

**Minutes of Joint Policing Committee Meeting held in the Council Chamber on
Thursday 16th February 2023 at 10.30am.**

In attendance:- Cllr. John Crowe, Chairperson
Cllrs. Michael Begley, Gabriel Keating, Paul Murphy,
Joe Killeen, Ann Norton, Alan O'Callaghan, P.J. Ryan

Deputy Cathal Crowe

Gardaí:

Chief Superintendent, Colm O'Sullivan
Supt. John Galvin
Supt. John Ryan
Insp. Helen Costello

Officials:

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

Bill Slattery, Lahinch Community Development
Dermot Hayes, Community Activist in Disability

Apologies:

Cllr. Pat Burke
Cllr. Bill Chambers
Cllr. Pat Daly
Deputy Joe Carey
Deputy Violet-Anne Wynne
Deputy Michael McNamara
Brian McManus, Clare Youth Service
Mary Mather Leahy, Clare Older People's Council
Madeline McAleer, Public Participation Network

Welcome:

The Chairperson Cllr. J. Crowe welcomed the members to the meeting.

1. Draft Minutes of JPC meeting held on 28th November 2022:-

Proposed by: Cllr. A. O'Callaghan
Seconded by: Cllr. G. Keating and agreed.

2. Matters arising from minutes:

There were no matters arising.

3. Correspondence

Karen read out correspondence from Ennis Municipal District as follows:-

“Members and staff of Ennis MD have had a number of complaints from businesses and other members of the community regarding anti-social behaviour in Ennis town. The complaints coming from the business community are in relation to people camping outside the door of their premises, intimidating staff and customers. We have advised that this is a matter for the Garda Síochána, they have contacted the Gardai. They have come back stating, as rate payers they are not being supported with regard to dealing with this ongoing issue”

Karen advised that the matter was discussed with the Joint Policing Steering Group and they advised that Ennis MD need to arrange their own meeting with An Garda Síochána directly as it is not a matter for the JPC.

Chief Supt. O’Sullivan stated that this is not something that is just happening in Ennis, it is repeated across the whole country. From An Garda Síochána’s perspective, he advised that they are engaging with the individuals as they are intimidating people. He recommended that the businesses come forward to the Gardaí and they will assist and find a solution to the situation.

4. Presentation by Clare County Council on Safety during Storms & Emergency Weather Events

Cormac Falvey, Assistant Chief Fire Officer introduced himself to the members and presented on the following:-

- Inter-agency coordination for severe weather events
- Co. Clare Severe Weather Events
- Preparation for Severe Weather
- Winter Service Plan
- Wind Events
- Communicating with the Public
- Co-ordination
- Major Emergency Management
- Working with other agencies

Cllr. J. Crowe thanked Cormac for his presentation and invited members to comment.

Deputy C. Crowe thanked the Fire Service for all that they are doing. He referred to the photograph in Springfield, Clonlara and took the opportunity to thank the Fire Services and Civil Defence for their outstanding work. He stated that this is where there is interface with the public. He referred to the Doolin Coast Guard station which stood down but is now operating again. He advised that there were a number of competencies that were transferred to the Fire Service and he enquired if they were fulfilling any duties for them now.

Cormac stated that it was great to see Doolin Coast Guard back up and running. He advised that Ennistymon Fire Brigade were trained up and the Fire Service still attend those incidences and carry out a lot of training as well as training in caves, combined with the Coast Guard. The Fire Service take advice from the Coast Guards in these incidences.

Cllr. M. Begley stated that hopefully they will not see the scene in Springfield, Clonlara again as the project is nearly completed and trial runs gave them a chance to test the pumping system and it seems to be working well. A permanent system has not been set up yet. These issues straddle two JPCs as this is located in the Limerick district however, Cllr. Begley stated that when these events happen everyone carries out wonderful work. He referred to severe weather events in 2009, 2016 and 2020 where everything was put to the test and the results were good. He referred to an accident which recently took place on the Southbound lane of the motorway (close to the Inn at Dromoland) involving a single vehicle and the right hand lane was also closed and it appeared to be closed unnecessarily.

