

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Minutes of the County Galway Joint Policing Committee Meeting held on Monday 14th November 2022 in the Claregalway Hotel (Annual Public Meeting)

I LÁTHAIR:

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

An Garda Síochána: Chief Superintendent Gerard Roche
Supt. Paudie O'Shea
Supt. Damien Flanagan
Insp. Conor Madden
Insp. Georgina Lohan
Insp. Senan Wall
Insp. Adrian Queeney
Insp. Brendan Moore
HEO Olivia Maher, Senior Analyst
Sgt. Mick Walsh
Sgt. Sinead Cunniffe

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

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

Other Officials: Ms. Noreen Moughty, Corporate Services

Oireachtas Members Senator Ollie Crowe

The meeting was also attended by members of the public, as it was our Annual Public Meeting.

Item No. 1 – Introduction and welcome by the Cathaoirleach of the Committee, Cllr. Jim Cuddy

Cathaoirleach Jim Cuddy welcomed everyone to the JPC's Annual Public Meeting - the first public meeting since 2019 due to the pandemic, Covid-19.

Cathaoirleach Cuddy wished the outgoing Chief Superintendent, Thomas Curley, the very best in his retirement and thanked him for all that he has done in Galway.

He also welcomed the new incoming Chief Superintendent, Gerard Roche, and wished him every success in his new role in Galway in the future.

Item No. 2 – JPC Overview & Protocol for the Conduct of the meeting

The Meeting Administrator, Úna Ní Eidhin, outlined the Conduct Protocol for the Public meeting, along with general housekeeping guidance and details in relation to the emergency exits.

Item No. 3 – Adoption of Minutes of the JPC Meeting held on the 12th September 2022

On the proposal of Cllr. Michel Moegie Maher and seconded by Cllr. Andrew Reddington, it was agreed that the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 12th September 2022 be adopted.

Matters arising:

Cllr Reddington raised the ongoing issues with the use of cocaine and welcomed Emmet Major, Western Region Drugs Force Liaison worker with GRETB, who is assisting with the Planet Youth Model which will be rolled out.

Chief Superintendent Roche thanked Cathaoirleach Cuddy for the welcome and Chief Superintendent Roche advised of his past roles in various parts of the country and that he was happy to be back in Galway again where he started in 1996 and established the first Drugs Unit in 1999. The Chief Superintendent outlined that he intended in particular to focus on tackling organised crime, drug dealing and that he was also looking forward to working with the community and meeting with the various task teams. He wished his predecessor, Chief Superintendent Thomas Curley, all the best on this retirement and thanked him for his work during his tenure in Galway.

He also noted, as per the minutes of the last meeting, that he hopes to increase the Gardaí complement in An Cheathrú Rua and also in Uachtar Ard.

Item no. 4: Report from an Garda Síochána

Crime statistics in the Garda Report were read out by Olivia Maher, Senior Data Analyst (circulated to all members of the committee prior to the meeting).

Chief Superintendent Roche stated that the theme of the meeting would be road safety, especially in the lead up to Christmas.

The Chief Superintendent also referred to new legislation that is due to come into place in relation to opening hours of nightclubs and that therefore we may see change in terms of public order.

He stated that drug issues are still a big concern and referred to large organized groups.

Questions from the Floor - Councillors and members of the public

Cllr. Hoade raised a query in relation to mandatory alcohol testing and mandatory drug testing.

Chief Superintendent Roche confirmed that Mandatory Intoxicant Testing (MIT) is ongoing throughout the County. He also stated that they are due to get a newer test unit which will have results in minutes. Chief Superintendent Roche also referred to ongoing issues with burglaries and the need to get the message out about safety. He stated that Galway is fortunate to have Sergeant Michael Walsh, Crime Prevention Officer, and thanked him for all the information he provides, via local press, radio and social media. He also advised to be vigilant and to always ring the Gardaí to report anything.

A member of the public enquired about the correct telephone numbers for Garda stations. The Chief Superintendent stated that there are over 60 personnel man the Control room and that it covers the whole region. Calls will be diverted to the regional area and the nearest patrol will respond to the call/emergency. He also stated that they could link with Community groups and issue local numbers.

