

Chair, Committee Members,

Thank you for the invite to meet with you today.

As the people who deal with the victims of rural crime and particularly burglaries every day, An Garda Síochána is acutely conscious of the impact this crime has on people, families and communities, both urban and rural, particularly vulnerable victims.

Burglary is not just an economic crime, it is one that can have a devastating impact on people emotionally and personally.

That is why we are so determined to tackle it:

In November 2015, An Garda Síochána introduced Operation Thor. It was a new approach with a large number of units across a wide-range of different areas and disciplines working together to prevent and detect burglaries based on analysis of crime trends and intelligence to target criminal gangs and repeat offenders. It saw us deny criminal gangs the use of the motorway network and increase patrolling in areas worst affected by burglaries:

It has resulted in many of those involved in burglary being arrested and charged.

Under Operation Thor, since November 2015:

- Over 8,300 arrests have been made
- More than 9,500 charges preferred
- 34,000 searches undertaken
- 203,771 patrols undertaken
- 143,231 checkpoints mounted

In addition, we have heavily publicised locally and nationally crime prevention advice through our "Lock Up and Light Up" campaign.

All this activity has seen residential burglaries reduced by 34% and non-residential burglaries down 23% since November 2015.

We have maintained that focus in 2018. This year up to the end of August, residential burglaries are down 17% on the same period the year before.

But we won't be complacent, particularly when we are coming into the time of the year when burglaries traditionally increase due to the longer winter nights.

We also know that while we have significantly reduced burglaries, this is no comfort to those who are burglary victims or are in fear of being a victim, particularly elderly people living in isolated areas.

In this regard, the Winter Phase of Operation Thor has started. This will see increased patrolling and checkpoints with a particular focus again on criminal gangs and repeat offenders.

The Assistant Commissioner, Special Crime Operations, is meeting with all Detective Superintendents from across the country tomorrow to re-enforce this message.

I hope you don't mind Chair, but I would also like to take this opportunity to ask the public to Lock Up and Light Up, particularly at evening time. During the winter, nearly 40 per cent of burglaries happen between 5pm and 10pm. Burglars also are most likely to enter homes through the rear door or a window. So I would ask the public to use timer switches to make your homes look occupied, lock your doors and windows, and not to keep large amounts of cash in your home. We also ask people

to mark their property so when we do recover property – and we do recover a lot of property each year – we can return it to them.

Lastly, it is vital that people report crimes. We can only investigate crimes reported to us and each and every crime is investigated.

Thefts from farms have fallen nationally by 8% in the last year, but again we are not being complacent.

We fully recognise the terrible impact theft from farms can have on the livelihoods of farmers and their families sense of security, so we are continuing to work with local communities, community groups and farming bodies to reduce farm theft. For example, this was a major focus for us during the recent Ploughing Championships.

Again, we would advise the farming community to restrict access to their yard, lock gates when not in use, and ensure the property is well lit as more farm thefts occur at night than during the day.

Farmers should also ensure that machinery, tools and vehicles are secured properly, and details such as serial numbers or property markings are recorded and photographed.

### **Community Policing**

On community policing, An Garda Síochána is dedicated to policing with the consent and support of the community.

We have a strong connection with the community we serve and maintaining and enhancing that bond is one of our key priorities.

But we recognise that we do need to change in this area. Society is changing at a rapid pace and we have to keep up. Society is demanding a more responsive service and we will meet that demand.

With our numbers starting to increase we can put in place measures to deliver a policing service that is better positioned to address the concerns of local communities.

We will ensure community policing is the ethos of policing in Ireland.

As identified by the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, like many police services around the world, An Garda Síochána has struggled to put in place structures and practices that supports a truly community-orientated police service.

The Commission acknowledged the work done and innovation shown by many excellent Gardaí in this area, but found that our implementation of community policing lacked specific direction.

As international research has shown, changing this requires more than just a technical fix. It needs restructuring, decentralisation of decision making, greater empowerment of front-line officers, and, most critically, having an external focus where we actively and regularly listen and react to the needs of the community.

It requires that all our personnel have a strong community-orientation.

As the Commissioner has said, the Commission on the Future of Policing provides us a pathway in this area and in other areas to improve our service in conjunction with our policing partners.

In this regard, following extensive research, we are developing a new model of community policing based on delivering localised policing services to meet the differing needs of different communities.

It will see our systems and structures re-organised with the aim of having a real and deep understanding of what our communities and citizens require from a modern policing service. It will reinforce that communities and their needs are at the heart of the organisation.

The Division will co-ordinate all community issues and develop tailored policing responses to communities based on their needs.

This approach will be part of the new proof of concept divisional policing model that we will be introducing in four divisions – Galway, Mayo, Cork city, and Kevin Street – in the first quarter of 2019.

We are a public service and must provide a quality service that meets the needs of the public. That is the focus of our approach to community policing and policing in general.

Thank you.