

## **Cathaoirleach, Deputies and Senators,**

Good afternoon and thank you Cathaoirleach and members of the Committee for the invitation to appear before you today and for the opportunity to address your Committee on policing matters as Commissioner of An Garda Síochána.

### **Garda Síochána Policing Plan, 2023:**

As we enter the final phase of implementing and delivering An Garda Síochána's Policing Plan for 2023, coincidentally drawing a close to An Garda Síochána's Strategy Statement 2022 – 2024, An Garda Síochána continues to develop and strengthen our Community Partnerships both at home and abroad; we continue to implement policing operations and initiatives to prevent and detect all levels of criminality within local communities while supporting the needs of victims and the most vulnerable in society in addition to safeguarding the security of the Irish State.

I have prioritised the targeting of National and Transnational Crime Groupings that wreak havoc on our communities through the sale and supply of illegal substances by enhancing An Garda Síochána's national, regional and local capabilities and international partnerships. The operational success derived from our international law enforcement partnerships continue to bear fruit by enhancing and strengthening our policing and security capabilities. The expansion of the Garda Liaison Officer Network has greatly enabled An Garda Síochána in reinforcing our international partnership approach by building on liaison, cooperation and operational readiness capacity from a policing and intelligence perspective.

An Garda Síochána's 2023 Policing Plan saw an estimated 60,000 (sixty thousand) individuals being arrested by An Garda Síochána in the year to date with a total of 248,060 charges and summons being created and issued for prosecution of offences before the Courts. Throughout 2023, members of An Garda Síochána have seized in excess of €10 million of cash suspected to be the proceeds of crime during the course of multiple investigations in addition to seizing illegal drugs, controlled drugs and drugs paraphernalia to the value of 271 million euro to date during the course of multi-faceted and complex policing operations. An Garda Síochána has recovered and seized an estimated 1575, firearms (which includes real and imitation firearms but excluding ammunition) through intelligence led policing operations. In total year to date there were 1,783 instances in which knives or sharp instruments were seized from persons posing a threat to public safety within local Communities. This is just a headline overview of the work undertaken by the members of An Garda Síochána in respect of fulfilling our commitment to 'Keeping People Safe' in Ireland.

The unprecedented and unpredictable challenges of the pandemic have demonstrated An Garda Síochána's determination and commitment to public safety as a community focused, victim centric, human rights policing organisation in rising to meet the significant challenges posed in the post Covid-19 era. In the coming weeks, An Garda Síochána will finalise the development of a proactive, robust, and flexible Policing Plan for implementation in 2024 in order to build on the success of the 2023 Policing Plan. As we continue to emerge from the aftermath of the global pandemic, we

continue to experience the unforeseen consequences of Covid-19 in real terms from a policing perspective.

We continue to develop, strengthen and enhance our organisational capabilities and expertise in a multitude of areas namely:

- (i) cyber enabled and economic crime;
- (ii) harm posed to vulnerable persons particularly victims of domestic, sexual and gender based violence;
- (iii) those experiencing or subjected to hate crime and
- (iv) public safety on our streets by combating public disorder and anti-social behaviour by renewing our commitment to combating public disorder and by adopting a 'zero tolerance' approach to investigations into assaults in public.

### **Dublin City Centre:**

'Operation Citizen', a dedicated community policing operation within the Dublin North and South Inner City is a uniform led, high visibility, street level, community-focused operation supported by plainclothes and specialist units, was established to combat instances of public disorder, anti-social behaviour, assault-in-public, street level drug supply and use, criminal damage and other matters of public safety. It is imperative to highlight that 'Operation Citizen' aims to promote a whole of society approach in tackling the keys challenges facing the City Centre and utilises a community and stakeholder collaborative partnership approach to influence its outcomes. The issue of tackling anti-social behaviour or public disorder emanating from alcohol abuse, drug addiction, homelessness and mental health issues requires a whole of government / societal effort to assist those most vulnerable in society. The allocation of an additional €10 million in Garda overtime by Government focused on the Inner City Area will substantially enhance the capacity of An Garda Síochána in reinforcing our operational deployment in safeguarding public safety in Dublin City Centre. Assistant Commissioner Willis will provide the Committee with a greater overview of 'Operation Citizen' from a resource deployment, stakeholder partnership and operational effectiveness perspective.

### **Recruitment & Retention:**

I am a strong advocate of the concept that as an organisation our people are our greatest asset. While there are significant external labour market forces at play in respect of the recruitment and retention of personnel by An Garda Síochána in terms of both Gardaí and Garda Staff, I am confident that we will continue to attract candidates of calibre driven by a sense of community spirit and public service ethos to fill crucial roles within the Garda organisation. I welcome the continued commitment in Budget 2024 to financially support the recruitment of additional Garda Trainees and Garda Staff.

