

Minutes of Joint Policing Committee Meeting held in the Council Chamber on Monday 26th September at 10.30am.

In attendance:- Cllr. John Crowe, Chairperson

Cllrs. Gabriel Keating, Michael Begley, Pat Daly, Paul Murphy, Joe Killeen, Pat McMahon, Ann Norton, Tony O'Brien

Deputy Cathal Crowe
Deputy Joe Carey

Senator Timmy Dooley

Gardaí:

Chief Supt. Sean Colleran
Supt. John Galvin
Supt. John Ryan
Insp. Helen Costello
Insp. Ronan McMahon

Officials:

Leonard Cleary, Director of Service,
Karen Fennessy, Administrative Officer

Mary Mather Leahy, Clare Older People's Council
Madeline McAleer, Public Participation Network
Brian McManus, Clare Youth Service
Bill Slattery, Lahinch Community Development

Apologies:

Cllr. P.J. Ryan
Cllr. Pat Burke
Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne
Senator Róisín Garvey

Welcome:

The Chairperson Cllr. J. Crowe welcomed everyone to the meeting. He also welcomed Chief Supt. Sean Colleran and all the members of An Garda Síochána. He congratulated everyone involved in the Women's Irish Open that took place in Dromoland. It was a very successful event with great team work and effort.

1. Draft Minutes of JPC meeting held on 30th May 2022:-

Proposed by: Cllr. G. Keating
Seconded by: Deputy Cathal Crowe and agreed.

2. Matters arising from minutes:

Deputy Cathal Crowe referred to the rise in bogus tradesmen in Clare which he raised at a previous meeting. He stated that they are calling to vulnerable people and it was his understanding that these acts came under the Criminal Justice Act 2001. Some people are being told that it is a civil matter and to put a civil case through the courts is very costly and most people will not pursue it. Deputy Crowe requested clarification on this.

3. Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

5. Update by An Garda Síochána

Chief Superintendent Sean Colleran welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the following members:-

- Inspector Ronan McMahon
- Inspector Helen Costello

Chief Supt. Colleran provided the latest statistics to the JPC comparing figures from January 2021 to the end of August 2021 against figures from January 2022 to the end of August 2022. He also provided a snapshot of Community Engagement Initiatives.

Chief Supt. Colleran referred to the upcoming National Age Friendly Awards and advised that An Garda Síochána's project by Garda Deirdre Scanlan entitled "Outreach to Elderly on Valentine's Day 2021" has been shortlisted for an Award. This project is one of 4 in Clare that has been shortlisted. Chief Supt. advised that the Assistant Chief Commissioner Paula Hillman will be presenting the award and to get nominated is a huge honour. Chief Supt. formally invited members of the JPC to join An Garda Síochána in celebrating their Centenary at Ennis Garda Station on 7th October. Members of An Garda Síochána will march through the town of Ennis with the Garda band and this will be followed by a medal presentation ceremony for retired members and refreshments in glór. He stated that An Garda Síochána are guardians of the peace and that is what separates them from other nationalities.

Cllr. John Crowe thanked Chief Supt. Colleran for his presentation and invitation to the centenary celebrations. He then invited comments from the members.

6. Questions from JPC Members

Questions from Madeline McAleer:

Madeline stated that Clare has been outstanding in terms of interagency work in relation to Domestic Abuse. She stated that it was on the news recently that pulse system analysis revealed what services and agencies have been saying and it is very stark. Domestic abuse is the key factor in an amount of homicides. There has been a

big increase post-Covid and the Gardaí nationally are dealing with between 120 and 150 cases per day. Madeline outlined the statistics since 1996 on the amount of homicides including women and children and sexual offences that have taken place. She stated that it is shocking that the home is the most dangerous place to be and front line people are aware of this. She advised that the Gardaí can now base policy on statistics but there are gaps in the system. Madeline referred to safety audits and stated that there is a lack of interagency training and a break down of communication and the way it is recorded. She stated that they are looking at drafting a plan and they will need to look at how this can be addressed. She stated that Clare will be a pilot for interagency training. She advised that they have the interagency network that could make the difference in relation to homicides in Ireland. She stated that there is a need to discuss this further and put forward a proposal.