Cormac advised that both lanes of the motorway were closed as the ice was particularly bad. The road was treated but it rained down on it and the road temperature was so low that it froze over again causing very hazardous conditions which resulted in a number of incidents on both sides. There was also very heavy traffic due to a rugby match taking place. It was the same the following morning. Gritters were out at 5am but very heavy showers followed.

Cllr. P.J. Ryan thanked Cormac for his very detailed report. Cllr. Ryan referred to the major accident and fire on the motorway recently and enquired if a contra flow system could be put in place. He stated that it would be great for the emergency services.

Cormac stated that a contraflow system was trialled on the N19 from Bunratty to Setrights last June but there are no diversion routes and if the road is closed for a long time this would be particularly challenging. Traffic from Ennis travelling southbound would have to go through the bridge and through Broadford and this route is unsuitable for heavy goods vehicles. He advised that it took 2 hours to deal with that particular incident and if there was a fatality it could take up to a day to allow investigations. It takes 4 or 5 hours to set up a contraflow and takes the same time to take it down. Unless the incident takes more than 16 hours to sort then it is not justified. Cormac advised that following the trial they have gone back to see can anything else be done.

5. Update by An Garda Síochána

Cllr. John Crowe introduced and welcomed Chief Supt. Colm O'Sullivan. Chief Supt. Colm O'Sullivan addressed the members and advised that he has been appointed to the Clare/Tipperary Garda Division. He introduced Supt. John Galvin and Supt. John Ryan to the members.

Chief Supt. O'Sullivan provided the latest statistics to the JPC comparing figures from January to December 2021 against figures from January to December 2022. He also provided a snapshot of Community Engagement Initiatives.

Cllr. John Crowe thanked Chief Supt. O'Sullivan his presentation and invited comments from the members.

7. Questions from JPC Members

Question from Cllr. Alan O'Callaghan:-

Cllr. O'Callaghan thanked the Chief Supt. for his presentation and welcomed him to Clare and wished him all the best. He advised that Supt. John Galvin served the JPC well and wished him all the best in his retirement. He referred to the increase in thefts from shops and noted that footfall has dropped off as more people are buying online. He stated that theft may be on the increase as people are struggling. He enquired if the stats on assaults took place in houses or in public. He stated that there is more drinking at home and it would not be in a controlled environment. He enquired if the increase relates to the economy.

Chief Supt. Colm O'Sullivan referred to the increase of 29% on thefts from shops and stated that the figure broken down over 2 years is 1.5 thefts per week. It has increased but going back to 2021 the shops would have restricted access due to Covid. He stated that a lot of the figures in 2022 will bring them back to where they were in 2020. Figures presented are impacted by Covid. In relation to assaults the Chief Supt. advised that the figures have increased and there is a need to raise awareness and educate people. He stated that a lot of ads highlight what can go on behind closed doors and awareness is helping people come forward. The more awareness the greater opportunity there is for people to say that they are a victim.

Cllr. O'Callaghan referred to the amalgamation of the Clare/Tipperary division and stated that numbers have dwindled. He stated that 108 nationally have resigned or have left the role. He referred to the difficulty of covering the Clare/Tipperary area if they cannot get numbers. He enquired if the Courts System need to change as a lot of resources are tied up in courts and if they cannot get new recruits what is the alternative?

