

**Minutes of Joint Policing Committee Meeting held online
Monday, 12th April 2021 at 10:30 a.m.**

In attendance:- Cllr. John Crowe, Chairperson

Cllrs. Pat Daly, Michael Begley, Alan O'Callaghan, Joe Killeen, Pat McMahon, Gabriel Keating, Ian Lynch, Mary Howard, Pat Burke, Paul Murphy, P.J. Ryan, Ann Norton.

Deputy Cathal Crowe
Deputy Violet Anne Wynne
Deputy Joe Carey
Senator Timmy Dooley

Gardaí:

Chief Supt. Sean Colleran
Supt. Brendan McDonagh
Supt. John Galvin
Garda Siobhan Madden

Officials:

Leonard Cleary, Director of Service,
Annette Donnellan, Administrative Officer

Brian McMahon, Clare Youth Service
Dermot Hayes, Community Activist in Disability
Adrian Brooks, IFA
Madeline McAleer, Public Participation Network
Bill Slattery, Lahinch Development Association

Apologies:

Senator Roisin Garvey
Mary Mather Leahy, Clare Older People's Council

Welcome:

The Chairperson Cllr. J. Crowe welcomed everyone to the online meeting and outlined the meeting protocol due to COVID regulations. He said the meeting was not being recorded and that there was no permission to record the meeting. An attendance roll call of JPC members was taken to confirm attendees.

Cllr. Crowe extended a welcome to Garda Siobhan Madden who will be presenting to the meeting on Support for Victims of Crime.

1. Draft Minutes of JPC meeting held 8th February 2021

Proposed: Cllr. PJ Ryan
Seconded: Cllr. Alan O Callaghan and agreed.

2. Matters arising from Minutes

There were no matters arising.

3. Correspondence

A Donnellan stated there were two pieces of correspondence relating to CCTV (a) from the Ennis MD and (b) a reply from the Garda Commissioner.

4. Presentation – Support for Victims of Crime (AGS)

Garda Siobhan Madden attached to the Victim Support Office (VSO) presented to the members of the JPC. She outlined details of the VSO as follows:-

- The office gives information, support and protection to victims and ensures that victims are recognised.
- A Victims Charter which was introduced in 1999 was revised in 2020. The Charter covers multiple agencies and advises victims what they can expect and describes the role of An Garda Síochána.
- The establishment of the Garda Victim Support Office (GVSO) aims to enhance the Garda services being provided to victims.
- The office was set up in March 2015 and there is an office in each of the 28 divisions.
- The GVSO will augment the existing service provided to victims.

Garda S. Madden outlined the role of the GVSO, information supplied to victims of crime and details of the pulse letters. She presented a list of organisations and support services that are distributed to victims. She advised that the Clare Office is manned by two staff members dedicated and trained and the office operates from Monday to Friday 9-5pm. Garda Madden outlined details of Operation Faoiseamh.

Cllr. J. Crowe thanked Garda Madden for her presentation and invited members to comment.

Members of the JPC thanked Garda Madden for her excellent presentation and commented as follows:-

M. McAleer advised that it is good to know all the details and the new services coming down the line. She advised that she is running a training course on domestic abuse and asked could she share the presentation. Garda Madden agreed to this. M. McAleer also enquired if a Garda was available to give an input at the training.

Cllr. J. Killeen stated that this is information that all Councillors need to have for circulation and dissemination. He enquired if there is counselling for gender-based violence and can it be included as part of the support.

Cllr. A. Norton stated it is very welcome and positive to see increased support for those suffering physical and mental abuse within family settings. She enquired if the office was based in Ennis. Garda Madden advised that the office is based in Ennis Garda Station and that this is the point of contact for the entire County.

Cllr. P. Daly gave an example of a lady who was being abused by her son. He put her in contact with Clare Haven, spoke to Supt. McDonagh and a court order has been organised. He stated this information will be very helpful in the future as people will know where to go and what to do in these situations.

Cllr. P.J. Ryan stated that the presentation was very informative and Councillors will find the information very useful in their role.