Senator T. Dooley:-

Senator Dooley referred to the gaps in the system. He stated that the Gardaí respond to each incident of domestic abuse but there are a number of cases that do not go on to be charged because of fear. The support structure is not there and if it continues to be treated as a criminal act it is not going to be solved. Senator Dooley enquired if the Gardaí believe that a unit within each district to specifically address Domestic Violence would be helpful? He stated that he is deeply concerned with the level of domestic violence and he noted that there has been an increase in incidents since the pandemic and there is greater abuse of alcohol and drugs. It is a difficult period with financial pressures and there is potential again for women to be the victims of violence.

Chief Supt. Sean Colleran stated that he fully accepts Madeline's point in terms of interagency training. He acknowledged the work carried out outside of this committee and the Gardaí will support them. Training gaps can be identified and the Gardaí would welcome it and from a Garda perspective it will ultimately benefit investigations. He stated that those who report violence may be a victim multiple times before they report it.

Chief Supt. Colleran advised Senator Dooley that the Gardaí have divisional capacity to investigate domestic violence cases. There are a number of people trained up that investigate key offences under Domestic Violence. There is a dedicated unit which includes approximately 10 dedicated interviewers and that is just for Clare. The Gardaí did not have this until 2 years ago. Chief Supt. Colleran stated that having the skill set and support is a huge part in terms of identifying vulnerable people. The Gardaí work closely with Tusla and have quarterly meetings with them.

Questions from Senator T. Dooley:-

Senator Dooley referred to the Budget tomorrow and enquired if the Gardaí's manpower and equipment are adequately resourced. He stated that he is aware that a lot of equipment was procured during the pandemic e.g. cars, and he enquired if these were retained.

In relation to manpower and equipment Chief Supt. Colleran stated the Gardaí could always do with a lot more manpower and equipment and he recognises that there are

huge challenges in recruiting. In terms of resources, the Chief Supt. stated that the Gardaí are very conscious of making sure they have resources in key locations for the Summer, Halloween and Christmas but they have to make do with what they have. He stated that Covid had a huge impact.

Senator Dooley referred to incidences in North Clare of groups illegally hunting hares with lurchers and this is very worrying for farmers. It happens at dusk and they have no regard for the wildlife in the area or domestic or farm animals. This is a county-wide problem but it is more concentrated in North Clare. He stated that it is difficult to police it and there has been check points. From a national perspective he enquired if more can be done. He referred to the statistics from the Chief Supt. and requested that once a year a report be produced showing the trends over a 7/8 year period. He stated that the Gardaí are citizens and enquired how the morale is among the Gardaí. They encounter the same issues as everyone else e.g. in terms of lack of housing etc. He advised that a lot of public and civil servants are struggling with negativity and get a lot of back lash from the public. He enquired if the state can do more to support the Gardaí from a moral perspective.

Supt. Ryan stated that in relation to West Clare incidents, these are before the Courts. He stated that it is important to work with people who have knowledge, in particular coursing clubs. It is also important to get the information quickly as it may take 40/50 minutes to get to a location. Supt. Ryan stated that it is an industry that needs to be looked at at a higher level and possibly across all counties.

Senator Dooley requested that at the next meeting of the JPC that a 5 year trend be provided as stats can be looked at and taken on board for key categories.

In relation to morale, Senator Dooley stated that the cost of living can be an issue and the Gardaí are facing a lot of challenges. Provision of training and equipment are hugely motivating tools. Being shortlisted for an Award is also hugely motivating. Two things negatively impact on Gardaí; social media abuse from celebrities and Gardaí on suspensions is impacting on morale. It is important that there is a strong approach to Garda welfare and it is important to have a safe space to communicate.

Chief Supt. Colleran stated that the Gardaí have a welfare support available to them and they are very conscious and fully accept that it is very challenging for both the division and the individuals.

Questions from Cllr. T. O'Brien:

Cllr. Tony O'Brien thanked Chief Supt. Colleran for his presentation and congratulated him and his colleagues on their upcoming Centenary. He thanked the Chief Supt. for the invitation. He referred to the East Coast, in particular Killaloe which attracts a lot of tourism and new visitors. He stated that the public transport services have been greatly advanced. However, during the Summer season there is increased traffic. He enquired if the Gardaí can provide extra resources during the Summer.

Chief Supt. Colleran stated that he is very conscious that Inspector Moloney works there not just for the Summer but at other holiday times. The Gardaí are working on a high visibility approach and that is having a huge impact.

Question from Deputy Joe Carey:

Deputy Carey thanked Chief Supt. Colleran for his presentation and invitation. He commended An Garda Síochána for their outstanding work at the Women's Irish Open, in particular in relation to the movement of traffic.