The recent announcement by the Minister regarding the increase of the age limits to join An Garda Síochána will enable us to access an additional pool of employee talent. The launch of a dedicated recruitment campaign for vacancies at Clerical Officer Grade within An Garda Síochána has attracted 7,400 applicants to fill vacancies in operational and specialist support roles.

## **Employee Supports:**

As Commissioner, I am fully aware of the personal safety risks and constant demands associated with a career in policing. We will continue to invest in supporting the careers of our personnel through continuous training, development and in the provision of welfare and well-being supports. Unfortunately, the harsh reality is, that it poses a significant challenge for An Garda Síochána to develop a safe psychological environment for our Personnel due to the unpredictability and volatile nature of policing. It is of huge concern that in excess of 646 members of An Garda Síochána were subject to violence and assault while performing their duties in serving the public interest in the period 1 January 2023 to 30 September 2023.

It is a priority for me to ensure our personnel are supported and assisted when faced with trauma, crisis or mental health challenges. The expansion of the Garda Employee Assistance Service aims to support our people when faced with personal or professional dilemmas from a welfare perspective and is a very effective network. The introduction and provision of a confidential externally based counselling service [Inspire] allows personnel to access professional counselling support in a time sensitive manner. The development and launch of the KOPS App (Keeping Our People Supported) accessible through each mobility device ensures there is a resource available for all personnel to access information, advice and signpost supports available to our people 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The launch of An Garda Síochána's Health & Wellbeing Strategy supported by the establishment of the National Health & Wellbeing Office aims to enhance our organisational journey in supporting our people.

The introduction of 'Wellbeing' Workshops and dedicated 'Mental Health First Aid' training by the Garda Employee Assistance Service aims to bolster the organisational supports provided by An Garda Síochána in supporting our people. The development and launch of the menopause guidance policy aims to support our personnel regardless of their gender identity who may be experiencing or may experience menopausal symptoms. In addition to the latter measures, the training and deployment of 'Peer Supporters' by the Garda Employee Assistance Service continues at pace with the objective of connecting with and supporting our people within the workplace environs. I am committed to ensuring that An Garda Síochána continues to strive to prioritise the care and support afforded to our people in what is a challenging profession.

## **Rosters:**

From my policing experience of 40 years, I know that one of the fundamental aspects of supporting personnel within a policing organisation from a health and safety and wellbeing perspective is directly linked to the working time arrangements or rostering patterns in place to ensure the provision of the policing function. As Commissioner, my approach has been to strike a balance between ensuring that An Garda Síochána has sufficient resources available for deployment to meet the demands of the policing service in order to safeguard public safety whilst ensuring that Garda Personnel have a predictable roster that is compliant with Health and Safety and the European Working Time Directive.

I also have an obligation in law to use resources provided by Government in an effective and efficient manner.

### **Policing of Protests:**

An Garda Síochána's policing of public protests is community-based, engagement-focused, legal, proportionate, intelligence led and human rights focused. An Garda Síochána has established dedicated Event Management Units in the DMR to plan, engage, co-ordinate and implement operational policing plans based on intelligence and risk assessments. The fundamental objective of an Operational Policing Plan for Peaceful Protests is to afford every citizen the enjoyment of their constitutional and international Human Rights during such events, namely the right to freedom of expression; the right to the freedom of assembly; the right to freedom of association save in accordance with the rights of others; public order or national security. An Garda Síochána prides itself on its consent based and collaborative approach utilised in the policing of public demonstrations with the prioritisation of public safety as paramount while also being cognisant of the need for business continuity within the wider parameters of geographic location.

### **The Future:**

An Garda Síochána's priority for 2024 comprises the continued implementation of the Garda Operating Model across operational divisions. This model will deliver streamlined, efficient structures, embedding governance and performance functions at its core, focused on a community led service. The development of four functional areas: Community Engagement, Serious Crime, Performance Assurance and Business Services (Finance, HR, General Administration & Logistics) aims to release Gardaí from non-core duties to focus on operational policing duties while streamlining administrative processes locally as well as enhancing organisational governance.

To date, eight (8) Operational Divisions have transitioned into the Garda Operating Model Project and have commenced services in each of the four functional areas. In order to support and embed the Garda Operating Model, An Garda Síochána has substantially increased the numbers of Inspectors across the organisation to support the Operating Model and refocus on Community Engagement, Crime Investigation and Supervisory Leadership. The appointment of Assistant Principal Officers to each Division and assignment of additional Garda Staff to resource and manage the Business Services Functional Area has resulted in a standardisation of organisational processes while strengthening governance in the area of public expenditure and operations via the Performance Assurance Functional Area.

I am confident the full implementation of the Operating Model in 2024 within An Garda Síochána will greatly enhance and strengthen the nature and quality of the Garda Service provided to local communities by enabling specialisation within Garda Divisions in the area of local crime, serious / organised criminality and community-focused policing.

Thank you, my team and I are happy to take any questions.