Cllr. M. Howard advised that it was great to see this program and complemented the Gardaí. She had recently come across someone in an abusive situation and she had great confidence that the Gardaí would help, which they did.

Deputy C. Crowe outlined a scenario of domestic abuse taking place over a period of 13 months that involved foreign nationals. He advised that foreign nationals do not have family to support them. He requested that a campaign be run nationally on social media in other languages to highlight where they can avail of support.

5. Update by An Garda Síochána

Chief Supt. Colleran thanked the Committee for their positive comments on the presentation by Garda Madden. He provided the latest statistics to the JPC comparing figures from the first quarter of 2020 to the first quarter of 2021. He also provided a snapshot of Community Engagement Initiatives.

Cllr. John Crowe thanked Chief Supt. Colleran for his presentation and invited comments from the members.

6. Questions from JPC Members

D. Hayes enquired if there were many repeat offenders of domestic violence. He stated there is an increase in younger people selling drugs i.e. 16/17 year olds.

Chief Supt. Colleran advised that they monitor the situation very closely, where offenders are released on bail the Gardaí make sure it is under strict conditions. In relation to vulnerable victims of crime, the Gardaí ensure that the cases are followed through. He advised that young people and drug taking has increased at all levels of society from different classes and age. He assured the members that when the Gardaí receive information on drug taking or patterns they deal with it. Once the Gardaí get the organisers they can deal with it. School talks are also organised.

M. McAleer advised that she is the PPN representative on the Clare PPN. She offered her condolences to Sharon Bennett's family on behalf of the PPN.

She said that with regard to the Garda statistics on domestic violence that were presented, an EU report in 2014 indicated that only 10% of victims report to the police services across Europe. With 326 domestic disputes reported to Gardai over 9 months in Co. Clare, that was almost 10 reports per week. She stated that with a 10% reporting rate, that in reality equates to 100 cases per week in Clare, which is a sizeable number of families impacted by the issue – the 90% not reporting represents a huge, hidden problem.

She said that is great to see that more victims are coming forward to report. Public awareness campaigns have highlighted that there is inter-agency support available to victims. She enquired whether the JPC can get a gender breakdown of barring orders and number of offences.

Chief Supt. Colleran stated that a suspect in Sharon Bennet's case is in custody and was charged with murder at a recent hearing. He advised that it is important that people report early so incidences do not escalate. When victims ring the Gardaí they are happy that the Gardaí will deal with it. He stated that the decision was taken not to release the gender breakdown details as some crime numbers are so low that a victim may be identified.

Cllr. P.J. Ryan thanked the Chief Supt. for his presentation. He referred to the illegal encampment in Sixmilebridge. He has received a lot of complaints/questions from constituents. He stated they will not leave until they get accommodation, they have been offered accommodation but not in the area they want. He advised that there are a lot of older people living in the area. He enquired as to why people are allowed to stay so long in a public area. Cllr. J. Crowe and Cllr. O Callaghan supported Cllr. Ryan's comments. Deputy Carey asked for increased Garda visibility and checkpoints at the Sixmilebridge illegal encampment.

In response, Chief Supt. Colleran advised that they are aware of the situation in Sixmilebridge and that it has been discussed at divisional meetings. He advised that Supt. McDonagh has taken a proactive approach to trespassing. He stated that rehousing is out of the Gardaí's control but will work with agencies in relation to housing and look to increase checkpoints, increase their profile in the area and target illegal behaviour.

Deputy J. Carey commended Chief Supt. Colleran and all of the Gardaí in Clare for the work carried out during the pandemic. Deputy Carey referred to the homeless situation in Ennis. The fall out on the streets of Ennis was raised by a number of residents and people working in the town. He stated homeless accommodation is not adequate and proper supports are not there for those with complex needs. He inquired if there was a strategy to deal with this and that a multi-agency approach should be looked at to rule out unsavory behaviour. He also enquired if the CCTV system for Clarecastle was part of the scheme and if a meeting could be convened with the different parties, including Clarecastle Development Committee, for approval and sanction of funding.

