

## COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

### Minutes of the County Galway Joint Policing Committee Meeting held on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2023 in the Meadow Court Hotel, Loughrea (Annual Public Meeting)

#### I LÁTHAIR:

**Council Members:** Cllr. Jim Cuddy (Cathaoirleach)  
Cllr. Michael Moegie Maher  
Cllr. Mary Hoade  
Cllr. Andrew Reddington  
Cllr. Declan Geraghty  
Cllr. Peter Roche  
Cllr. James Charity  
Cllr. Shelly Herterich Quinn  
Cllr. Gerry King  
Cllr. James Charity  
Comh. Pádraig Mac An Iomaire

**An Garda Síochána:** Chief Supt. Gerard Roche  
Supt. Paudie O'Shea  
Supt. Damien Flanagan  
Supt. Finbarr Philpott  
D/Supt. Shane Cummins  
Insp. Conor Madden  
Insp. Declan Rock  
Insp. Brian Boland  
Insp. Adrian Queeny  
HEO Olivia Maher  
Sgt. Michael Walsh

**Community Reps:** Mr. Aodán Mac Donncha  
Mr. Pat Flanagan  
Mr. Gerard Costello  
Mr. Gerard Larkin

**Oireachtas Members:** Deputy Seán Canney

**Oifigigh:** Mr. Alan Farrell, A/ Director of Services  
Ms. Úna Ní Eidhin, Meetings Administrator

**Other Officials:** Ms. Elizabeth Hoffman, Corporate Services

**Apologies** Deputy Catherine Connolly, Oireachtas  
Ms. Aileen Heverin, Older Persons Council

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**

Cllr. Jim Cuddy, Cathaoirleach of the JPC, opened the meeting and welcomed Chief Superintendent Gerard Roche, members from An Garda Síochána, Oireachtas member Mr. Seán Canney, TD, Galway County Council Elected Members, the Voluntary & Community representatives, Galway County Council officials, the media and the members of the public.

**Item No. 2 – Overview and Protocol for Conduct of Meeting**

Cllr. Jim Cuddy, Cathaoirleach of the JPC, gave a brief overview of the purpose of the Joint Policing Committee.

The Meeting Administrator, Ms. Úna Ní Eidhin outlined the Protocol for the meeting and the manner in which it would be conducted which included that no individual or family names may be mentioned during the meeting and that matters relating to a specific criminal investigation or prosecution cannot be considered. She also outlined the general housekeeping guidance and details in relation to the emergency exits.

**Item No. 3 – Adoption of Minutes of the JPC Meeting held on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

On the proposal of Cllr. Michel Moegie Maher and seconded by Cllr. Mary Hoade, it was agreed that the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2023 be adopted.

**Matters arising:**

Cathaoirleach Jim Cuddy raised the issue of extending the entry age for An Garda Síochána to 50 years of age. He stated that it was unworkable and pointless if retirement age was 60 and that it would be more appropriate to increase the entry level pay rate to attract younger members who might have families to support.

**Item no. 4 –Report from an Garda Síochána**

Crime statistics based on the JPCs Annual Work Plan were read out by Olivia Maher, Senior Data Analyst (circulated to all members of the committee prior to the meeting). She explained that the Work Plan has 4 work streams that directs the work and focus for the year - these are Anti-Social Behaviour and Steet Crime, Misuse of Drugs and related Crime, Cyber Fraud Crime and Education and Awareness Programme for Schools.

Superintendents Paudie O'Shea, Finbar Philpott, Damien Flanagan and D/Supt. Shane Cummins each introduced themselves and gave a brief outline of the issues facing their staff in each of their working areas.

Chief Supt. Roche stated that by far the biggest issue facing the County is the rise in the misuse of Drugs and drug related crime, with an increase of nearly 95% in incidents of simple possession of drugs in 12 months and an increase of 141% in possession of drugs for sale or

supply in the same period. He continued that drug driving and drink driving are now nearly 50/50 but highlighted the positive fact that over 200 drug dealers were arrested and brought before a Court so far this year.

Chief Supt. Roche also addressed another serious issue in the County, namely Road traffic accidents and fatalities, with over 156,000 traffic incidents a year. He stated that so far this year, there have been 14 deaths in the County and City. Chief Supt. Roche assured all present that road safety is a big priority, with 630 Gardaí in the division currently focusing on Road safety, with a further 100 support staff. He continued that a Collision Prevention Programme is in progress, that will work in conjunction with the local area engineers and that the Christmas Program will start the first week in December to target drink driving, failure to wear seatbelts and using mobile phones while driving.

