

## COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

### Minutes of the County Galway Joint Policing Committee Meeting held on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2023 in Áras an Chontae

#### I LÁTHAIR:

**Council Members:** Cllr. Jim Cuddy (Cathaoirleach)  
Cllr. Mary Hoade  
Cllr. Liam Carroll  
Cllr. Gerry King  
Cllr. James Charity  
Cllr. Michael Moegie Maher  
Cllr. Andrew Reddington  
Cllr. Declan Geraghty  
Cllr. Colm Keaveney  
Cllr. Peter Roche

**An Garda Síochána:** Chief Superintendent Gerard Roche  
Supt. Paudie O'Shea  
Supt. Damien Flanagan  
Insp. Conor Madden  
Insp. Georgina Lohan  
Insp. Declan Rock  
HEO John Conway, Senior Analyst  
Sgt. Michael Walsh  
Sgt. Sinead Heaney  
EO. Joanne Dillon

**Community Reps:** Mr. Aodán Mac Donncha  
Mr. Gerard Costello  
Mr. Gerard Larkin  
Ms. Aileen Heverin

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

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

**Apologies** Cllr. Joe Byrne  
Cllr. Shelly Herterich-Quinn  
An Comh. Pdraig Mac an Iomaire  
Mr. Martin Ward

## **Item No. 1 – Adoption of Minutes of the Galway County JPC Meeting held on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

On the proposal of Cllr. Liam Carroll and seconded by Cllr. Gerry King, it was agreed that the Minutes of the County Galway JPC Meeting held on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023 in the Council Chamber, be adopted.

**Matters arising:** Cllr. Gerry King queried if there was any update in relation to legislation regarding e-scooters. Chief Superintendent Gerard Roche replied stating that the relevant legislation is not yet finalised and a timeline for when it will be completed has not been released.

Cathaoirleach Jim Cuddy welcomed Cllr. Declan Geraghty to his first meeting of County Galway JPC, following his appointment to the committee at the March 2023 Plenary Meeting of the full council, as a result of the resignation of An Comh. Dáithí Ó Cualáin from this committee. Cathaoirleach Cuddy also complimented Comh. Ó Cualáin and his valuable input during his time on the committee.

### **Item no. 2: Report from an Garda Síochána**

Chief Supt. Gerard Roche addressed the meeting. He referred to fact that there have been 7 suicides to date since the beginning of the year and that mental health is a big issue in the county.

He also raised the issue of fatal traffic accidents, with 10 fatalities so far this year but added that collisions on our roads usually reduce with the start of daylight-saving hours. He stated that the accidents that had occurred so far this year, were largely due to mistakes that could not have been prevented with better policing.

Chief Supt. Roche referred to the ongoing battle in relation to the misuse of drugs and drugs related crime in the county and informed that 2 Sergeants and a number of Gardaí were being assigned to a new task force, including Ballinasloe, Tuam and Oughterard, with 2 Gardaí in each area.

He also referred to the use of a new call transfer system, based in HQ, over the past number of weeks and the fact that they are the first in the region to use it.

Senior Analyst HEO John Conway presented the Garda Statistics Report (circulated to the full committee prior to the meeting).

### **Questions/Observations from the Committee**

Cllr. Peter Roche expressed surprise at the relatively low number of incidents that were reported as being drug related. He stated that every town and village seem to be struggling with drugs these days and that there has been a noticeable increase in anti-social behavior in

the community. He also stated that access to drugs is easy and cheap and that it is impossible for the Gardaí to keep on top of the fight against drugs.

Cllr. Liam Carroll expressed skepticism that the staff allocated to the new task force is sufficient. He stated his belief that young people are taking cocaine to enable them to drink more and that drink and drugs consumed together are a lethal cocktail and a very worrying trend. He also commented that he believes it is young professionals that are fueling the current rise in drug taking.