Chief Supt. advised that in terms of homelessness the Gardaí are fully aware of the spillover and certainly react to that. In terms of their housing suitability, the Gardaí have no control over this but they know the locations and react immediately. In relation to CCTV in Clarecastle, he agreed to speak to Supt. McDonagh on this.

Cllr. A. Norton supported by Cllr. M. Howard, spoke about the increase in anti-social behaviour in Ennis, the lack of street Garda Patrols, drugs being sold on the street, number of people drinking, people being harassed, and how the pedestrianisation of the streets may contribute to this. She spoke about the possible effects to business, reputation, and attracting people to the main town of the County.

Cllr. M. Howard offered her condolences to the family and children of Sharon Bennett. She referred to the Temporary Accommodation for the Winter Initiative and stated that the location of the Hotel was totally unsuitable for this kind of initiative. She suggested people buy a coffee or sandwich instead of giving money to those begging. She asked that Ennis MD meet with the Gardai before a meeting.

Chief Supt. Colleran referred to the social problems and people congregating in certain areas. Offenders have been drawn to the attention of the Gardaí and have been before the Courts on multiple occasions. Regarding increased visibility, he stated that Garda resources have been very stretched over the last 12 months but agreed it is one of the key areas where visibility needs to be increased and they will continue to prioritise it. In relation to drug taking, he advised that they have a dedicated Drugs Unit targeting top and low level criminals and will action any information or criminal reports received. He agreed to meet with Ennis MD.

Deputy C. Crowe spoke about the illegal encampment in Sixmilebridge and the fact that they travelled outside the 5km restriction during the peak of Covid. He stated if accommodation is not being accepted then the courts system should be used. He referred to animal welfare issues, in particular to a horse which was tied up for two weeks. He recommended that individuals responsible be aggressively pursued. He enquired if there was a backlog in court cases due to Covid and if any shebeens had been closed down. He advised that he is looking within government to legislate body cams for Gardaí as Gardaí are being harassed and recorded.

Chief Supt. Colleran referred to previous comment in relation to Sixmilebridge, He advised that the Gardaí are very proactive in criminality and ongoing feuds, and have made a lot of progress on this. In relation to horse welfare, the Gardaí are not the lead agency but will action any complaints received. He advised that no court cases were lost because of Covid. Gardaí have come across Shebeens in a number of locations, but the numbers are quite small and there are none before the Court. He agreed that recording/videoing of Gardaí needs to be addressed.

Cllr. A. O'Callaghan referred to theft of MPVs and catalytic convertors stolen for scrap value, he enquired if the scrap yards are being investigated. He encouraged people who see drug dealing taking place to ring An Garda Síochána to get more prosecutions.

Chief Supt. advised that as part of the investigation of thefts of MPVs and catalytic convertors, scrap yards are visited. He stated that the Drugs Unit is manned on a full-time basis on rotation every 3/6 months.

Cllr. I. Lynch requested that the results of the Kilrush Multi Agency Task Force be presented to the JPC to see what actions have been achieved and hope to be achieved. He spoke about theft from unlocked vehicles but noted that sometimes windows are broken to access property, and he encouraged people not to leave valuables in their car. He enquired about anti-social behaviour in Kilrush. He stated the JPC is a great forum for communications but does not have an output from the meetings. Youth services and lack of facilities for the youth is a problem and the JPC should put forward a proposal for a sports capital grant for Deis towns. He recommended that a small sub committee be set up e.g. in Kilrush.

Chief Supt. Colleran acknowledged that not all thefts from cars were because they were unlocked. He said Supt. Galvin would take on board the request for increase of patrols in the area. He acknowledged the value of an output document which would give structure to the JPC.

Cllr. J. Killeen commended the work of An Garda Síochána. He referred to staycations and the influx of tourists, clampdown on wild camping and traffic pinch points e.g. Mullaghmore, Corofin Village – Kilnaboy/Kilfenora side, Cliffs of Moher, Ballyvaughan. He enquired if there is a plan in place for the control of numbers at beaches this summer and if there will be co-operation between agencies to control pinch points and traffic disruptions.

