

AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA OPENING STATEMENT TO  
COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS – THURSDAY 21 MARCH 2024

Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation to be here today to discuss the An Garda Síochána 2022 Appropriation Accounts.

In 2022, Government provided An Garda Síochána with the biggest budget in its history to date. Gross expenditure in the year was €2.15bn and after taking account of appropriations-in-aid of €130m, the net expenditure was just over €2.02bn.

2022 was an important year for An Garda Síochána, as we marked our centenary. It was a year where we celebrated the organisation's growth and development over that century. It also served as a reminder of how much the organisation and Garda personnel have contributed to protecting democracy and keeping people safe throughout our history.

The year saw us continue to implement significant structural and organisational changes under the Government's policing reform programme, A Policing Service For Our Future, to ensure Gardaí have the tools and supports they need to deliver an efficient and effective policing service.

As one of the world's most trusted police services, renowned for its connection to communities, we continue to work in partnership with people and communities to keep people safe.

One of the ways we are doing this is through the implementation of the Garda Operating Model. This is the biggest change to the organisation's structure in our long history.

The Operating Model, based on work by the Garda Inspectorate, the Commission on the Future of Policing In Ireland and the views of members of An Garda Síochána, will enable the force to respond to the significant changes to Irish society, and the nature of crime now and into the future.

Through the Operating Model, we are driving forward key efficiencies through the standardisation of processes across the organisation, and providing more specialised services at local level in areas such as domestic abuse, cyber-crime, and combating drug dealing.

As of today, 12 of our 21 Divisions have fully implemented the Operating Model with the remaining Divisions in advanced stages of progress.

Under A Policing Service For Our Future, there has also been a significant investment in ICT systems and tools to reduce paperwork, enable Gardaí to spend more time on the street than in the station, and ensure we have robust data to inform policing activity.

For example, the development of our world-leading mobility device, which many police services are currently seeking to replicate.

The device enables Gardaí to access critical information while on the move, requiring less time in stations.

In addition, the device enables Fixed Charge Notices to be issued by Gardaí at the roadside. On average, 14,000 Fixed Charge Notices are issued every month from these devices. This means that 85% of all Fixed Charge Notices are now issued electronically. This has resulted in a move away from the inefficient and expensive paper methods.

In 2022, more than 10,000 Garda personnel had mobility devices, and, as of today, 15,000 have been issued.

Our mobility devices are improving all the time with new applications being added. Gardaí now have access to the PULSE Person Search App; our new KOPS health and wellbeing App; the MS Teams App – which reduces the need to hold meetings in-person thus cutting down on travel costs; and our updated Traffic App – which now includes Live Insurance Data.

In terms of information-led policing, major new ICT systems have increased efficiency and effectiveness, enhanced the safety of Gardaí, and strengthened governance.

These include a Roster and Duty Management System that enables supervisors to better deploy resources when and where they are needed most; a new nationwide dispatch system that improves the efficiency of how Gardaí respond to calls for service from the public and enhances the safety of Gardaí by giving them detailed information on potential high-risk calls; and an Investigation Management System that enables digital management of all material relating to an investigation.

We continue to grow and adapt our fleet. In 2022 we had 3,312 vehicles - the highest number in the history of the organisation.

Today, that figure is closer to 3,450 including 110 fully electric vehicles with a further 70 EVs to be allocated during 2024.

Our investment in electric vehicles will provide value for money in the medium to long term, as these vehicles have shown to be much more efficient to run. We can also expect them to contribute to savings in respect to maintenance and our overall fuel costs across our fleet.

Furthermore, as we work towards our Climate Action targets, measures we are implementing in this area will result in better value for money. Already things are going in the right direction. Our fossil fuel usage has reduced by 15%. That's based on average emissions over a three-year period from 2016 to 2018.

We are also on course to meet our energy efficiency targets for 2030. As of 2022, we had achieved a 31% improvement in that area. This equated to a saving of €41m since 2009.

However, it will get progressively more challenging, and we will be reliant on other stakeholders - including Government - to help fund projects into the future.

Following on from the valuable feedback received from over 6,000 Garda personnel in our internal Culture Audit, we have further invested in our people.

In 2022, we introduced a new practical and modern uniform. This uniform also incorporates changes we made to Garda policy, and provides for the wearing of headwear for religious and cultural reasons and beliefs.

We continued to invest in the health and wellbeing of our personnel. In 2022, we piloted Mental Health First Aid Training – this will result in An Garda Síochána this year becoming the first European police service to roll-out this training to all personnel. A Menopause Guidance document was also developed in 2022 – this was published in 2023 with An Garda Síochána becoming the first State body to introduce such guidance. Specific physiological support services were also introduced for specialist units exposed to distressing incidents and/or footage.

In the area of recruitment, the COVID-19 national emergency meant we lost the opportunity to recruit 1,500 Gardaí because of the public safety restrictions on educational establishments including the Garda College in place at the time.

However, after a gap of three years, in 2022 we ran a Garda recruitment competition that attracted 11,000 applications. Two successive campaigns ran in 2023 and 2024 with this year's campaign attracting almost 6,400 applicants.

This has significantly strengthened our recruitment pipeline and shows many people do believe that being a Garda is a job worth doing.

And, tomorrow, I look forward to meeting the latest intake of recruits passing-out from the Garda College and going out to help communities.

Further to what I've already outlined, a number of other efficiencies were introduced in 2022.

For instance, the move away from printed payslips for sworn Gardaí to online portal payslips resulted in annual savings of €200,000.

Meanwhile, the introduction of the Securetec Drug Wipe 6S in December simplified the road-side procedure for Gardaí. It is fast, efficient and has improved the capabilities of our Roads Policing Units. It is also contributing to making our roads a safer place.

If we look ahead and as the structure of the organisation evolves, there is also a need to ensure that our estate aligns with our changing operational requirements, population growth, and the needs of Garda personnel.

The biggest example in 2022 was the move of our crime operations headquarters from Harcourt Square to the new Walter Scott House building. This was the largest estate undertaking in the history of An Garda Síochána. Almost 10% of the organisation was impacted by the move.

In 2022, working with the OPW, upgrades to Longford and Navan Garda stations were completed, as well as the re-opening of Fitzgibbon Street Station in Dublin's inner-city.

We have an extensive station network – over 500 stations – and while the international trend is to shut stations, we have increased opening hours in smaller stations and have no intention of closing any stations.

In recognising that accommodation is a crucial element to facilitating policing activities, 30 major station and office projects are being progressed nationally as part of the Garda Capital Investment Programme 2023 to 2030.

I am confident as Accounting Officer of An Garda Síochána that public monies under my control were expended in 2022 within an ethos of value for money and investing in the future of our services on behalf of Government and the society we serve.

Thank you.