Chief Supt. Colleran stated that the golf was a huge success and the images on TV looked stunning.

Deputy referred to the successful apprehension of an individual on 6th September in Baltard, Doonbeg. He stated that there was great collaboration with the local coursing club who brought the incident to the attention of the Kilrush Gardaí. He had spoken to the Inspector and was told that a co-ordinated approach is needed to stamp this out. Using local coursing clubs is very important. These individuals who enter lands and have no regard to live stock should have their equipment and lurchers taken off them when apprehended and be issued with major fines.

Chief Supt. Colleran stated that in relation to illegal hunting there is a Liaison Officer for the whole division. He advised that the Gardaí will challenge these people and bring them before the Courts.

Deputy Carey referred to traveller feuds in the County and over the weekend in Ennis, criminal behaviour was at its worst. He stated that it is happening at all hours of the night, with the use of consaws and slash hooks. Windows are being broken, cars damaged and fights are taking place on the streets. This is having a detrimental impact on communities and needs to be treated very seriously. He stated that there is a need for an operation in the County to stamp out these activities. There is a fear that it will spill out to the wider community. Deputy Carey enquired if there is a strategy in place to deal with this.

Chief Supt. Colleran stated that significant investigations have taken place in relation to feuds. There have been multiple incidents in criminality and the Gardaí take a very proactive and targeted approach in the way they investigate the incidents. The Gardaí investigate everything and put all their resources on multiple strands. There is a significant number of cases before the Courts and Chief Supt. stated that the Gardaí carry out targeted patrolling and they are fully aware of the negative impact it has on society.

Questions from Cllr. P. McMahon:-

Cllr. P. McMahon referred to domestic violence and stated that the Gardaí are at the frontline at all times and when reports come in they follow up with the agencies. He recommended that legislation be brought in so that the Gardaí can act and the laws will need to be strengthened to make life more difficult for the perpetrators.

Chief Supt. Colleran stated that this is the reality. The people that offend are usually people that have a particular characteristic or role. He stated that the Gardaí work

very closely with other agencies/parties and the victims receive huge support post incident. He recognises how other agencies are stretched. The Gardaí work closely with the HSE in relation to mental health.

In relation to speeding offences, Cllr. McMahon stated that it is a small minority that speed, mostly younger people, and there is no excuse as Clare has an excellent road structure. He stated that the Gardaí are present on the motorways but motorists are doing 140/150km per hour. He advised that it is difficult for walkers and cyclists.

Chief Supt. Collieran stated that education plays a huge part in this and the Gardaí are conducting talks at schools, in particular for TY students. In terms of check points, the Superintendents identify the locations and it is not taken in isolation. It is monitored locally.

Cllr. McMahon referred to the damage caused to the bus stop in Bunratty. All the work that was carried out in Bunratty was done by volunteers in the community. There was €2,000 worth of damage carried out and he stated that the onus is on everyone to keep an eye out. Cllr. J. Crowe concurred with Cllr. McMahon on this and stated that Bunratty is one of the busiest tourist attractions in Clare.

Questions from Cllr. P. Daly:-

Cllr. Daly referred to the huge reduction in drug related offences. He stated that there is an excellent Drugs Unit in Clare and they work unsociable hours. He noted that theft from shops was up 52% and requested a break down of ones that do not have CCTV. He stated that there should be some incentive like a grant for CCTV as this is the only way of catching them. Cllr. Daly called on the Oireachtas members present to look into grant funding for CCTV. Cllr. Daly stated that he is looking forward to the Centenary.

Chief Supt. Collieran stated that Clare has a very active Drugs Unit and take a proactive approach. He stated that a lot of people are involved and the Gardaí are rotated within the unit in order to upskill them. The Gardaí are very conscious that it is a huge societal problem. In relation to theft from shops, Chief Supt. stated that there is a high detection rate and CCTV plays a big part in the investigation.

Questions from Cllr. J. Killeen:-

Cllr. Killeen referred to the parking of caravans and camper vans in the Burren. He welcomes the tourists but the difficulty in Ballyvaughan is the provision of facilities to cater for these vans. There is a need to work with communities to see if these facilities can be put in place. Illegally parked vans create difficulties for communities and those who carry out economic activities.

Leonard Cleary stated that the Tourism Department work with Fáilte Ireland. He referred to the accommodation audit which includes caravan data and this will be available in the Autumn. He stated that the biggest challenge is overnight camping with no facilities. He stated that the Council will work closely with the Gardaí and once the audit report is complete he will report back on same.