Chief Supt. Colleran stated that An Garda Síochána will take a proactive approach again in relation to staycations. He advised that a Traffic Management Plan will be put in place this summer and the Traffic Management Inspector will link in with West and East Clare and work with agencies to mitigate traffic problems.

Cllr. G. Keating acknowledged the input and support of An Garda Síochána in relation to fines and introduction of special Covid measures. He complimented Chief Supt. Colleran and Garda Madden on their presentations as very informative.

Chief Supt. reiterated the approach to fixed penalties; that is to engage, educate, encourage, and enforce in a graduated response. He advised that over Easter they had seen reduced incidences.

Cllr. P. Daly referred to the beat on the street in Ennis 30/40 years ago, but that Ennis today is very different and has serious problems with drugs. He commended the Drugs Unit and referred to recent drug seizures and arrests. He recommended that Gardaí patrol housing estates. He referred to illegal dumping in Ballybeg Woods and Cloughleigh and recommended CCTV urgently.

Chief Supt. Colleran fully agreed with patrol parking in estates. He advised that drugs was a social problem and the Gardaí play a key role where visibility makes a difference and Gardaí on the street gives a positive image.

Deputy V. Anne Wynne stated that a lot of important issues have been covered and extended her condolences to the family of Sharon Bennett. She thanked Chief Supt. Colleran and Garda Madden for their presentations. She stated that she has seen a lot of cuts to local support and mental health supports. She enquired if there was an increase in calls in relation to mental health distress. She recommended future community engagement in relation to youths.

Chief Supt. stated they have dealt with a number of incidences in relation to mental health issues e.g. people missing, people in vulnerable situations which were dealt with. The Gardaí work very closely with the youth and there are a number of inspectors appointed to develop strong relationships with youth groups.

Cllr. J. Crowe referred to traffic congestions, anti-social behaviour and crime in the area of the R469 Kilmurry to Quin Road. In relation to swimming in the lake he recommended that a meeting with agencies be set up. He agreed with the views raised by other JPC members on illegal encampments in Sixmilebridge. He stated

people were getting very frustrated with the situation and recommended that it be pushed forward and resolved.

Chief Supt. Colleran noted all comments in relation to Sixmilebridge and stated the Gardaí can be proactive in patrolling and engage with vulnerable people. In relation to Kilmurry/Quin he advised that Supt. Brendan McDonagh has a plan in place and will carry out active patrolling.

In reply to Cllr. Lynch, L. Cleary said he would add the Multi Agency update as an Agenda item to the next meeting. He said it was a good example of inter-agency cooperation between the Council, An Garda Síochána, Regional Drugs Task Force, Voluntary Organisations, and Groups supporting persons/individuals.

7. JPC Six Year Plan 2022-2027

It was agreed to defer this item to the next JPC Meeting.

8. Any other business

Cllr. J. Crowe advised that it was Annette's last meeting and called on the Chief Supt. to say a few words. On behalf of An Garda Síochána, Chief Supt. Colleran thanked Annette for all her help and support over the last 2 years and for the patience she has shown. He stated that she made his job a lot easier and wished her well in the future. L. Cleary echoed these sentiments. He stated that it was a whole new area of work and it was a mark of the caliber of the person to adapt to the role. On behalf of himself and his colleagues he also thanked her for her help and support over the last 2 years and wished her well on taking on some new initiatives.

Leonard advised that Karen Fennessy, Administrative Officer would be taking over the role from the next meeting. Cllr. J. Crowe, on behalf of the members thanked Annette for her outstanding work and stated that she was very efficient and the meetings ran smoothly.

Cllr. M. Howard thanked Annette for all her help and support and stated that she was a pleasure to work with. She stated that Annette will be a loss and wished her the best of luck in the future but will also look forward to working with Karen.

Annette took the opportunity to thank all the members for their support over the last 2 years.

With no other business the meeting concluded.


Chairperson: Cllr. John Crowe

Date: 20/09/2021

