

DRAFT Minutes of Joint Policing Committee Meeting held in the Council Chamber on Monday, 18th October 2021 at 12 noon

In attendance:- Cllr. John Crowe, Chairperson

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

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

Gardaí:

Chief Supt. Sean Colleran
Sergeant Marie Crowley
Detective Inspector Padraic Frawley
Inspector Morgan O'Donoghue

Officials:

Pat Dowling, Chief Executive
Leonard Cleary, Director of Service,
Karen Fennessy, Administrative Officer

Brian McManus, Clare Youth Service
Bill Slattery, Lahinch Development Association
Dermot Hayes, Community Activist in Disability

Apologies:

Cllr. A. Norton
Adrian Brooks, IFA
Mary Mather Leahy, Clare Older People's Council
Madeline McAleer, Public Participation Network
Senator Róisín Garvey

Welcome:

Cllr. J. Crowe opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the Special Meeting of the Clare Joint Policing Committee. He welcomed Garda Commissioner, Drew Harris who had come to Clare especially to meet the Clare JPC members. He advised that the Commissioner brings a wealth of experience to the role and thanked him for his leadership of An Garda Síochána.

Cllr. Crowe acknowledged the excellent working relationship that the Clare JPC has with community stakeholders, statutory agencies and the Gardaí in Clare. He stated that the JPC is an important mechanism to support policing and to engage on plans for the future in County Clare.

Cllr. Crowe advised that Commissioner Harris will be giving a presentation on the new Garda Operating Model and will then take pre-submitted questions from the JPC

Members around community engagement, crime and traffic/roads policing. He stated that the questions will be read out by the JPC Administrator, Karen Fennessy and following the Commissioner's response, a right of reply will be allowed for 1 minute only.

Cllr. Crowe advised that the meeting will be restricted by time therefore, open questions from the floor will not be facilitated on this occasion.

Cllr. Crowe thanked Commissioner Harris and invited him to give his presentation.

Commissioner Drew Harris addressed the members and thanked everyone for the invitation to attend the meeting. He stated that it was a great opportunity to engage with the Clare JPC and address specific concerns as it is important to engage at a local level. Commissioner Drew Harris presented the Operating Model and provided details on the following:-

- Overview of the Operating Model
- Current model versus future model
- Frontline Gardaí by numbers
- Functional Area Services
- Overarching benefits of the Operating Model
- Community benefits
- Future changes
- Operational decisions
- Regional and Divisional Headquarters locations
- Implementation timeline
- Community Engagement

Commissioner Harris advised that he will keep JPC's updated on the implementation of the Operating Model and he thanked the JPC members for their continued support.

Cllr. J. Crowe thanked Commissioner Harris for his presentation and invited the Meetings Administrator to outline the questions submitted by the members. The questions were divided into three categories: Community Engagement, Crime and Traffic & Roads Policing.

Karen Fennessy outlined the questions submitted as follows:-

Community Engagement:

Q1. Whether the Commissioner proposes to increase the number of Garda personnel stationed in County Clare (from Cllr. J. Crowe & Deputy C. Crowe)

Commissioner Harris outlined the staffing levels of the new Clare-Tipperary Garda Division. He advised that over the past ten years there has been an increase of 6 Garda members in the Division. The current total is 875 and this is to rise to approximately 1,500. The increase will come through to all divisions. By the end of 2022 there will be 14,600 Garda members. The Commissioner noted that a

maximum intake of 800 recruits per year created an increase of 450 members. He advised that the Economic Crime and Cyber Crime Bureaux needs more resources.

He advised that when you look at divisions it appears that things have stayed static over a period of time, however other areas have built up resources e.g. the Protective Services Bureau which has engaged 300 Gardaí across the Country. Armed support units have been created, operating 24/7 which have drawn a lot of personnel.

Deputy Cathal Crowe thanked Commissioner Harris and stated that there is a truly unique dynamic in Clare in terms of policing. County Clare has the largest urban centre, an international airport and a number of Direct Provision sites. Deputy Crowe advised that he expected more than 6 additional Gardai over the last ten years and advised that this is alarming. He stated that some villages cover large areas in rural Clare. The Garda Station in Broadford closed six years ago and this station covered a wide area. This has put pressure on Killaloe and Ardnacrusha stations. Deputy Crowe appealed that more Gardaí are freed up to police the streets.

