

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Minutes of the County Galway Joint Policing Committee Meeting held on Monday 30th January 2023 in Áras an Chontae

I LÁTHAIR:

- Council Members:** Cllr. Jim Cuddy (Cathaoirleach)
Cllr. Mary Hoade
Cllr. Liam Carroll
Cllr. Gerry King
An Comh. Pdraig Mac an Iomaire
Cllr. James Charity
Cllr. Michael Moegie Maher
Cllr. Shelley Herterich-Quinn
Cllr. Joe Byrne
Cllr. Karey McHugh Farag
- An Garda Síochána:** Chief Superintendent Gerard Roche
Supt. Paudie O'Shea
Supt. Damien Flanagan
D/Supt. Shane Cummins
Supt. Aidan Foley
Insp. Conor Madden
Insp. Des Byrne
HEO Olivia Maher, Senior Analyst
Sgt. Michael Walsh
Sgt. Sinead Cunniffe
Sgt. Sinead Heaney
- Community Reps:** Mr. Aodán Mac Donncha
Mr. Gerard Costello
Ms. Aileen Heverin
- Oifigigh:** Mr. Michael Owens, Director of Service
Ms. Úna Ní Eidhin, Meetings Administrator
- Other Officials:** Ms. Noreen Moughty, Corporate Services
- Apologies** Cllr. Andrew Reddington
An Comh. Dáithí Ó Cualáin
Cllr. Peter Roche
Gerard Larkin
Tom Madden
Deputy Catherine Connolly TD.

Item No. 1 – Adoption of Minutes of the Galway County JPC Annual Public Meeting held on the 14th November 2022

On the proposal of Cllr. Michel Moegie Maher and seconded by Cllr. Gerry King, it was agreed that the Minutes of the Annual Public Meeting held on the 14th November 2022 in the Claregalway Hotel, be adopted.

Matters arising: No matters arising.

Item no. 2: Report from an Garda Síochána

Chief Supt. Gerard Roche addressed the meeting. He referred to challenges that they face and mentioned the Summer of 2022 in particular, a time when society was opening up and recovering from a bad period in society due to the Pandemic. He went on to state the importance of Road Safety Initiatives and to make sure to light up and be seen, as it's a serious matter with loss of life. He reminded that the safety of people on the roads is paramount and that the Roads Policing Unit investigate all accidents, tying in with forensic investigation as well.

He referred to drink and drug driving, noting that there was a new swab system in place. He informed the committee that drug issues were a high priority and that he hopes to have more personnel focused on this area, particularly on the main dealers and the sale and supply distribution of drugs. There is a change in strategy, with an aim to highlight the importance of these issues and tie it in with organized crime.

He stated that these issues, in certain instances, fuel burglaries and travelling criminals and gangs, with those in question taking back roads, as there are cameras on the motorways. He highlighted that they need assistance from the public, that local knowledge is key and that they had met with the IFA to expand that network, so that they can call in what they see e.g. if anyone is trespassing, etc. The Muintir na Tíre Group is also available to assist.

When referring to Roads Policing and Safety, Chief Supt. Roche reminded the committee that everyone is responsible, not just An Garda Síochána.

Senior Analyst Olivia Maher presented the Garda Statistics Report (circulated to the full committee prior to the meeting).

Questions/Observations from the Committee

Cllr. Liam Carroll congratulated the Task Force (Divisional Drugs Units) in Ballinasloe for their recent work in particular. He also queried if An Garda Síochána have any interaction with the ESB in relation to a surge in the use of electricity? He stated that members of the Public would see lights on day and night and would potentially notice if they see anything that doesn't seem right. He asked that they remain vigilant and report anything they consider suspicious.

In relation to the drugs issues, Cllr. Carroll noted that he was glad to hear that the Chief Supt. has a plan to address them, as cocaine in particular is awash in the county. He also referred to the increase in the number of assaults causing harm, noting that it is very serious.

In response to Cllr. Carroll's query in relation to the Energy suppliers, Chief Supt. Roche stated that there might be surges in some instances, however that there are ways around this e.g. generators. He agreed that local knowledge is essential as locals might notice something. In relation to the drugs issue and assaults, the Chief Supt. noted that Cocaine culture is rife at the moment, which often results in a rise in assaults when people are under the influence of drugs.

