

Chair, Committee Members,

Thank you for the invite to meet with you this evening.

Arson is a very serious crime. Not only can it destroy public or private property, but there is a significant danger of loss of life.

For this reason, arson carries a penalty, following conviction on indictment, of up to life imprisonment.

As such, An Garda Síochána takes every arson or attempted arson attack seriously.

This been the case with the arson attacks on International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) centres or property rumoured to become IPAS centres or property housing refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine.

In each incident, a Senior Investigation Officer is appointed, an investigation team of detectives is formed, and an incident room created. Technical examinations are undertaken and evidence gathered.

As would be standard practice when similar crimes occur in different parts of the country, there is national, regional and local co-ordination between investigative teams.

At national level, the Special Detective Unit (SDU), which is responsible for the investigation of threats to national security, is examining all these incidents, along with national intelligence, to determine if there any commonality in terms of modus operandi and/or individuals.

At the moment, there is nothing to suggest there is an overarching conspiracy involved in these attacks, but we will continue to keep an open mind on this based on the evidence.

By their nature, arson attacks are difficult to investigate as evidence can often literally be burnt to cinders. At times, particularly if a property is in an isolated area, there is no CCTV footage.

The extent and complexity of these investigations is illustrated by our on-going investigation into the arson attack on a property at Roscahill, Co Galway. This has seen an ongoing technical examination of a number of mobile phones, 330 investigative tasks being conducted, and 250 statements taken.

Despite these challenges, to date we have made a number of arrests for arson attacks or for criminal damage on IPAS or rumoured IPAS locations.

This includes:

- Five people arrested in respect of the investigation into criminal damage by fire and public order incidents on Sandwith Street on the 12th May 2023 and a

file is currently with the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP).

- Two people persons arrested and charged before the District Court in Kerry by Gardaí investigating alleged criminal damage to a residential building in Killarney on the 1st January 2024. At this location, a can of accelerant was found on the property.
- Three people arrested by Gardaí investigating criminal damage by fire to a building in Irishtown on the 31st December 2023 and a file is being prepared for the DPP.
- A person arrested and charged relating to criminal damage and burglary at a property in Ballybrack in August 2023. A file is currently being prepared for the DPP relating to an arson attack at the same property a day after the criminal damage and burglary.

In several other incidents, investigative files have been sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions for decision or are due to be submitted shortly.

Criminal investigations are also ongoing into a large number of different potential criminal incidents including activities at public gatherings, and potential harassment at public facilities including libraries, and online incitement.

It should also be stated that not all incidents that are initially publically reported to be arson attacks turn out to be the case.

For example, a commercial property in Dublin that was widely reported to have been subject to an arson attack during the serious public order incident in November 2023 was not subject to arson, but criminal damage, which is under investigation.

We have also seen a significant amount of mis and dis-information circulating in relation to properties that are rumoured to become IPAS centres.

An Garda Síochána is liaising with IPAS at local and national level around this issue.

In most cases, those rumours turn out not to be true. Several properties have been targeted that weren't planned to be IPAS centres at all.

We informed local protestors and communities of this, but this did not dissuade some people from continuing their protests.

This meant that Garda resources that could have been deployed in preventing and tackling local crime was diverted to patrolling around these locations.

Even more concerning, are the incidents of mis and dis-information that have directly caused safety concerns for local people.

For instance, a leaflet circulated in a local area by a so-called community group that had a photo of a house that it claimed was going to become an IPAS centre. This

property was actually a private residence with a family living in it. We liaised with the family and provided them with security advice.

An Garda Síochána would once again urge local communities or individuals who want clarity on what is happening in their local area to talk to their local Gardaí or public representatives or civic society representatives rather than listen to rumour.

The vast majority of protests at these locations have been peaceful, but not all. Just last week in Celbridge, for instance, Gardaí were verbally abused and had fireworks aimed at them. This is now subject of a criminal investigation.

During 2023, 45 arrests were made by An Garda Síochána related to potential illegal activity at anti-migration protests in the Dublin area, alone.

To date in 2024, 11 arrests have been made in the DMR relating to potential illegal activity at anti-migration protests.

Our extensive investigation into the serious public disorder incidents in Dublin city centre on 23 November 2023 continues. To date, we have arrested 37 individuals for offences such as arson, violent disorder and thefts.

We are currently reviewing over 20,000 hours of footage from 140 different CCTV feeds and we expect to make further arrests.

Our investigation into those who allegedly incited such shocking and disgraceful criminal action via social media also continues.

I would also like to take this time to say that the victims of the terrible knife attack and their families remain in our thoughts.

To conclude.

This country has been fortunate so far that we have not suffered a death or deaths as a result of these arson attacks.

We remain determined to bring the perpetrators of these highly dangerous and violent criminal acts to justice.

An Garda Síochána considers any suggestion in respect of the threat to use violence and/or perpetration of violence or intimidation in any general sense or against individuals or organisations or property as a matter of serious concern that will be investigated.

An Garda Síochána continues to appeal to any person who may have any information on any criminal activity, including arson attacks, to contact their local Garda station or the Garda Confidential Line 1800 666 111.

Thank you.