

OPENING ADDRESS

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

I am honoured to be here today to represent the Garda Commissioner and to address the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, in the area of ‘A continuous and active presence in rural communities’.

As an organisation, An Garda Síochána is somewhat unique in that we are intricately interlinked into the fabric of every aspect of society. Our members work, live and socialise in the communities we are honoured to police. Never is this truer than in rural communities...

All of you here today have an intrinsic interest in this topic and are all too aware of the challenges faced by rural communities and the unique requirements they have from a policing perspective.

I hope that when you leave here today, you feel fully up to date with the various initiatives put in place in rural communities to ensure the delivery of a continuous and proactive service as well as an awareness of the relationships cultivated between the Garda Síochána, and external community stakeholders.

Policing Approach

An Garda Síochána has a long-established tradition of developing and maintaining close relationships with the communities in which we work. We have been grateful for the invaluable assistance we have received from many members of our communities over the years.

An Garda Síochána is comprised of 28 Garda Divisions, 96 Garda Districts, 564 Garda Stations with 12,420 sworn members, 2,000 civilian support staff and 739 reserve Garda members.

Crime Trends

The most recent Garda Síochána Analysis Service crime statistics indicate that, nationally, property crime is down 21% in the year to date. Burglaries continue to decrease, with 34% fewer crimes in the year to date. Crimes against the person are also down 4%.

An Garda Síochána delivers a holistic policing service, with equal efficiency, effectiveness and impartiality to all communities in Ireland. It is difficult to extrapolate and indeed, identify, the distinction between crime statistics and the impact on urban and rural communities. An Garda Síochána estimates that the statistics divide on a ratio of 70/30, urban to rural.

Community Engagement

An Garda Síochána is committed to an active policing presence in rural Ireland which is manifested by the District / Station network. This network ensures a footprint of An Garda Síochána in every community throughout the country and is supported and reinforced through :

A. The Garda National Community Policing Model.

Community Gardaí engage in community partnership building, to enhance delivery of the Garda service within communities. Such engagement is a joint process between An Garda Síochána and community groups, working together, to improve the “quality of life” of people in those areas and to reflect their needs and priorities.

B. Community Alert/Neighbourhood Watch networks.

Community Alert was introduced by Muintir na Tíre and An Garda Síochána in 1985 to encourage rural dwellers to reduce opportunities for crime and to reduce isolation amongst local vulnerable community members. There are 1,409 Community Alert groups across rural Ireland with a presence in every rural Garda District. Community Alert gives An Garda Síochána direct access to 387,000 rural homes through a network of Liaison Gardaí. This is supplemented by additional layers of contact with Garda management;

District Meetings: Each Autumn every District Superintendent arranges a public meeting with their Community Alert and Neighbourhood Watch schemes. This

provides an opportunity to co-produce a Community Crime Prevention Plan that is devised and owned by communities and An Garda Síochána.

Divisional Meetings: Each Spring every Divisional Chief Superintendent holds an Annual Divisional Meeting to showcase new crime prevention practices and ideas.

Community Alert is a particularly vibrant initiative and continues to provide An Garda Síochána with an excellent platform for delivering practical assistance to communities.

Neighbourhood Watch

Neighbourhood Watch shares the same ethos and tenets as Community Alert and is present in every Garda Division in Ireland. Principally this programme concentrates on encouraging property owners to protect their property and report suspicious activity in urban areas. Since its establishment in 1985 there are now 1,122 (136,000 households) schemes in rural areas with a further 1,221 (205,000 households) in Cork, Limerick and Dublin cities. The same contact structures exist for Neighbourhood Watch, with contact from a Liaison Garda, District and Divisional Officers. There has been a very noticeable increase in new and re-activated Neighbourhood Watch schemes since 2009 and which includes rural provincial towns.

C. Community Engagement with partner agencies.

Text-Alert System

Through a well-established partnership approach with Muintir na Tire, Neighbourhood Watch and the IFA, An Garda Síochána continues to roll-out the very successful Text-Alert System.

The Garda Text-Alert System is a communication tool which is utilised by Community Alert and Neighbourhood Watch programmes in every Garda Division in Ireland. Devised in 2013, there are now 984 schemes, with 184,000 subscribers, receiving texts from An Garda Síochána. The programme enjoys very significant support from communities and the Department of Justice and Equality recently announced a Text-Alert Rebate Scheme to financially assist communities participating with the system. Apart from informing communities of imminent criminal threats, Text-Alert is also used to promote Public Safety during inclement weather. A series of Regional Text-Alert Seminars, to increase

scheme efficiency, for operational Gardaí will conclude this November. This will help to improve and expand the service.

Community Text-Alert encourages people to report suspicious activity to An Garda Síochána, which will, in turn, relay verified and appropriate crime prevention information to the public. The emphasis is on preventing crime through active partnership with communities. The service is community driven and provides a mechanism for a community or Residents' Association to register a "community contact" with their local District Headquarters (Garda Station).

