

Chair, Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today.

I take my statutory function of Accounting Officer of An Garda Síochána very seriously. I am strongly focused on ensuring that the public money invested in us is spent efficiently, effectively and appropriately.

As an organisation with a €1.7bn annual budget, it is vital that we demonstrate that we are providing value for money. For me, that means maximising our policing impact for the benefit of the public within the budget given to us by Government.

It is also critical that we spend public money in line with accounting and governance best practice.

I am strongly of the view that our budget is our budget. Since I became Commissioner in September last year I have continually stressed to managers at all levels of the organisation of the need for us to stay within our budget.

This can best be seen in the reduction in discretionary and administrative overtime spend in last three months of 2018, which achieved substantial savings for the Exchequer. The savings achieved by these measures have carried over into 2019 as the actual spend for the first quarter of €21.7 million is some €6 million less than the corresponding 2018 quarter.

While we are largely on target for overtime spend, this requires constant monitoring and vigilance to ensure there is no slippage, and I met with senior managers last week to stress this point to them again.

While these controls have had some impact on the delivery of policing, overtime is still available, particularly in relation to specific policing and security operations around organised crime and violent dissident republicans.

The introduction of a mandatory 15 minute parading time is a significant proportion of the Garda overtime budget and is a fixed cost that I have no influence over. So, for example, in 2019 €22m out of a total overtime budget of €95m will be spent on the 15 minute parading time. This effectively means that our real operational overtime budget is only €73m.

There is also overtime associated with Garda members securing and attending courts, escorting prisoners, and escorting people from the country, which again are non-discretionary activities.

However, on the proportion under our direct control we must ensure we stay within budget. This means making hard choices.

In relation to the 2017 accounts for An Garda Síochána and specifically the significant overspend on overtime in that year, there are a number of factors that attributed to this such as the aforementioned mandatory 15 minute parading time, as well as the major 24-7 policing resources required to protect lives and communities as a result of the outbreak of the ongoing gang feuds.

I fully accept the findings of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform that the 2017 overspend on overtime is not sustainable and demonstrated the need for stronger controls and governance, and the requirement for modern systems to monitor overtime.

Further to the controls already in place, we will address these issues through a number of additional measures:

- The introduction of a Roster and Duty Management System, which has been piloted in a Dublin Division and will start rolling-out to the organisation later this year, will improve our ability to plan, control and manage the deployment of personnel. This should result in savings in overtime through more effective and efficient resource allocation.
- Our new Divisional Policing Model, which is currently being piloted in four Divisions, includes a greater investment in Garda staff with financial expertise who can provide local management with better information and data on their overtime spend.
- Our workforce plan, which is currently being finalised, will see us deploy our personnel where they needed most, which should lead to operational efficiencies.
- ICT initiatives such as our Investigation Management System, which has started to roll-out, and our Mobility Project, which this year will enable around 2,000 Gardaí to access certain Garda systems remotely, will reduce the time Gardaí have to spend on paperwork and focus their times on policing activity.
- We have also committed in our 2019 Policing Plan to establishing a framework to provide for multi-annual budgeting and delegated sanctions. Again, this will make it easier for local management to plan resource deployment based on the budgets available to them.

To conclude Chair, we have been provided with a large amount of taxpayers' money. All of us in An Garda Síochána have a duty to ensure this is spent wisely for the benefit of the public. We are a public service and our spending should be focused on the public good in keeping people safe.

Thank you.