

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM DHLÍ AGUS CEART AGUS COMHIONANNAS

JOINT COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Dé Céadaoin, 18 Meán Fómhair 2019

Wednesday, 18 September 2019

The Joint Committee met at 9 a.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Colm Brophy,	Lorraine Clifford-Lee,
Jack Chambers,	Martin Conway,
Catherine Connolly,	Niall Ó Donnghaile.
Peter Fitzpatrick,	
Jim O'Callaghan,	
Thomas Pringle.	

I láthair / In attendance: Deputies Declan Breathnach, Mary Butler, Jackie Cahill, David Cullinane, Martin Kenny, Denis Naughten and Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire and Senators Colm Burke and Michael McDowell.

Teachta / Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Business of Joint Committee

Chairman: I remind members and myself that mobile phones should be switched off because they interfere with the recording equipment. No apologies were indicated to the Chair in advance of the meeting. I propose we go into private session to deal with housekeeping matters. Is that agreed? Agreed.

The joint committee went into private session at 9.05 a.m. and resumed in public session at 9.34 a.m.

Garda Reform and Related Issues: Discussion

Chairman: The purpose of the meeting is to meet the Garda Commissioner, Mr. Drew Harris, for an update on the Garda policing plan for 2019, the implementation of the Garda reform plan, new policing structures and miscellaneous issues that have arisen since the Commissioner was last before the committee in June. He is joined by Mr. John Twomey, deputy commissioner for policing and security, Mr. Michael Finn, assistant commissioner for the southeastern region, and Mr. Joseph Nugent, chief administrative officer. I extend a warm welcome to them and to their colleagues who are also present, including Mr. Andrew McLindon, director of communications, and Mr. John Keegan, superintendent of corporate services.

I will shortly invite the Commissioner to make his opening statement, which will be followed by a brief overhead presentation prepared for this meeting. I must first draw the attention of our witnesses to the situation in relation to privilege.

Witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the evidence they give to the committee. However, if they are directed by it to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

We have been joined by colleagues from both Houses. They are all very welcome. All Members should be aware that under the salient rulings of the Chair, they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official, either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I invite the Garda Commissioner to make his opening statement.

Mr. Drew Harris: I thank the Chairman and committee members for the invitation to meet them today.

An Garda Síochána's mission for the next three years is outlined in our strategy statement, Keeping People Safe, which was published earlier this year. This is the guiding principle on which we base strategic and operational decisions. As guardians of the peace, keeping people safe and safeguarding human rights are central to what we do. Progress on our strategy statement is measured against the delivery of our annual policing plan. So far this year, we have met the majority of our policing plan targets. Many of these have had a direct impact on the com-

munity, such as the introduction of local protective service units to investigate crimes against the vulnerable, the continuing redeployment of Garda members from administrative roles to front-line duties, and an increase in roads policing detection of lifesaver offences. In addition, we have introduced a number of strategies in areas such as a human resources and ICT that will deliver better support for our people resulting in improved service provision.

A key central element of our strategy statement is a new operating model for An Garda Síochána. The operating model will introduce major changes to our structures and, more importantly for the public, it will provide more front-line gardaí, increased Garda visibility and a wider range of policing services in their local area. Ireland is changing and with this crime is changing. However, the reality is that despite the very great efforts of all of my staff our own burdensome structures are holding them back from providing the best possible policing service. This is supported by the Garda Inspectorate, which stated in its 2015 Changing Policing in Ireland report that fundamental structural change will enable the Garda Síochána to respond with increased visibility and effectiveness to the needs of society today and in the future. In addition, the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland stated divisions should be large enough to be self-sufficient for all routine administrative and operational purposes. The Policing Authority has welcomed the new model, stating that when implemented, it should result in an increase in Garda resources and greater autonomy at divisional level, which will make it possible to better respond to the specific needs of the local community.

The new operating model will see larger divisions with more resources available to the chief superintendents leading them. A key focus of these divisions will be on community policing, with between 50% and 60% of all resources in each division devoted to this area. As we have done in the four divisions where we piloted this model, community policing teams will be introduced that are dedicated to working with communities and other stakeholders to identify and tackle problem crimes in their area. This should result in different agencies and non-governmental organisations, NGOs, working with us to break cycles of anti-social behaviour, drug dealing, and violence that can blight communities and the lives of individuals. I believe this approach meets key recommendations from this committee's report on community policing and rural crime from earlier this year. It will mean a local policing service based on local needs. The public wants to see more gardaí visible on the streets and so do I. Our new operating model will help achieve this.