Cllr. J. Crowe advised that over the last number of years small villages have grown into towns which has resulted in increased population in these areas and more Garda resources are needed. He requested that Commissioner Harris look into this.

Crime

Q2. Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne would like the Commissioner to provide an update on the unanswered Domestic Violence calls

Commissioner Harris advised that the Clare Division had 22 incidents of unanswered calls. 14 of those were related to domestic disturbances, 6 were complaints on missing persons or civil issues, 2 related to mental health. In 11 incidents no contact was made by Gardai. In 7 cases officers did attend but the calls were not correctly classified and 4 calls did not warrant a call back. The calls were reviewed by the Divisional Detectives and none of the callers requested further personal engagement. In rural divisions this has been a lesser issue than in urban settings. Commissioner Harris advised that they have learned a lot from incorrectly classified calls and stated that there will be a new dispatch/CAD system by October 2022.

Deputy Wynne thanked Commissioner Drew Harris for the update. She advised that the old system was not working and was not helpful in these situations. She welcomed the news of the improved system for classifying calls. She advised that in Clare a lot of the communities are rural based and because victims are so isolated it is a bigger ordeal for them to reach out for help. She advised that she is concerned about the calls that were misclassified and that maybe the callers politely said they didn't need further assistance when that might not be the case.

Commissioner Harris referred to the service failure in not classifying the calls properly and this was rectified by making contact with the callers. He advised that everything that can be done will be done and calls will be dealt with in the appropriate manner.

Cllr. J. Crowe welcomed the Cathaoirleach to the meeting.

Q.3 Deputy Cathal Crowe is requesting an update on An Garda Síochána's success, at national level and county level, in terms of combatting drug dealing.

Commissioner Harris stated that he would forward a written report on this. He advised that they are working at a national and local level. Nationally they are concentrating on trafficking of drugs into Ireland. He stated that over the last number of years An Garda Síochána have stepped up their liaison with appointed international law enforcement partners and have staff in Bogota and Washington Embassies. There has been a huge response from this. He referred to Europol and Interpol that are bringing success against organised crime gangs.

He advised that there has been a large number of successful operations in Clare over the last year. He stated that Chief Supt. Sean Colleran had reported on various operational successes whereby hundreds of thousands of Euros worth of drugs and tens of thousands of Euros in cash had been seized in the County. He stated that it is CAB's 25th Anniversary and a lot of time and effort has been expended at divisional level. Members of the force are trained to do an assessment on individuals with unexplained wealth, properties etc. An Garda Síochána are very much interested in pursuing wealth and referred to the Proceeds of Crime Act. Commissioner Harris requested that communities come forward if they know of people with unexplained wealth in the form of properties, cars etc. as there is a need to take wealth from criminals. He stated that the Clare Division is very active in this work.

Deputy Crowe took the opportunity to commend the work of the Chief Superintendent and the Gardaí in the County. He stated that there was a Prime Time special last week that outlined cases under investigation and advised that some of the small-time drug dealers from the 80's/90's are now the Drug Barons of Europe. He stated that there is something wrong that they cannot be reigned in from street corners. He advised that drug dealing is happening in every village in the County and that a lot of people are living way beyond their means and profiteering. Deputy Crowe questioned whether the law is too soft.

Commissioner Harris noted Deputy Crowe's points and added that the criminal justice system's response to criminal gangs is rigorous and that the Country has the most rigorous legislation in Europe and the strongest regime regarding recovery of funds. The response is robust and it is the intention to make Ireland a hard target against organised crime. He stated that the force needs international partners, CAB, members of Department of Social Protection, Gardaí, Customs and taxation to work in a combined effort to tackle organised crime. He stated that information is needed from the public also to take out supply routes.

Traffic & Roads Policing Questions

Q.4 Deputy Cathal Crowe would like to know if the principle of "discretion" is still taught to all guards in training in Templemore Garda College and if on a day-to-day basis this principle is applied by Gardaí when enforcing the Road Traffic Act.