Cllr. Shelly Herterich Quinn referred to the importance of social media, in that an offender was caught via social media in her area. She stated that community CCTV is very important, including cameras on motorways and asked if a lot more cameras could be put on slip roads, etc – possibly by setting on a scheme to be pushed forward nationally? Chief Supt. Roche stated that he is a great believer of CCTV, that there is a lot involved with the process but that it is not impossible. He advised that all parties – An Garda Síochána, Local Authority, etc - need to come together in relation to the processing of the actual footage, as it is of huge advantage.

Cllr. Mary Hoade referred to rural burglaries and particularly east Galway, stating that there are a far greater number here, with 10 in her own area in January alone. She queried if Automatic Numberplate Recognition is something that our national politicians need to address, as it would be very useful. She also thanked the Gardaí for their work in rural areas and stated that we are very lucky to have a good Crime Prevention Officer here, who we need to listen to and mobilize community alerts groups, as rural crime is escalating out of control. She referred to the importance of the Community Alert Groups and also, the Property Marking Machine and encouraged the IFA to use it. She also commended the engagement with schools in relation to awareness around drugs, road safety, etc and linking it with work programmes.

On a separate matter, Cllr. Hoade raised a query in relation to testing positive for drug driving if you are taking prescription drugs. Chief Supt. Roche replied and clarified if you have a prescription, that you should be fine, as long as no other drugs show up in your system. In reference to rural burglaries, the Chief Supt. advised that there is definitely local intelligence but that the groups themselves are not actually from the area. He stated that burglaries are difficult to predict because of their random actions.

D/Supt. Shane Cummins added that there was a high occurrence of burglaries during January in particular and that they have a number of operations in place to try to prevent and/or detect them but that it is a major challenge due to the travelling gangs.

Cllr. Joe Byrne addressed the committee and stated that Garda presence on the ground is key and a high priority, along with communication between Gardaí and communities. He also referred to the statistics in relation to speeding, noting that a speed limit review in County Galway was upcoming and that it would be very important to take these statistics into account as part of the Councillor's reserved functions. He complimented the Gardaí for their excellent work but reminded that more resources were required, along with enforcement of current speed limits.

Chief Supt. Roche agreed that Garda presence on the ground is very important. He advised that the new community policing model will come into effect on the 1st April and that it will be announced how this will happen on the ground. He went on to advise that there are 623 Gardaí in the division, supported by 100 Garda Staff and other staff in regional units. The second phase of this is to go live in March, which will deal with the entire region.

An Comh. Pdraig Mac an Iomaire referred to traffic collisions and queried how we could get the message out there to the public to be safe and be seen. He also mentioned that he was very surprised with the speeding statistics, given the amount of Go Safe vans that are in operation.

Chief Supt. Roche advised that the Go Safe vans link with the RSA, however the Gardaí and the Local Authorities can make submissions in relation to speeding in certain areas.

Cllr. James Charity welcomed the announcement that there is going to be an extra garda assigned to the Leacht Seoirse (Loughgeorge) area and the update of the opening hours. Cllr Charity also referred to the statistics and the increase in possession but decrease in sale and supply and queried why this was the case? He concluded by referring to the point that was mentioned during the report, in relation to the 38% increase in thefts in shops and queried are there particular shops that are being targeted, what could we do to try to tackle it and are the culprits who are involved in these thefts, being caught?

In relation to Leacht Seoirse (Loughgeorge), Supt. Paudie O'Shea stated that they recognized the deficit through this JPC Committee and that they are hoping that the opening hours will be 2-3 hours daily but that these are subject to change, depending on demand. No matter what, that they have a mobile patrol, that Oranmore is open 9-5pm and that calls will always be answered around the clock. Supt. O'Shea advised that community engagement is key, that people are their eyes and ears, and that this is important throughout the region, including the islands. He also reminded that there is a Drugs unit for all of Conamara, based in Oughterard. In relation to the thefts in shops, Chief Supt. Roche stated that when shops reopened, a lot did not employ security people and also, that a lot of the thefts are one-offs – children or sometimes adults, usually of low value. He also reminded that there has been a change, in that they are not really meant to go into public places unless invited.