Chief Supt. Colm O'Sullivan advised that every organisation including An Garda Síochána has resource issues and problems with recruitment and retention. He stated that the target is 15,000 and this has not increased. The Garda Commissioner wants this increased by the end of the year as the population has grown. The figure is at 14,133 at present. He stated that there has always been resignations especially when members realise that the job is not for them. He advised that society today, especially younger people, are more transient in their jobs. He stated that when he joined he joined for life and it became a vocation. An Garda Síochána is affected by societal change. If a person goes into manufacturing, retail etc. there are more opportunities now than 30 years ago. People are highly educated now and more sought after and this is affecting the force. He advised that the plan is that the Government will authorise 1,000 extra resources before the end of the year, on top of the 800 from last year. The force did not reach the 800 quota last year. He stated that the recruitment campaign will commence in the coming weeks and he would encourage people to come and talk to An Garda Síochána if they are interested. The more engagement they have the more appealing An Garda

Síochána can be. It is a fantastic rewarding career. He referred to incidences of negative publicity and advised that the vast majority are committed but there are members that do feel it is a challenging career especially when attending car accidents with fatalities or scenes of fire. The next batch of recruits will not be out until July and there is 87 in that group. He advised that when something happens the Gardaí have to deal with it and sometimes it can last for anything from 10 minutes to several hours. He advised that teams are actively patrolling when they are not responding to service. He stated that they have community policing and proactive policing. A lot of crime is opportunistic (cars unlocked, phones left in shops). Through proactive patrolling the force is trying to prevent crime from happening.

In relation to the Courts System, Chief Supt. O'Sullivan advised that everybody is entitled to face their accuser and challenge the evidence and An Garda Síochána have no control over this. If the Courts ask the Guards to give evidence then they have to go and it takes time and is out of their control.

Question from Deputy Cathal Crowe:-

Deputy Cathal Crowe welcomed Chief Supt. Colm O'Sullivan and paid tribute to Supt. John Galvin and thanked him for the many great years of service. He referred to the recent spike in feud activities in Ennis, discharge of firearms, video footage, making threats etc. He enquired if there was a strategy to clamp down on these activities. He stated that it used to be a quiet town and hopes that these incidences are in isolation. He enquired if there are resources being channelled in to deal with it and if searches are being conducted in some of these houses and halting sites where weapons are being held.

Chief Supt. O'Sullivan advised that there are ongoing investigations into the feuds and for operational reasons this cannot be discussed. He provided reassurance that resources will be used from everywhere including the armed response units.

Deputy Crowe referred to the ongoing problems with bogus tradesmen who are targeting vulnerable Clare people and too often it is put down as a civil matter. He referred to the Garda Station in Lisdoonvarna where there is one Garda assigned who is playing a massive role in welcoming refugees. He recommended an increase in terms of resources in the town as they have a lot of paperwork to deal with from the refugees.

Chief Supt. O'Sullivan stated that unfortunately problems with bogus tradesmen have continued over the years. His advice is if something sounds too good, there is something wrong and if you need something done talk to a family member or a friend and get a recommendation. He advised not to entertain cold callers. He stated that this is something that is preventable, but people do come under pressure and the advice is if you do not know them do not entertain them.

Chief Supt. O'Sullivan advised that there is a Guard on duty in Lisdoonvarna and in addition there is a community policing unit in Ennistymon. There is also an inspector nominated to liaise with the Council on those who are less fortunate. There is a lot of work being done in the background to address their specific needs.

Deputy Crowe referred to the Garda vetting process in terms of housing applications in Clare County Council. The applications are sent off to the vetting office and the red flag is drugs. He stated that the people of the County want to know whether sex offences are notifiable and counted. This is for the safety of adults and children. He enquired if someone is charged are the Council notified.

Chief Supt. O'Sullivan stated that when a person is convicted in the Courts there is a process they go through and is followed by the letter of the law by An Garda Síochána and Local Authorities. Leonard advised that this is a housing function. They make the decision based on the Scheme of Letting Priorities. The Local Authority works very closely with An Garda Síochána and they have a very prescriptive procedure in relation to Garda vetting. He stated that the Local Authority are obliged to follow procedures and the advice from the Gardaí is considered carefully by the Housing Section. Deputy Crowe enquired if sex offences is included on the list and Leonard advised that the general terms state that all crime is included.