Senator Ollie Crowe complimented Sergeant Michael Walsh for all his work and especially the new initiative in relation to property marking.

Cathaoirleach Cuddy spoke of the ongoing burglaries and the proximity to the motorway, suggesting that there is a requirement for more Gardaí.

Cllr. Reddington concurred with Cathaoirleach Cuddy in relation to sporadic burglaries in his area. He also wished to thank local Gardaí in his area for their work on the ground.

Cllr. Shelly Herterich Quinn welcomed the comments in relation to Community Policing and asked what the Chief Superintendent's plan was for Athenry, as it is down in numbers. She stated that there is often no Gardaí available for signing of passports and suggested that alternative arrangements for facilitating same be considered.

Cllr. Liam Carroll, spoke of the lifesaver offences, phone /seatbelts /speeding. He stated that we need to get the message out to all and appealed for everyone when they are out and about, even during the day, to wear a high visibility jacket and to also use a torch when dark. He confirmed that high visibility jackets are readily available from Roads Section in Galway County Council. Cllr. Carroll also raised concerns that he has received from constituents in relation to bogus tradesmen, who seem to prey on the elderly in particular. He commented that there is little to no resource available to the Gardaí but that the issue needs to be tackled and that people can check suspicious bogus trades people out themselves if in doubt.

Cllr. Peter Roche complimented Gardaí and thanked them for their excellent work. He also noted that Tuam is well served and that it is good to see that the theft of dogs has stopped. However, he stated that there is a problem with small groups who are trespassing on private land illegally hunting with lurcher dogs, as this is the season for it and they are out late at night, frightening at times, people who live alone in rural areas. He expressed concern that people may take the law into their own hands.

Inspector Adrian Queeney advised that the IFA are very pro-active in this area and are aware of lurching/hunting, particularly after hares, which are a protected species. He cautioned that members of the public should not try to take matters into their own hands or confront these groups and that any incidents or suspected activity should be reported to local Gardaí at all times for them to deal with it. It was confirmed that Sergeant Michael Walsh is ready to release an article to the press in relation to this.

Cllr. James Charity queried why there seemed to be a 120% increase in checkpoints, with less than 14% detections and 26% increase in property crime based on the statistics in the report. He commented would it not be more beneficial to focus on crimes, burglaries and so on. He also went on to state that the Community Alert scheme in Eanach Dhúin (Annaghdown) have struggled to get communication from Gardaí since 2021. Cllr. Charity also queried if there was any update in relation to Leacht Seoirse (Loughgeorge) Station? He commented that various local stations are now closed.

Cllr. PJ Murphy agreed with Cllr. Charity in relation to the closure of local stations, stating that there was a time when all stations had the local Gardaí and their families, living there as part of the local community. He also expressed substantial concerns in relation to the drug situation.

In reply to Cllr. Charity's comments, Chief Superintendent Roche defended the increase in checkpoints, as he stated you cannot measure prevention. Checkpoints are about high visibility, with the aim of preventing crime. In relation to local stations, he stated that many of these are now below standard and that requirements investment that is managed by the OPW.

Cllr. Eileen Mannion referred to the new Policing model and commented that there is no senior Gardaí in Conamara, which geographically is a substantial widespread area.

Insp. Senan Wall stated that they would be happy to meet with the Conamara Councillors to discuss the new model further if required. Chief Superintendent Roche reminded that the model is set out by the Garda Commissioner Drew Harris. He stated that Head Quarters is in Oranmore but that he will aim to put more personnel in Conamara. He noted that South Conamara needs fluent Irish speakers.

Vincent Lyons of the Public Participation Network (PPN) wished to convey one message to the meeting in relation to bicycles and e-scooters, that they must be visible at all times. He stated that high-visibility clothing should be law. He confirmed that the PPN are more than happy to publicize any Garda initiatives as required.

Cllr. Declan Geraghty also expressed major concerns in relation to Garda cover in his constituency, with the lack of Gardaí in areas being the biggest issue, and stated that people are working together as much as possible, alongside the Gardaí.