In response to Cllr. Carroll's comment, Chief Supt. Roche stated that a lot of resources were being made available with more than 4 times the staff being dedicated to the anti-drug strategy this year. He also commented that there is no one particular area that is more affected by drugs and that it is at every level of society. He stated that the job of the Gardaí is to disrupt the sale and supply and to prosecute those that are selling and supplying.

Cllr. Mary Hoade welcomed the extra resources and added that she believes education and linking with schools are key, in creating awareness of the issues.

Cllr. Reddington stated that he believes the decline in the mental health of young people and the increase of drug taking could also be linked to increased mobile phone and computer screen time. He advised parents to keep an eye on their children's surfing of sites such as TikTok and snapchat and that digital safety was paramount. He said that there is a lot of pressure on young people to use drugs on those sites. He also stated that a recent report from the United Nations Office on Drugs has listed Ireland as current joint-fourth highest consumers of cocaine globally.

Deputy Catherine Connolly TD stated that she has spoken with drug addiction councilors and that they have confirmed that the HSE services for drug users and addicts is inadequate to deal with the scale of the problem. She wondered what liaison did the Gardaí do with the HSE in relation to the services for drug users. She also questioned why the Merlin Park addiction treatment center was not rebuilt with the insurance money, after it burnt down in 2012.

Cathaoirleach Jim Cuddy added that nothing has happened to bring back the Treatment Centre in the last decade and called for it to be re-opened as soon as possible.

Chief Supt. Roche responded that the inadequacies of the availability of services for drug users is a matter for the HSE, as is the current status of the Merlin Park treatment center. Provision of medical and mental help for drug addiction is a matter for the HSE. He added that a lot more resources are needed and that there is very little point in prosecuting the users, as they need addiction help, not incarceration. He added that the Gardaí are first responders and that 90% of the callouts are alcohol or drug induced and are not mental health issues and that less than 10% go to a psychiatric unit. He informed the committee

that there is currently a project underway in Limerick, where two Garda Units are accompanied by a qualified physiologist on drugs related call outs.

Cllr. Declan Geraghty commented that the state of people's mental health was not a Garda role and that the HSE simply is not providing enough care in the hospitals.

On a separate matter, Deputy Connolly TD raised concerns about the availability of Gardaí, who are proficient in the Irish language, to work in Gaeltacht areas.

Chief Supt. Roche explained that to be deemed fluent in the Irish language, Gardaí must have a certain level of Irish or at least 70% fluency, as only fluent Irish speakers can serve in Gaeltacht areas. He also explained that the Gardaí that have that required level cannot be local to where there are available positions.

Deputy Connolly asked for further details on the domestic abuse cases and Chief Supt. Roche explained that the Gardaí have responded to 287 call outs since the start of the year. Many of these call outs were subsequently classified as "no offence identified". The reasons for these were that the calls were bogus calls, there was no response when Gardaí attended the location or that the callers refused to engage with the attending Gardaí. He reassured the committee that all calls are monitored and announced that a new initiative was being rolled out where the Gardaí were looking at regular callers who do not go ahead with making an official complaint following the initial contact. These callers will then be contacted by plain clothed Gardaí, who could meet the caller off site. Chief Supt. Roche explained that the goal was for interaction, not prosecution.

HEO John Conway added that nothing falls through the cracks and that every call is subject to a call back. He also stated that the Domestic abuse figures given are for both city and county.

Cllr. Andrew Reddington queried if there were plans to install CCTV on the exits and entrances to the motor ways as a method of tackling the alarming increase in burglaries. He pointed out that criminals are driving off the motorways, breaking into premises and are back on the motorways within minutes.

Chief Supt. Roche responded that there are currently CCTV in operation at the tolls only and that there are no plans for CCTV to be installed on the motorways as this would be a huge undertaking and would need to be a government initiative.

Cllr. Declan Geraghty raised the issue that a lot more Gardaí are needed to tackle rural crime. He noted that when figures for rural areas and city are merged together, that it does not give a true reflection on rural crime. He commented that there was now only one Garda Car serving the north east of Galway that included Glenamaddy, Williamstown, Ballymoe,

Kilkerrin and Clonberne and that retired Gardaí are not being replaced. He believes that more Garda resources are needed and that community alert and people with local knowledge also needed to play a bigger role and that emphasis should be put on forming community alert areas. He called for the reinstatement of the Garda car and the replacement of the retired staff.

