

**An Garda Síochána Opening Statement to the Public Accounts
Committee - Thursday, 31st March 2022**

Thank you, Chairman and Members of the Committee, for the invitation to this meeting to examine An Garda Síochána 2020 Appropriation Account. Accompanying me this morning are Deputy Commissioner Shawna Coxon, who has responsibility for Strategy, Governance and Performance, our Chief Administrative Officer, Joseph Nugent and our Executive Director of Finance and Services, Kathryna Clifford.

The 2020 Gross expenditure of An Garda Síochána was €1.93 billion and after taking account of appropriations-in-aid of €117million, the net expenditure was just over €1.8 billion.

Funding through vote 20 supports An Garda Síochána in policing activities. 2020 was an unprecedented year due to the Covid 19 pandemic and an extremely challenging year for policing and for our citizens. Public health was of the utmost importance, and required unparalleled restrictions on freedom of movement of people, normal business, sporting and social activity.

An Garda Síochána was tasked with policing and supporting government, the community and businesses on measures imposed

due to Covid 19. We responded quickly and in doing so our Gardaí and Garda staff members demonstrated commitment, flexibility and resilience in this emergency and dedication to the continued protection of our society and citizens.

Some immediate actions undertaken included maximising the availability of Gardaí for high visibility community policing, which necessitated new roster arrangements, restriction on annual leave, the postponement of some retirements, acceleration of attestation of over 300 student Gardaí and additional Gardaí being allocated to front-line duties.

Operation Fanacht was put in place, this consisted of an extensive network of thousands of checkpoints established across the country, with over 2,500 Gardaí involved in these checkpoints on a daily basis.

Other activities included supporting cocooning members of our communities through delivering essential supplies; working on Covid-19 emergency legislation; provision of Covid-19 advice with our office of Internal Communications winning three awards in 2020 for their work in this area.

And very importantly there was the launch of Operation Faoiseamh in response to the increase in domestic abuse related calls received by An Garda Síochána during the Covid-19 pandemic. The objective was to provide enhanced support and protection to victims of domestic abuse. A total of 22,795 contacts and attempted contacts were made by An Garda Síochána with victims of domestic abuse during 2020. The organisation also responded to over 43,000 calls for assistance in relation to domestic abuse incidents with in excess of 11,600 criminal charges created in 2020 for crimes involving an element of domestic abuse, including breaches of domestic violence orders.

We also accelerated the implementation of technology across the organisation, providing the platform for personnel to move quickly to remote working and the provision of 2,500 mobile data stations to frontline Gardaí. We provided essential PPE equipment to effectively keep our members and staff safe during this time, resulting in An Garda Síochána maintaining an employee resilience rate in the order of 95%.

In addition to policing activity related to Covid 19 measures, normal policing services continued to be essential for the prevention, detection and investigation of crimes, which continued to be committed. An example is the seizure of over €45 million related to

illicit drugs and cash, numerous firearms and thousands of rounds of ammunition. Work also continued on cybercrime with 400 new cases and 333 closed cases in 2020.

Policing activity in Ireland is funded in the main through the Exchequer. While the activities required due to the Covid-19 pandemic can make comparisons with other time periods somewhat difficult, I am confident as Accounting Officer of An Garda Síochána that public monies under my control were expended in 2020 within an ethos of value for money and investing in the future of our services on behalf of government and our citizens.

This investment included maintaining and building the capital infrastructure to support our policing. We continued to invest in our fleet, which is an essential resource for Garda operations and reaching a record number of over 3,100 vehicles in 2020, the largest Garda fleet in the history of the organisation. In line with government policy of sustainability, climate action and low emissions, we are in the process of developing strategies to move this fleet to a more sustainable one of electric vehicles.

The property portfolio in use by An Garda Síochána is extensive, including over 560 stations and a range of other national, support, administrative and specialist facilities. As the structure of the organisation evolves there is also a need to ensure that the Estate aligns with the evolving operational needs.

A number of refurbishments and upgrades were completed in 2020 and work commenced on site on the new Garda, Security and Crime Operations Centre at Military Road. Not all of the Garda Bureaus currently based at Harcourt Square will be transferring to Military Road, with some being located elsewhere and accommodation solutions being provided by the Office of Public Works (OPW) to meet the requirements for all of these Bureaus.

Accommodation is a crucial element to facilitating policing activities and I believe we need to future proof this area. Hence, my Officials continue to engage with the OPW on capital and maintenance works across the Estate. This includes working in collaboration with the OPW and Dublin City Council on a proposed development of a new substantial Garda Station and Facilities on Dublin City Council lands at the corner of the R139/Malahide Road, Northern Cross.

My Officials have provided a written response on the implementation of the Committee's previous recommendations. The Pandemic has impacted the rate of progress on some of these matters. However, I wish to assure you Chairman and members of the Committee that I take the Committee's recommendations very seriously and we are working at completing the implementation stage.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank most sincerely, all the people working in and with An Garda Síochána for the delivery of essential services during the Covid 19 pandemic and to the Minister and Department of Justice for their assistance and support. I also thank the Comptroller and Auditor General and his staff for their work and the Committee for the time allocated to this opening statement.

Thank you

Drew Harris

Garda Commissioner