The model, along with long-needed investment in information and communications technology, ICT, such as our mobility app, will reduce the amount of time gardaí have to spend in stations, time that they will spend out on the ground, on patrol instead. We will receive a net increase of 800 Garda members under our recruitment programme between now and 2021. This, combined with a further 1000 gardaí released to front-line duties, will make a positive impact on the policing service we deliver. Increased visibility in local communities will help provide reassurance that there is a strong policing presence, in line with a key recommendation of this committee.

Chief superintendents and superintendents will be empowered to make decisions on how policing is best delivered within their divisions. This has been something that they have been wanting for quite some time. This has been portrayed in some quarters as creating 19 mini-police services, but this will not be the case, nor is it my intention. Local divisional officers - chief superintendents - will have the ability to make many more decisions of their own on how to police their area, but, in doing so, they will be subject to oversight at a regional and national level, and must operate within our corporate framework. That way we will have consistency

of delivery of service across the country, something we are aiming to be sure of in our service delivery.

I also note some of the commentary that Garda members, particularly superintendents will inevitably be pulled into wherever the divisional headquarters are placed. That will not be the case and it is certainly not our intention. While there may be some centralisation, largely of administrative resources, at the divisional headquarters, I am resolute that as many as possible superintendents will be in key locations throughout a division. This has been achieved in the divisions that piloted the model.

In addition, specific administrative support and the introduction of the superintendent for performance assurance will remove a major bureaucratic burden from the community engagement superintendents, which they have sought for a long time. As a result, the superintendents for community engagement will be freed up to get out from behind their desks and interact with their communities. Communities have seen an increase in sergeants and inspectors and this will continue. This will not only be of benefit to communities, but also to gardaí. A key request from our cultural audit was for more supervision. Additional sergeants and inspectors will provide much-needed supervision, mentoring and guidance.

At a time the reporting of sexual and domestic violence is increasing, when many crimes have a digital element, and when financial frauds are increasingly complex, it is not sustainable to rely solely on our national units to investigate all such crimes. Our new operating model will enhance the investigation of crime through the delivery of a greater range of specialised services in local areas such as the investigation of sexual crime, domestic violence, cybercrime, and economic crime. Each division will be provided with a detective superintendent who, along with trained investigators in specialist areas, will be responsible for local crime investigation. Complex or highly technical crimes will generally be dealt with at national level. This widening of specialist services at local level will be supported by the introduction of an investigation management system, which will make it easier for those supervising investigations to oversee their progress but also for us as an organisation to understand the investigative demand that is placed on us as a whole. This will have a number of benefits for victims. In general, it should see their crime investigated more quickly and, particularly in the case of specialist crimes, by investigators well trained in that area. More investigations being conducted locally, coupled with the investigation management system, should also mean information about the progress of the investigation is more readily available.

Our new operating model is in line with best international practice, is based on extensive consultation with our own people, has been recommended by both the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland and the Garda Inspectorate, and is supported by Government and the Policing Authority. It will deliver a community-based, community-focused police service, which was a central recommendation of this committee. An example of this commitment to community-focused policing is the recent permanent reallocation of Garda members to one or two-member stations in areas such as Emly and Toomevara in County Tipperary, and Ballyhale and Stoneyford in County Kilkenny. These stations have not had a Garda member attached to them for a number of years and although not regarded as closed, they were opened only intermittently. This is what we aim to do, increase our commitment to community policing in rural communities. This is in addition to the six Garda stations to be reopened under the programme for Government.

We are also examining other options such as setting-up clinics in vacant stores in certain towns and villages but we are also using the An Post offices to set up in effect clinics where we

meet the community. Our strong connection with the communities we serve will not change. It is one of the key reasons why we have a trust level among the public of approximately 90%. The new operating model is being introduced under the Government's 'A Policing Service for the Future' plan. This year, a number of improvements have been introduced as part of that plan, including regional control rooms, the start of the roll-out of the investigation management system, more gardaí redeployed from administrative posts to front-line duties, and a range of measures to enhance our ability to deliver a human rights focused service.

Further benefits are to come before the end of the year include beginning with the roll-out of mobile phones for front-line officers, particularly those working in roads policing; starting the procurement for a new Garda uniform; accelerating our e-learning programmes, and further roll-out of new systems such as the investigation and management system, and the roster and duty management system. I recognise that change is never easy, but our operating model is necessary if An Garda Síochána is to meet the needs of the public for a community-focused police service that focuses its resources and energy on keeping the people of Ireland safe.