#### **Item No. 5 – Questions from the Floor - Councillors and members of the public**

Deputy Seán Canney, TD remarked that on several occasions when someone tried to ring Athenry Garda Station, Clifden Station answered. He also questioned the benefit and cost of the Community Text Alert system. Mr. Canney stated that in the past 4 years, he has only received 7 text messages.

In response to Deputy Canney, Supt. Paudie O'Shea explained that if the staff who are on duty in an area are out responding to calls and cannot answer, then the calls will be redirected to Clifden, to ensure that no calls go unanswered. He informed that if the call had come in prior to 7pm, then it would have been answered by the Oranmore Station. He continued that all 999 calls go through CAD or Computer Aided Dispatch to direct accordingly. In relation to the Community Text Alert System, Supt. O'Shea stated that the Gardaí must be able to stand over each text that is issued. He continued that some groups use a WhatsApp system to spread information these days, but that information is not always accurate and can be incredibly dangerous. On the same issue Sgt. Michael Walsh remarked that some of the Community Alert signposts have the wrong contact number on them. He also agreed with what Supt. O'Shea stated in relation to the importance of accurate information only being issued by text message.

Cllr. Andrew Reddington stated that resources are simply not available for Community Alert Groups. On a separate note, he commended the magnificent job that the Gardaí have done in the fight against drugs in the County. He also reminded that each individual, as well as An Garda Síochána, has a responsibility in relation to drug prevention.

Cllr. Shane Curley commented that he believes educating children at a much younger age in relation to drug issues, is key, as this is when they are more susceptible to falling into drug dependency.

He also queried in relation to the crime statistics, if it was known how many of the 200 prosecuted for drug related crimes, were handed down a jail sentence. Ms. Maher informed

that the figure was not known and reminded that it was the job of the Gardaí to give evidence for the prosecution only.

Cllr. Shelly Herterich Quinn queried if the staff, who were diverted to deal with the surge in cybercrime during the Pandemic, have since been rediverted back to other areas? In response to this query, D/Supt. Shane Cummins stated that Cyber Crime is still a major issue in society. Factors such as increased use of the internet, remote working and automation have all contributed to a steady growth in cybercrime. Attacks affect everyone from essential services, such as the HSE, to businesses and private individuals. Each year, cybercrime causes significant financial losses, therefore it remains a high priority for An Garda Síochána.

Deputy Anne Rabbitte, TD expressed her thanks to An Garda Síochána for their help and support after an incident that affected her earlier in the year. She queried if a drugs dog had been acquired and whether this dog had been brought out to do drug spot checks in schools yet?

Chief Supt. Roche was able to confirm that a dog named Chilli had joined the force but was still in training and would therefore not be a part of active duty for quite a while yet.

Cllr. James Charity referred to Garda Commissioner Drew Harris' visit to the Galway JPC last year, at which he asked the Garda Commissioner to allocate more resources to rural Garda stations in Galway. Cllr. Charity queried how many, if any, has since be allocated to Galway County? Chief Supt. Roche replied that currently 55 people are on the transfer list to join his division in County Galway and that there are approximately 30 positions unfilled. He stated he believes HR are doing their best to send people to Galway, however with a recruitment crisis, that it is very difficult. He also pointed out that crime is much more hidden these days, with financial frauds/crime being a huge issue. This is in comparison to less than a decade ago when burglary was up to 100 incidents a month, which required the Gardaí to be more visible on the roads and streets.

Chairman of Galway County Public Participation Network Mr. Vincent Lyons raised the lack of legislation in relation to e-scooters and called it a disgrace that there are currently no laws surrounding the wearing of hi-vis jackets and helmets etc. for pedestrians, cyclists and those on e-scooters. Chief Supt. Roche agreed with Mr. Lyons and assured him that new legislation was in process and urged all attendees and the public to wear hi-vis jackets and to light up while on our roads, during the long winter nights and to encourage others to do the same.

Cllr. Declan Geraghty urged for more action to combat rural crime and stated that he believes that Community Alert must be reactivated in rural areas and that closer corporation with An Garda Síochána is vital.