Question from Cllr. Paul Murphy:-

Cllr. Murphy wished Chief Supt. O'Sullivan the best in his role and will look forward to keeping the peace. He wished Supt. John Galvin the very best and stated that his service has been outstanding. He noted that public order offences is down which is welcome. He stated that the issue with resources has always been challenging and advised that Ennis has the bulk of the population and enquired if there is enough resources to police the County efficiently.

Question from Cllr. Joe Killeen:-

Cllr. Killeen referred to the future model of policing in Clare and enquired if the Ennistymon Garda area will lose an inspector. He stated that in the past there was a Superintendent in Kilrush.

Chief Supt. O'Sullivan stated that no decision has been made in relation to the inspector. He advised that the operating model is a model that has come from a number of reports. Restructuring of An Garda Síochána will be implemented and it is up and running in five divisions. Six regions are now down to 4 and the regions consists of a number of divisions. Divisions are going from 28 down to 19. An Assistant Commissioner is in charge of each division. He advised that there are a number of district changes to community engagement areas. There will be 6 Superintendents for the Clare/Tipperary division. The Superintendents' roles will be broken down into responsibility for protective services unit and serious crime, performance assurance, courts. The model will look at key performances and government strategies to see how the force is doing in relation to detection rates and dealing with disciplinary issues. The community engagement Superintendent will deal with general community engagement functions and will deal with all the stakeholders. The model will be professionalising the policing service.

Question from Cllr. Michael Begley:-

Cllr. Begley enquired if there was a soft approach in relation to drugs at the bottom end of the scale. He advised that some people will not go to the pub on their own because of pressure from individuals. He stated that it appears that everyone knows someone that is trading or dabbling in the drug scene. He advised that there is emphasis on the high end but there needs to be more emphasis at the bottom end or a programme directly aimed at it and this should commence in Primary Schools. He stated that nobody wants to intervene as they do not feel safe to do so.

Chief Supt. O'Sullivan stated that there is no soft approach taken by An Garda Síochána to high level or bottom of the scale. Under 18's caught in possession will be admitted to the Juvenile Liaison Scheme. There will be no prosecution if they are accepted in the scheme but if they are unsuitable and have not engaged with the service then they could be prosecuted. From an operational point of view the Gardaí follow up every report and establish evidence. He stated that there seems to be a significant change worldwide in relation to drug use. Certain states have legalised drugs. An Garda Síochána will prosecute those in possession and he encourages the public to give information to the Gardaí. If the Gardaí are not aware they will not be in a position to deal with it. Very often when information is received by the Gardaí it is too late. If somebody sees someone selling or using they need to inform the Gardaí straight away.

Question from Dermot Hayes:-

Dermot thanked the Chief Supt. for his presentation and advised that he is a representative on the Clare Leader Forum. He stated that the JPC used to get a break down of towns in the statistics. He stated that the issue of e-scooters has been brought to his attention and people are very nervous of them. He enquired what authority the Gardaí have for people parking on footpaths on streets and what measures can be taken.

Chief Supt. O'Sullivan stated that there is new legislation proposed for e-scooters but they do not have the details yet. At the moment e-scooters are classed as mechanically propelled vehicles and as such require tax and insurance. Many e-scooters have been seized by the Gardaí for no tax/insurance. The new legislation might deem that they are not a mechanically propelled vehicle. In relation to parking the Chief Supt. stated that it is illegal under the Road Traffic Act to park on footpaths. The Gardaí can issue on the spot fines but it does not attract penalty points.

8. Draft Annual Work Plan 2022 – 2023

The Draft Annual Work Plan 2022-2023 was proposed by Cllr. Alan O'Callaghan, seconded by Cllr. Gabriel Keating and agreed.

9. Any other business:

Cllr. G. Keating welcomed the new Chief Supt. and stated that West Clare was well looked after by Supt. John Galvin and now by Supt. John Ryan. He wished John well in his retirement.