In relation to cyber bullying Cllr. Killeen welcomed the improvements. He has concerns about videos circulating on social media. He stated that school talks are very welcome and are very significant, as the talks are targeting young people that are very impressionable. It is a good opportunity through education and people will understand their responsibility. It is an education for the person behind the camera in relation to people's privacy.

Chief Supt. referred to inappropriate sharing of messages and stated that it is a huge conduit for the Gardaí to increase awareness in school going children and vulnerable students can be identified. The Gardaí are aware of incidences, are examining them and there is multiple strands involved.

Question from Mary Mather Leahy:-

Mary referred to the assault figures and requested what percentage of older people are included in the figures. She stated that they have seen quite a number of horrific murders in the last 2 years. She stated that older people may not press charges if the case involves a family member. A lot of the cases involve financial, legal and civil matters.

Chief Supt. stated that as an organisation one of the key roles of the Gardaí is to keep people safe. The family element is a huge issue with older people. He stated that the age profile of assaults can be looked at. Chief Supt. stated that there is a need to get the message out there that older people can come to the Gardaí in confidence and they will be provided with the support.

Questions from Deputy C. Crowe:-

Deputy Crowe stated that feuding factions are a serious issue. During the Summer a lot attended an event and within a few metres a feud faction happened. People entered shops and had weapons. The people involved had venomous rage and do not care who is around them. They carry weapons with intent on damaging and Deputy Crowe stated that he hopes the investigation is progressing. These incidents happen very often in the public domain and they will do whatever they can to take out the enemy.

Chief Supt. Colleran stated that feuds are a hugely emotive issue and the Gardaí are affording it the necessary resources.

Deputy Crowe referred to former Garda Stations and closures in Carrigaholt, Doonbeg, Quin, Inagh and Lahinch and enquired if An Garda Síochána have any intention of doing anything with them before going to public sale. He enquired if the stations could have a minor role as a base to stop off in.

He referred to roving criminal gangs and stated that he knows of a case where it is being dealt with under the Criminal Act and another case in West Clare is being dealt with under Civil Law. He advised that he looked up legislation and under Section 7 of the Criminal Justice (Theft and Fraud Offences) 2001 it stipulates that it is a criminal offence. He stated that older people do not have the resources to deal with it under Civil Law and gangs are travelling from Kerry hitting very vulnerable people

and these cases should come under the Criminal Law legislation. He stated that the Gardaí are doing excellent work on it.

Chief Supt. Colleran stated that the OPW are responsible for the Garda Stations and they are aware of the locations. He stated that this forum is not the platform for this issue but it can be looked at from both sides. It is good to see lights on at the stations but it is about access to services rather than location.

In relation to bogus tradesmen Chief Supt. Colleran advised that each incident is examined on its own merits. He stated that there is a civil aspect to some parts of fraud. If it is a criminal act it will be investigated. The Gardaí want to make sure that older people are not afraid to come forward.

Question from Cllr. M. Begley:-

Cllr. Begley sought clarification in relation to communications between other divisions e.g. if there was an incident/accident and the vehicle involved was travelling from one division to another. He enquired if there is a line between the divisions pursuing criminal activities which crosses the border.

Chief Supt. Colleran stated that investigations will not stop at the County border. He stated that there are no issues and to take comfort that in major operations there is a huge cross over.

Question from Bill Slattery:-

Bill referred to a recent incident in Lisdoonvarna involving a couple on the main street. Videos were shown on What's app and facebook and some involved impersonating people. Bill recommended that there should be penalties involved so that this would no occur again. He stated that serious rumours were doing the rounds and enquired if there is criminality involved in this.

Chief Supt. Colleran stated that the Gardaí are fully aware of this incident.

7. Draft Annual Work Plan 2022 - 2023

The Draft Annual Work Plan 2022 – 2023 was proposed by Cllr. P. McMahon and seconded by Cllr. Tony O'Brien. Madeline McAleer requested a few amendments in relation to Domestic Abuse and gender-based violence, more nuance information and more actions to be included before the next JPC meeting.