Cllr. Peter Roche congratulated the Gardaí on their recent success in drug detection and seizures, however he also stated that those involved in drugs are becoming more sophisticated and almost casual in where and how they conceal their contraband and that it is a task too great for just Chilli the drugs dog. Cllr. Roche continued by addressing the spate of burglaries that areas like Monivea, Colemanstown and Ballygar have suffered in recent weeks. He stated that they have all been carried out in a similar fashion, where the burglars entered through the back door and then exited quickly through the front. He queried if any arrests had been made. Detective Superintendent Shane Cummins replied that Gardaí had identified a trend in the last two to three weeks of break-ins from Monivea to Mountbellew, which occurred Wednesday to Saturday and usually between 3pm and 9pm. He explained that they believe that they are a travelling gang with possible local input to identify properties. He continued that An Garda Síochána have a dedicated plan in place which involves a high visibility presence. He explained that the Gardaí are running an extensive operation involving units from Galway, Mayo and Roscommon on overtime to mount widespread patrols, targeting criminals travelling to the area but as yet, have not made any arrests. He urged people to leave lights on in their homes when they are away, especially coming up to Christmas.

A member of the public, who referred to herself as a concerned mother of 3 daughters, expressed her dismay at the rampant use of cocaine in her local area. She stated that Ireland is not successful in its fight against drugs, as we are an Island nation and should have better control. She continued that an extreme campaign was needed and that parents seem to be oblivious to what their children are involved in. She explained that her 3 children can easily spot a drugs transaction taking place and are well aware of who to contact to buy drugs and have themselves been offered drugs. She continued that the burglaries and robberies are fuelling the drugs issues and that a strong campaign was urgently needed. The same member of the public also raised the issue of district boundaries and explained that if something happened in the Clostown area (where the Meadow Court Hotel is situated), that it would be the Gardaí in Gort who would be sent to respond, instead of members from the Loughrea station which is closer.

In response to the matters raised, Chief Supt. Roche stated that he agreed with what was said in relation to drug use and that it is down to personal choice at the end of the day. As parents, that we can only do our best to raise our children. He continued that he was against legalising drugs and currently, rehabilitation services are not there for people who are struggling. In relation to the query on district boundaries, the Chief Supt clarified to the member of the public that Clostown was in fact in the Gort area and that if a call went into the call centre that it is the staff nearest to the call that are sent to respond, regardless of what area they belong to.

Cllr. Pdraig Mac An Iomaire addressed the meeting in relation to the issue of drugs, stating that if there are people who know what is going on and who are dealing drugs, then that they

must take responsibility and come forward. On the separate issue of hi-vis jackets, he stated that hi-vis jackets and reflective lights should be more readily available and perhaps distributed from all shops. Chief Supt. Roche informed all that drug operations are intelligence led and that even so called “soft information” is taken seriously and can lead to arrests. He urged anyone with information to contact their local station. He also agreed that hi-vis jackets should be made more readily available. Director of Services Alan Farrell confirmed that hi-vis jackets are available free of charge from Áras an Chontae and that we could look into distributing them to the local area offices as well.

Cllr. Gerry King referred to the issue of drugs again and stated that he believes a lot of the drugs are being brought ashore in remote parts of Connemara. In order to combat this, he believes it is vital for the Gardaí to work with the local communities. He continued that the Community Engagement Week was highly popular as it gave people the opportunity to meet Gardaí face to face.

Mr. Gerard Costello, Community Alert Development Officer for Muintir na Tíre organisation gave a brief recap on the recent events that were held, to gather as many local support agencies. This was to showcase how everyone can work together to build stronger communities. He stated that the previously mentioned text alert system was only a small part of what Community Alert is about and that Text Alert Groups registered with An Garda Síochána can apply directly to Muintir na Tíre for a rebate of up to €350 on their yearly costs.

Cllr. Michael Moegie Maher highlighted that over €100,000 is currently being spent to combat illegal dumping and that CCTV legislation is now vital to tackle this growing problem, which will hopefully be in place by the new year. He also addressed the poor turn out of the public to the meeting, stating that it was very well advertised across all media platforms, with a campaign being run on local radios and newspapers, as well as social media.

Another member of the public addressed the meeting and informed that he had established a local Residents Association and Community Alert/Neighbourhood Watch Group in his local area, which had led to a much lower crime rate, as they were very active and that this is the way forward for all areas.

Sgt. Michael Walsh agreed and stated that they are hoping for a reinvigorating of Community Alert in the coming months, including the development and launch of an app.

Cathaoirleach Cuddy thanked everyone for attending and drew the meeting to a close.

Cathaoirleach Cuddy concluded the meeting.  
Chríochnaigh Cathaoirleach Cuddy an cruinniú ansin.

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