An Comh. Ó Cualáin wished to acknowledge Superintendent Paudie O'Shea for sorting the allocation of Gardaí in An Cheathrú Rua station. However, he went on to comment that Conamara is the size of Carlow or Louth and queried where the resources are coming from. He stated that Gardaí feel isolated in rural areas and at one stage that there were only 2 Gardaí in the area, with morale at an all-time low.

A representative of Annaghdown Community alert noted having issues in relation to receiving communication from Gardaí since Covid. He informed that the group had a Zoom meeting recently and that no Gardaí joined.

Cllr. Reddington confirmed that local Gardaí in his constituency have engaged with their local Community Alert Group and that there was due to be a meeting on the 30th November 2022. Cathaoirleach Cuddy stated that he is aware that that the number of Gardaí in stations has dropped, and that the community are genuinely worried and feeling like there is less policing than there was in the past. He stated that even though Garda numbers are going up, the increased amount of specialized units that need to be manned, haven't been taken into account, hence the loss of feet on the ground.

An Comh. Padraic Mac an Iomaire, who is also a local undertaker, commented that he was recently called out to deal with a sudden death. He noted that two Gardaí attended and that they had to wait over two hours for a Sergeant to attend, due to the fact that a squad car was unavailable until that time. He stated that he feels that the Garda Commissioner may not realise the extremely vast area that is required to be covered in Conamara.

Item no. 5: Reports for Subcommittees

A report from the Waste Management and Enforcement Subcommittee was presented by Cllr. Maher – Illegal Dumping and Littering

He confirmed that progress was being made, with 7 illegal waste collectors identified and fined. He also outlined awareness campaigns in relation to unauthorized vehicle collectors and commented that the large signs at roadsides were a great way of getting people's attention.

In relation to bulky goods collection, he confirmed that 75 tonnes was collected.

Drinking water stations were also provided at bathing areas, to reduce the number of plastic bottles being used.

718 complaints were received so far this year in relation to illegal dumping – 92% were compliant, the remainder received a fine. 990 inspections were also carried out so far this year by Community Wardens and Waste Enforcement Officers.

Cllr. Maher thanked Ann Dolan and all the Enforcement Staff for their work throughout the year.

When referring to the use of CCTV to detect and prevent illegal dumping, he noted that this will take another number of months, that it cannot be enforced and that footage cannot be used as of yet.

He finished off by stating that everyone was working together – the Council, Groups, Gardaí and that they are seeing results from this.

The Education and Awareness Subcommittee report was presented by Cllr. Gerry King.

Cllr. King emphasized the ongoing issue in relation to cocaine and that they are aiming to put an information programme together to target all ages.

He referred to road safety and the 'Arrive Alive' campaign which advises of 'No texting and Driving' and the 'Slow Down' campaign.

When mentioning Cyber Fraud Crime, he noted that the setting up of a cyber fraud unit in Galway in the last year is a huge step forward in tackling this issue, which is now unfortunately a common issue.

To date in 2022, they have examined and promoted the setting up of an age friendly committee for the County, in conjunction with the PPN and he also confirmed that Anti-Bullying and Internet Safety Talks have been rolled out by Gardaí in conjunction with the schools, amongst many other initiatives, as detailed in previous meetings.

The importance of the use of high visibility clothing was also stressed in this report. Reference was made to the 'Make Way Day' and Cllr. King commented that he noticed in his own area, the many obstacles of all types that are left in the way of disabled persons.

Item no. 6: A.O.B

A Presentation was given to the committee and the public in attendance, by Inspector Conor Madden regarding a Christmas Road Safety Campaign from the 25th November 2022 to 3rd January 2023.

A second Presentation was given by Inspector Georgina Lohan in relation to the new Policing Operating model for the County of Galway.

Cathaoirleach Cuddy thanked everyone for attending and wished all a Safe and Happy Christmas.

The next meeting will be held on the 30th January 2023.

Chríochnaigh an cruinniú ansin.