4. Presentation By Clare County Council on the Property Marking Scheme

John Treacy introduced himself to the members and presented on the following:-

- Property Marking Scheme Update
- Property Marking Scheme Events
- Future Plans

Inspector Helen Costelloe stated that the recent event in Miltown Malbay was a great success and thanked John. John advised that the event went down as one of the best events locally. Chief Supt. Collieran enquired if people are fussy about where the equipment is marked. John stated that they try to prioritise marking and mark sections of the equipment. They marked 220 musical instruments and there was only two that they couldn't mark. There are wear plates on the feet of harps that can be used. The service is provided free of charge.

Cllr. J. Killeen suggested that marking take place in recycling centres. It would be a good opportunity for farmers to bring their valuables to be marked when they have set a designated day for disposing of plastic. John stated that he would be happy to attend on that day. He advised that those type of events where a large amount of people are present is ideal for this service. He stated that there has been a couple of detections made. The service is publicised through social media and John stated that he can provide posters and online posters for sharing on social media. Cllr. Killeen stated that the plastic collection takes place in the month of October.

Cllr. Keating enquired if this service was promoted at the National Ploughing Championship and if the service will be provided throughout the County. John advised that over the winter months they will try to take on events in cooperation with the local members of the force and local community groups who help with the logistics on the day. Cllr. Keating enquired if all local authorities are rolling this out. John stated that they advised Limerick County Council on this scheme, Tipperary are up and running as well as Kerry. The Midlands rolled it out first.

Madeline enquired if there were any plans to use microchips on high value equipment. John stated that he is aware of a number of different mechanisms that can be used e.g. Apple Airtag and Android. Other technologies can be integrated but battery longevity is the problem.

Madeline enquired if consideration was given to building sites as they contain a lot of expensive equipment. John advised that builders are one of the most popular professions attending at the marking clinics. Brick layers and plumbers have attended with their entire van. A full van can be completed within 3/4 minutes. John stated that the scheme can be upscaled for the building sites but there is a need for interaction with the industry and to get the word out there that it is a free service. He advised that a forum like the JPC can help with promotion of it.

8. Any other business:

Questions from Deputy Cathal Crowe:-

Deputy Cathal Crowe apologised for the late submission of two questions. He enquired about community policing and how it has been operating since it was overhauled in January 2019. He stated that roles had been removed slowly from base and did not return. He advised that Community Gardaí are building up a rapport and it is a model that is most valued by the people. He enquired if there were any gaps. Deputy Crowe commended the Coastline and Airport staff. As the Clare coastline is vast he enquired what capacity have they for policing the smuggling of illicit drugs. He referred to Operation Steambrite and stated that there are a lot of

slipways and piers remote and he enquired if the Coastguards or the Gardaí have the capacity to deal with same.

Chief Supt. Colleran stated there are various models in terms of all Gardaí in Co. Clare. He advised that there are a small number of dedicated community policing Gardaí and operate according to availability of hours. Every Garda has a community element to their policing.

Supt. Ryan stated that the Gardaí work closely with international agencies and local units in relation to smuggling illicit drugs. He stated that he does not have the figure for slipways as the Navy are the main people that monitor it. The Gardaí work very closely with other countries and any incidents will be dealt with at national level. The good relationship with customs depends very much on information e.g. local knowledge and is very dependent on people informing them. It is intelligence lead and at a high level.

Supt. Galvin stated that there is a constant Garda presence in the Airport and Customs. He advised that they work nationally and internationally on intelligence based information that comes through and they act on that as well as local knowledge. He stated that in the late 1990's there was a national and international incident and there was huge cooperation between national and international Customs which resulted in a seizure of £14.5m worth of drugs.

Emergency Contact Numbers:-

Cllr. Tony O'Brien proposed that the JPC roll out a list of emergency contact numbers and to liaise with the Chief Superintendent and Clare County Council. He recommended that the JPC takes this on board and work with the Gardaí and Clare County Council to roll it out as a pilot. This was seconded by Senator Dooley and agreed. He commended John Treacy and the Gardaí on the roll out of the property marking system.

Next JPC Meeting:

A discussion took place on a venue for the next meeting and the Vandeleur Gardens or Cnoc na Gaoithe in Tulla was suggested. Cllr. J. Crowe advised that for future meetings, any questions that need to be discussed must be submitted beforehand.

The next JPC meeting will take place on Monday 26th September 2022.

Cllr. J. Crowe took the opportunity to thank the Chief Superintendent, his colleagues from An Garda Síochána, members of the press and all the JPC members for their attendance. With no other business Cllr. J. Crowe declared the meeting closed.

The meeting concluded.


Chairperson: Cllr. John Crowe

Date: 28th November 2022