforcement – Presented by Cllr. Hoade

On the 9th of June Galway County Council in conjunction with Galway City Council and An Garda Síochána launched a new multi-agency operation to combat illegal dumping,

Gardai and waste enforcement officers conducted a few multi-agency checkpoints on that date targeting the illegal haulage of waste.

Day 1 of this multi-agency approach was primarily focusing on highlighting the offenses of illegal dumping and providing the public with the necessary advice. Further days of action will be rolled out across the city and county during September and checkpoints will be carried out during the daytime, the evening, late at night, and at weekends.

Waste Presentation Bye Laws

- In 2022 to date 480 waste presentation bye law inspections have been carried out.

- These have been carried out in Tuam (Country Meadows, Tirboy and Rivercrest), Gort (Crowe St, Bolands Lane, Bolands Court, Bolands Close and Sycamore Grove), Loughrea (Fahy Gardens, St. Laurences Fields, An Crannog and Loch na hOileannin)
- These were all initial inspections and warning letters were sent to those found to be non-compliant with the bye-laws
- Follow up inspections were carried out in Tuam on 07/09/22
- This year to date 4 FPN's have been issued under the bye law inspections

Anti-dumping initiative (ADI) 2022

We received funding and approval for 13 projects with a total funding amounting to 110, 000 euro.

Projects ranged from clean-ups, awareness, bulky goods , mattress collection in An Mám and paint collections in the CAS. Most of these projects have been completed.

Cllr. Maher stated that we need to keep these initiatives going, as illegal dumping is still a problem. He confirmed that they are continuing to have meetings with relevant staff and that there is a plan in place. He stated that there is a need to get the message out there that it is not ok to dump and that more fine and penalties are needed. He also referred to the bin service and the need to find out which households do not have it in place.

Education and Awareness Subcommittee report – Presented by Cllr. Gerry King

The Green dog walkers initiative is a friendly way to change the attitudes of dog owners. If they poop, you scoop.

Scamming is a big concern at the moment, whether it be text messages, online, etc and people are advised to be extra vigilant.

Dark evenings are approaching – campaigns in relation to high vis jackets underway for when people are out walking on the roads. Bushes are protruding out on to the roads as well so this needs to be addressed due to the safety of walkers.

Cllr. Roche gave his compliments to the subcommittees for their initiatives. He did state that check points for illegal dumping have an impact but that it will not solve the problem. He also referred to the delay in relation to the data commissioner and cctv footage. The Director of Services, Michael Owens confirmed that it was signed into law in July and that we are still awaiting the commencement order to be signed. He stated that once in place, it will allow for overt surveillance, but not covert surveillance.

Cllr. Colm Keaveney commented that strategies tackle situations like this and that he is glad that Gardaí are stopping vehicles.

Cllr. Charity queried if there had been any convictions from the check points that were held in relation to illegal dumping. Cllr. Maher advised that these check points were more so to give people a heads up, to show them that we would be there and if they are caught again, that there will be penalties.

Item no. 4: A.O.B

Cllr. King stressed again the importance of getting messages out to schools in relation to drugs. Cllr. Maher confirmed that this has already started in schools and that the message is being pushed out.

An Comh. Ó Cualáin requested clarification regarding who will cover the Conamara area when no Gardaí are there. Superintendent Glynn advised that it depends who is available and what admin resources are available, that it will be diverted to where it will be answered.

Cathaoirleach Cuddy confirmed that the next meeting is due to be held on the 14th November 2022. This will be a public meeting and is due to be held in the Claregalway Hotel.

Cllr. Maher welcomed this and asked if the next public meeting could be held in Loughrea. Cathaoirleach Cuddy said this would certainly be considered.

Chríochnaigh an cruinniú ansin.