Theft Stop

An Garda Síochána and the IFA recognised the need to help farmers prevent theft of their farm equipment and, as a result, 'Theft Stop' was developed. The initiative was piloted in Tipperary in 2014 and is currently in the process of being rolled-out nationally.

'Theft Stop' is a farm theft-prevention initiative. It provides 'Theft Stop' members with a unique identification code to mark farm equipment. The marked equipment is then recorded on theftstop.ie website.

Marking property acts as an effective crime deterrent and will help reduce farm equipment related theft. 'Theft Stop' members can purchase a stencil kit and / or a metal-punching set for use in applying their unique codes.

'Theft Stop' provides An Garda Síochána with a comprehensive database of 'registered' farm equipment which can be used in investigation, recovery and identification processes.

Metal-Theft Crime Prevention & Reduction Plan

The Garda Commissioner launched the Garda Síochána Metal Theft Crime Prevention and Reduction Plan on 6th February 2013. The crime of 'Metal-Theft' strikes at the very heart of rural communities and has become a significant security and safety concern for An Garda Síochána, businesses and the public. The impact of metal-theft prompted An Garda Síochána to develop a proactive plan to tackle the increase of this crime, nationwide.

To promote a multi-faceted approach to preventing metal-theft, An Garda Síochána established a Metal-Theft Forum which brings key stakeholders

together. The most recent meeting of the Forum was last Friday, 28th October 2016, which was the eleventh meeting since its inception.

Representatives from a number of groups attend the Forum. This collaborative approach has assisted in the development of knowledge and assisted intelligence gathering. It has resulted in raising awareness of metal-theft through briefings by the key stakeholder and the National Crime Prevention and Public Safety Bureau to operational Garda personnel. The Forum has also facilitated the development of external awareness-raising measures, through the use of the Garda website and other media outlets and through the Crimercall television programme.

CCTV Schemes

CCTV systems are part of an overall collaborative local policing strategy encompassing Joint Policing Committees, Local Authorities and community crime-prevention initiatives. From a Garda perspective, a CCTV system in a public place is, primarily, an aid to policing.

An Garda Síochána is committed to the development of innovative policies and practices aimed at enhancing the service provided to the public and improving the quality of life in rural communities. In pursuance of reducing the incidence of crime, anti-social behaviour, public disorder, vandalism and the general fear of crime, An Garda Síochána supports the installation of CCTV systems.

There are currently 91 public CCTV schemes in place, nationally, comprising 36 Garda schemes and 55 Community schemes.

D. Rural Crime Phenomenon.

An Garda Síochána responded to this phenomenon by utilising a number of very effective Garda operations :

1. Operation ‘Thor’ – An Garda Síochána launched a multi-strand national anti-crime strategy, entitled Operation ‘Thor’ on 2nd November 2015.

The Operation actively targets organised crime gangs and repeat-offenders, through co-ordinated crime prevention and enforcement activity, based on intelligence and the latest crime trends and patterns, to protect communities.

Operation ‘Thor’ has resulted in :

- increased visibility in local communities to prevent burglaries and related crimes;
- more high-visibility checkpoints;
- increased patrolling on the motorway network, denying criminals use of the roads;
- enhanced use of intelligence, technology and data to target prolific offenders and organised crime gangs;
- a strong focus on working with communities to reduce opportunities for burglaries to take place;
- a national awareness campaign to inform people on how to enhance the security of homes.

The Garda Bureau of Community Engagement, through the National Crime Prevention and Public Safety Bureau, has produced a radio advertisement promoting the ‘Lock-Up / Light-Up’ campaign. Lock-Up / Light-Up provides advice to house-holders on home security, with particular emphasis on lighting up one’s home during the darker winter months.

The NCP&PSB has distributed thousands of ‘Lock-Up / Light-Up’ leaflets to Crime Prevention Officers in each Garda Division for dissemination to local communities. The Crime Prevention Officers are also available to the members of the public, resident- and business groups to discuss and advise on home security issues and regularly engage with community groups, providing effective crime-prevention advice and information.

2. Divisional Operations under Operation ‘Thor’, e.g. ‘Project Storm’ in the South Eastern Region in particular the Carlow / Kilkenny Garda Division.
3. Operations to target Metal-Theft.
4. Dedicated crime prevention days / weeks of action with support / advice seminars coordinated across the country by the network of Crime Prevention Officers.