Chief Supt. Roche responded that the Garda car had unfortunately been written off in a car crash and would not be replaced in the near future. He agreed that the Gardaí cannot be everywhere all at once and that the community do need to be play a role, with the Gardaí just being a phone call away. He said that he was unaware of any problem with Garda personnel numbers in the North East region. He explained that the Gardaí operate a hub system, which means that one guard would never work on his or her own and that they use a 4 on duty 4 off duty system.

Cllr. Gerry King noted that speeding offences seem to be down but that mobile phone usage while driving has unfortunately increased again. He also commented that a Garda is due to retire in Cloch na Rón (Roundstone) and queried whether the replacement Garda would be full time? Chief Supt. Roche confirmed that the replacement Garda would be attached to Roundstone Station. In relation to the increase in figures, Chief Supt. Roche confirmed that figures are up because the number of inspections and stops have increased.

### **Item no. 3: Updates for Subcommittees**

#### **An update from the Waste Management and Enforcement Subcommittee was presented by Cllr. Michael Moegie Maher – Illegal Dumping and Littering**

Cllr. Maher stated that the legislation in relation to the use of CCTV to combat illegal dumping has yet to be finalized. He continued that the CCTV cameras could not be used and stated that the matter needs to be addressed urgently by the Government.

Community Rep. Mr. Gerard Larkin expressed his concern at the level of litter across rural Galway saying it was rampant, especially in rural areas with low density population. He stated that Community Wardens are doing a great job but that it is impossible to patrol every road and that they cannot manage it all. Therefore, that there is little chance of the perpetrators being caught. He believes that that a minimal custodial sentence needs to be introduced. He also stated that more wardens are required, however that he realizes that considerable funding would be required to combat the problem.

#### **The Education and Awareness Subcommittee update was presented by Cllr. Gerry King.**

The committee was given a brief update by Cllr. King and he informed that a full report would be presented at the next meeting of the committee in June.

### **Item no. 4: Consideration of hybrid option for future JPC meetings**

Cllr. Michael Maher proposed that all future JPC meetings should be held in person in the Chamber. This was seconded by Cllr. Mary Hoade.

It was agreed, however it was also noted that the hybrid should be allowed in exceptional circumstances only.

**Item no. 5: A.O.B.**

Garda Inspector Georgina Lohan presented a report on a soon to be launched service which will provide up-to-date information on community engagement with Gardaí right across the county. The service has been developed as part of the community policing engagement policy and it is hoped it will strengthen the connection between the Gardaí, local community representatives, business and schools. She explained that the aim is to achieve stronger relationships with the JPC, Neighbourhood Watch groups, Community Alert groups, youth campus and youth projects etc. This is hoped will lead to stronger engagement with these groups as the policing is then information led.

Garda Inspector Lohan continued with a detailed report on how the new service will work and that the Community Policing Co-Ordinator for the Galway Garda Division is Executive Officer Joanne Dillon. She stressed the point that this new initiative was for non-immediate, non-emergency issues.

Following a concern from Cllr. Peter Roche on whether it would be an assessable platform for the non-computer literate, the elderly or those with limited internet use, Chief Supt. Roche reassured the committee that it was not designed to replace the current methods of contacting the Gardaí but rather it would be part of a more widely based community service.

The committee were informed of a letter of resignation that was received from Deputy Noel Grealish, indicating that he wished to resign from the County Galway JPC committee.

Compliments were given to the Gardaí who assisted in the St. Patricks Day parade in Headford and Abbeyknockmoy.

Sgt Mick Walsh briefly informed the committee of a recruitment campaign that is underway by An Garda Síochána, noting that it was a good career and that he wishes to get a positive message out to the public.

The next meeting will be held on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2023.

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Chríochnaigh Cathaoirleach Cuddy an cruinniú ansin.