Cllr. Shelly Herterich Quinn queried if we could bring the local community policing back – the local garda full time in each station. The Chief Supt. confirmed that Gardaí in general do not live in their area anymore and also, that it is too dangerous to have Gardaí working on their own, they need to double up and merge and work with other stations. He reminded however that they do link with community alert groups and that their feedback has been great and essential.

Sgt. Michael Walsh replied to the Be Safe Be Seen query, confirming that Hi-Visibility vests are available from the Gardaí or the Local Authority free of charge. In relation to the thefts query, he recommended to also refer to the Garda Website which has a guide on precautions that can be taken.

Community Representative Gerard Costello noted that members of his community in Athenry Monivea are phoning the local station and being transferred to Clifden. He stated that they hang up, as they think they have dialed the incorrect number. Supt. Paudie O’Shea responded that they would look into it, however that if people ring outside of Business hours, that they could be transferred to a different station, if the local station is closed. He confirmed that the Clifden personnel are aware of this and they will accept the calls.

Chief Supt. Roche followed on to confirm that the vast majority of calls will go into the communications room in Galway, as phases are rolled out. He specified that urgent calls will always take priority and that this will mean that non-urgent calls may be backed up as a result.

Cllr. Michael Moegie Maher referred to the Oireachtas members and noted their poor attendance at meetings. He reminded that if they wish to be on the committee, that they need to attend. In response, Cllr. Jim Cuddy confirmed that Deputy Catherine Connolly had sent her apologies in relation to this meeting, as she was not available to attend.

Item no. 3: Updates for Subcommittees

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

Cllr. Maher confirmed that the subcommittee had already held their first meeting of the year and that the following was covered on the Agenda: RMCEIs (Recommended Minimum Criteria for Environmental Inspections), Waste Presentation Bylaws and Anti-Dumping Initiatives. He confirmed that they are currently seeking funding for the Anti-Dumping Initiatives again this year and that they were looking for ideas.

Cllr. Maher also mentioned CCTV and reminded that it cannot be used at the moment until the legislation is finalized, along with the Automatic Number plate Recognition.

He concluded by complimenting the work of Sgt. Mick Walsh and thanked all of the sub-committee members.

Chief Supt. Roche stated that he met with the Data Protection Commissioner and that as a result, they managed to get cameras up and running, that it can be used but have to bring applications before the commissioner.

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

Cllr. King raised the issue of the use of mobile phones while driving and referred to the statistics regarding same, along with cyber crime. They are aiming to raise awareness via social media, papers and similar.

He also referred to the amount of people who have been killed on the roads since late last year and early this year. He believes that the message in relation to the wearing of hi-visibility clothing is not getting through, even though they are readily available. He stated that the amount of people who are getting knocked down on our roads, is getting out of control and he queried if we were at the point where high visibility patches would need to be sewn into winter clothing, school bags, etc.

Cllr. King also raised a query in relation to e-scooters and asked what the ruling was in relation to these at the moment. Cathaoirleach Cuddy advised that there is no existing legislation, however that it is in the process of going through the stages currently. He agreed that it needs to be addressed, as they can be very dangerous.

Item no. 4: 2022 Annual Report of the County Galway JPC

On the proposal of Cllr. Joe Byrne and seconded by Cllr. Liam Carroll, it was agreed that the 2022 Annual Report of the County Galway JPC, be adopted.

Item no. 5: Consideration of the County Galway JPC Annual Work Plan for 2023

On the proposal of Cllr. Liam Carroll and seconded by Cllr. Mary Hoade, it was agreed that the 2023 Annual Work Plan for the County Galway JPC, be adopted.

Item no. 6: Agree dates for the 2023 meetings

The following dates were agreed: 3rd April, 19th June, 4th September and 6th November 2023 (Annual Public Meeting in Loughrea)

Item no. 7: A.O.B.

Cllr. Byrne referred to the number of inspections done by staff in relation to the implementation of waste by-laws and stated that they need to be complimented. He asked if an update regarding the number undertaken could be provided at the next meeting. Cllr. Maher confirmed they are working on it and he would provide same.

The next meeting will be held on the 3rd April 2023.

Chríochnaigh Cathaoirleach Cuddy an cruinniú ansin.