E. Results of An Garda Síochána Operations.

Property-crime has reduced in every Garda Region, for example a reduction of

- 17% in the Dublin Region
- 24% in the Eastern Region
- 22% in the Northern Region
- 23% in the South-Eastern Region
- 27% in the Southern Region; and
- 23% in the Western Region

Here is a overview of National crime : -

National Crimes Reported Totals as at 26th October				
	Crime Type	2015 YTD	2016 YTD	YTD Change
	Property Crime	86,751	67,655	-22%
0712	Burglary (not aggravated)	21,706	14,105	-35%
0811	Theft/UT of Vehicle	4,274	3,033	-29%
0822	Theft from Shop	18,724	17,290	-8%
0821	Theft From Person	4,277	3,849	-10%
0823	Theft From Vehicle	12,513	9,073	-27%
1211	Arson	1,463	1,261	-14%
	Crimes Against the Person	14,525	13,454	-7%
	Assaults Causing Harm	2,875	2,724	-5%
	Minor Assault	9,058	8,491	-6%
	Sexual Offences	2,064	2,085	+1%
0824	Theft/UT of Pedal Cycle	4,971	4,478	-10%
0826	Theft of Other Property	16,573	12,982	-22%
0611	Robbery of an Establishment or Institution	748	564	-25%
0613	Robbery from Person	1,215	1,029	-15%
1212	Criminal Damage (not Arson)	20,398	16,385	-20%
1312	Public Order Offences	16,144	14,108	-13%
1313	Drunkenness Offences	5,224	5,041	-4%
1021	Possession of Drugs For Sale or Supply	2,889	2,951	+2%
1022	Possession of Drugs For Personal Use	9,452	9,455	0%

F. Resource deployment.

An Garda Síochána, with Government support, has recruited 450 new trainee Gardaí during 2015/2016 with a further 200 due to commence training in the Garda College before the end of 2016. In addition, the Government has committed to recruiting a further 800 in 2017. The majority of these trainee Gardaí have been allocated to provincial settings and An Garda Síochána proposes to continue with this deployment.

There has been significant investment in the Garda fleet to support mobility / visibility and transport challenges. A total of 505 vehicles were allocated to the Garda Fleet in 2016. This will continue.

G. Community Policing.

Our Community Policing model reflects the following figures

- 10 Inspectors
- 96 Sergeants (part-time)
- 697 Gardaí (part-time)
- 83 Sergeants (dedicated)
- 647 Gardaí (dedicated)

(as of latest update in 2013):

There have been challenges in this area and An Garda Síochána is committed to reorganising, reinvigorating the Community Policing approach as indicated in our Modernisation & Renewal Programme 2016 – 2021.

H. Modernisation & Renewal Programme, 2016-2021.

The Garda Síochána Modernisation and Renewal Programme, 2016-2021 has thirteen goals, identified as follows :

1. Renewing the culture of An Garda Síochána - *“We will build on the best elements of our culture, while changing behaviours to deliver a professional policing and security service that meets the expectations of the people and communities”.*
2. Putting victims at the heart of the Garda Service - *“We will provide a respectful, reassuring, responsive and reliable service addressing the needs and expectations of all victims”.*
3. Community Engagement and Public Safety - *“We will work with communities to deliver a policing service tailored to their needs”.*
4. Preventing Crime - *“Preventing crime will be the number 1 policing priority of An Garda Síochána”.*

5. Bringing crime investigation to a new level - *“From the moment a crime is reported to when it is in front of the Court, we will have highly trained investigators using the latest systems to ensure the professional investigation of every crime”*.
6. Roads Policing - *“We will increase our use of technology and introduce a roads policing unit to help make our roads even safer and deny criminals the use of the road network”*.
7. National Security and Organised Crime - *“We will use advanced technology and intelligence – sharing to prevent, detect and deny any threats to Irish Society from terrorism and organised crime”*.
8. Cyber Security and Cyber Crime - *“We will enhance our capabilities and work with National and International partners to protect critical infrastructure and prevent and detect criminal activity”*.
9. Leading and Governing a changing organisation - *“There will be stronger governance and leadership throughout the organisation to ensure we reflect best practice legally, ethically and professionally”*.
10. Managing and motivating our best asset - *“We will provide our people with the right tools, guidance and support, appropriate training and development, and the leadership to do their jobs effectively”*.
11. Partnerships and collaboration – *“We will work more closely with our local, national and international partners to protect and support communities”*.
12. Technology – *“An Garda Síochána will be a highly connected police service using advanced technology to prevent and detect crime”*.
13. Communicating better on all fronts – *“We will promote policing excellence and our changing culture through a wide variety of communications channels”*.

Conclusion

An Garda Síochána is confident that its efforts to date to ensure a Garda presence in rural communities are sustainable and viable into the future. This, coupled with the considerable investment by the Government in our Modernisation & Renewal Programme, will pay significant dividends to the people of Ireland. Rural and urban communities will benefit from continued crime-reduction and enhanced community-safety & personal protection.

These expected outcomes reflect the commitment of An Garda Síochána to deliver an effective, efficient and responsive policing service responding to the challenges and needs, particular of our rural communities.

THANK YOU