Commissioner Harris advised that discretion is taught right from the very first day of training in Templemore. He stated that there are many forms of discretion and referred to informal cautions, interactions with An Garda Síochána and members of the community. He advised that discretion used is there to provide a human service taking circumstances of the individual into account e.g. public order offences, begging, juvenile offending.

Deputy Cathal Crowe advised that he had raised this issue in the Dáil recently. He stated that Clare's population is 118,000 and 16,000 come under the Limerick Garda division (e.g. Cratloe). In the last two years 8 out of the Limerick force have been on suspension and 60 are under investigation. It is harrowing for families involved as there is a shroud of suspicion over them. He recommended that the process be sped up. Deputy Crowe requested that the Commissioner engage with this effectively. Deputy Crowe advised that he has spoken to members of the GRA and they are fearful of discretion. The reality was that Gardai were able to square off offences but this puts the principle of discretion in jeopardy but discretion is crucial. Cllr. Crowe outlined that reasonable discretion should be used if e.g. somebody is on the way to the Maternity Hospital. He advised that County Clare gained 6 Gardai in the last 10 years but Limerick lost 8 in two years and recommended that this be addressed.

Commissioner Harris advised that there is a process by which a fixed charge penalty can be examined. He stated that there is an important difference in policing between discretion and preference. He advised that he would recommend every member of An Garda Síochána to use discretion and not preference and understands how a crime investigation is stressful for members of the force but it needs to be investigated and the investigations are essential for public confidence. Commissioner Harris expressed the importance of expediting the matters and advised that he is regularly updated on investigations and is personally engaged with the matter. Members of the public have an expectation that they receive the same treatment before the law and An Garda Síochána have to be entirely honest in their dealings with the public.

Q. 5 Deputy Michael McNamara has asked, What is the chain of command for notifications of Road Traffic Offences?

Commissioner Drew Harris advised that difficult road traffic offences can cover a wide range of matters e.g. vehicle defects, speed, intoxication while driving, serious injury. In most cases speeding offences are dealt with by the Fixed Charge Penalties and can proceed through the courts. More serious offences merit investigation and are filed for prosecution.

Cllr. Crowe thanked the Commissioner for his replies and thanked the JPC members for their submissions.

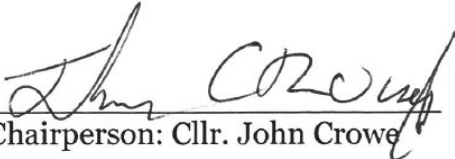
Pat Dowling, Chief Executive addressed the meeting and thanked the Chairman and Commissioner Drew Harris for attending the meeting today. He advised that it is a

great honour that the Commissioner took time out to attend and support the work of the Clare JPC. He thanked him for the ongoing engagement and referred to the annual engagement with the Policing Authority and Gardaí around the whole role of the JPC and advised that fresh guidelines are being developed at present. He referred to the policy services for the future around organisational change and the operating model. He acknowledged the Commissioner's role in the operating model and wished him well with this ongoing work. He acknowledged Chief Superintendent Sean Colleran who has an excellent force. The Council and the Gardaí are doing a lot of work together, especially in relation to Covid. The public are very well served in County Clare and the Gardaí work very well with them. Pat congratulated the Gardaí and thanked them for all the work carried out behind the scenes. Pat took the opportunity to also thank the members of the JPC and Leonard and Karen for facilitating the meeting.

On behalf of Clare JPC members, Cllr. J. Crowe thanked Commissioner Harris for giving his time to attend the meeting and updating the JPC on the operational plan. He also thanked Chief Supt. Sean Colleran and his team, Karen and Leonard and all the team for organising the meeting today. He stated that it was a great honour to have the Commissioner down in Clare and advised that the JPC is important for the people of Clare and the relationship with the Gardaí is very important.

Cllr. Crowe made a presentation to Commissioner Harris on behalf of the Clare JPC and Gardaí to mark the occasion.

With no other business Cllr. J. Crowe declared the meeting closed.


Chairperson: Cllr. John Crowe

Date: 21st February 2022