Chief Supt. O'Sullivan stated that it is a special day for John and he also paid tribute to the time John went into a burning building in Dublin which was collapsing and he rescued an individual. He was awarded a Scott medal and received two other commendations. On that day John risked his own life. He stated that he has given fantastic service to An Garda Síochána in Clare and everywhere else. He became a Detective Inspector in Kilrush and then came back to Ennis. He stated that what John has done for the communities words cannot describe. Chief Supt. took the opportunity to thank John for all his involvement with local communities, Cllrs. and An Garda Síochána. He stated that he is always happy, his resilience is fantastic and wished him and his family all the best.

Cllr. J. Crowe took the opportunity to welcome Chief Supt. Colm O'Sullivan to the first meeting and stated that he will look forward to working with him. On behalf of the JPC he wished John the very best in his retirement and stated that he is a very genuine, straight talking person and thanked him for all his work on the JPC. He also thanked the media present – Padraic and Josh and wished Josh well as it is his last JPC meeting before he moves to Limerick. He welcomed back Chief Supt. Sean Colleran who was an outstanding Chief Supt. during his time in Clare and thanked him on behalf of the JPC for all that he has done for the County.

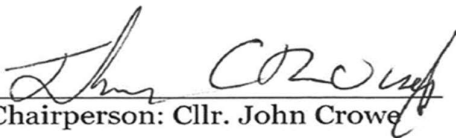
Leonard congratulated and welcomed Chief Supt. Colm O'Sullivan to Clare who has been here since October. He wished Supt. John Galvin a happy retirement and welcomed back Chief Supt. Sean Colleran and acknowledged the presence of Supt. John Ryan. On behalf of Clare County Council he stated that they are looking forward to working with Chief Supt. O'Sullivan. He advised that there is a strong partnership with An Garda Síochána and Clare County Council and they will work together in emergency times and assured the Chief Supt. of the Council's full support. He stated that Chief Supt. Sean Colleran led the recent centenary celebrations and it was a mark of his character and how well regarded he is in the community. It was a significant event and gave people an insight into his character. He passed on the apologies of Pat Dowling who was unable to attend today. Leonard wished Supt. John Galvin a most enjoyable and fruitful retirement. He stated that he worked on various schemes with him e.g. Rapid Programme and worked with him in various different roles and above all he acknowledged John's contribution and service to An Garda Síochána. He stated that he emersed himself in the community and in the field of sport and wished him every success. He acknowledged the sacrifice that families make to ensure that members of the force can make a huge contribution to the County.

Chief Supt. Sean Colleran acknowledged the support he received over the last few years and thanked all present for their eloquent words. He referred to the great relationship with the stakeholders and principal responders. He stated that it was a privilege to work in Clare and he enjoyed it. Work is built on these relationships and it is a common theme. He took the opportunity to thank John and stated that everyone is influenced by people. When John was an Inspector in Galway, he was a Sergeant out in the trenches. John had been Divisional Clerk in Ennis and asked Sean would he consider doing this job. Sean advised that he took it on and was lucky to get the job and stated that he is where he is today only because of John's

influence. John made his job easier. He stated that John is an absolute outstanding person and brought calm to every occasion and Clare was very well served by him.

Supt. John Galvin addressed the members and thanked everyone for their support. He stated that he arrived in the County 27 years ago after transferring from Dublin. He worked in Clare during his full career except for 3 1/2 years. He stated that it was a privilege to work and live in the County. He referred to the great welcome and support that he received. He stated that he met the finest people and it was a privilege to work with the representatives on the JPC. He stated that he was paid to do something he loved and loved to be part of it and is very proud. He stated that he is not going anywhere and not going to stay idle. He will enjoy life. He thanked all those present who made his life so pleasurable.

With no other business Cllr. Crowe drew the meeting to a close.


Chairperson: Cllr. John Crowe

Date: 9th May 2023