Chairman: I thank the Commissioner. Before we open the meeting to the floor, we will show the overhead slide presentation entitled 'An Garda Síochána - A Policing Service for the Future - Keeping People Safe'.

Mr. Michael Finn: To put this in context, as the Commissioner said, our mission statement sets out a strategy for the next three years from 2019 to 2021 and the four key pillars are keeping people safe, protecting communities, our national security and transforming the organisation. It is in that context that our operating model comes into play for the work we will do over the next three years to transform An Garda Síochána so that we can fulfil our mission of keeping people safe in their homes and communities.

Our policing plan sets out what we intend to do this year in delivering that service across the country. The Policing Authority has commented favourably on our progress to date in delivering all of the goals in the areas we set out. That is a good bill of health for 2019. The operating model involves improving our services, structures and processes with the goal of delivering a better service to the community and keeping people safe in their homes and communities. That means enhancing our community policing and the emphasis on what we are doing in the operating model is ensuring that we have more gardaí available for front-line policing across the organisation so that people feel safe in their homes and communities, with particular emphasis on the most vulnerable people in society. An example of that is setting up our protective services units that we will have in each division in the country.

It is important that we as an organisation adapt to the changing society. Crime and its nature are changing and the demography of communities is changing we have to be able to adapt to that policing environment. Our structures have not changed for almost the past hundred years since the organisation was set up. Given the investment that is taking place in An Garda Síochána, this is an appropriate time for us to examine our structures and to enhance and improve the service and how we deliver it.

The operating model is part of the 'Policing Service for the Future' report, which was recently commissioned by Ms Kathleen O'Toole and her committee, following extensive consultation around the country. There has been extensive consultation with the public, her colleagues, and stakeholders in terms of politicians and the public. That wide consultation will go a long way towards informing us about how we deliver the new operating model.

The operating model will deliver what we set out in our strategy in respect of enhancing community policing, protecting the public in terms of being at home or in their communities, and all this must be done within the human rights context. We want to make sure that our people are our greatest asset. They want to help us to transform the organisation and deliver a policing service, which we require for the public.

The next four slides put the operating model into context. We, in the Garda Síochána, are creating larger divisions so we can do more with our services. Inevitably, we want to deliver more and have more gardaí on the front line to deliver bespoke services to local communities. To do that, we need to enhance our national services and regional supports, and all of this is heading towards improving and providing a better performance across the organisation.

What will larger divisions mean? We are moving to larger divisions of between 600 and 800 personnel. That will mean divisional officers will have the capacity to deliver a wider range of policing services across the organisation, be that dealing with economic crime or dealing with vulnerable people in terms of the protective services unit. We are giving the divisions the capacity to deliver a local bespoke service that meets the needs of local communities, which is one of the major driving forces behind the local policing model.

We want to ensure that we have a sufficient number of gardaí to meet the demands of the local policing services. That is why we are moving from our district-based model, which was spread across 96 districts, to a new divisional model. Effectively, the number will decrease from 128 administrative units to 19 and, therefore, we will have more operational resources to deploy to front-line policing. Divisional officers, with larger numbers, will be able to provide a wider range of skills whether that is dealing with economic crime and cybercrime or dealing with protective services units. Divisional officers will have the autonomy to decide which policing service will be delivered locally provided they operate within our corporate framework thus ensuring there is consistency in how we deliver our services across the organisation.

There will be more front-line gardaí, which I will show on my next slide. I reiterate that we are recruiting more gardaí and garda staff, which will allow to redeploy more front-line gardaí. The fact that we have reduced our administrative hubs has, in the four areas where we are piloting this policing model, released more than 50 gardaí from administrative posts back to front-line policing. That is an example of how the operating model can change the Garda presence and service we provide to the public. Indeed, when one passes through the airports now, one will see that the gardaí have been released from that duty and the immigration service mans the booths at the airports.

Garda staff work in our control rooms. So far this year, 33 gardaí have been released to undertake front-line policing as a result of putting Garda staff into control rooms and we have another 31 gardaí lined for the end of the year. That means an initial 64 gardaí are now delivering front-line policing to communities. Our challenge is to make sure that when we release gardaí from operations to undertake front-line policing that it is the type of service local communities need to match the demands of the local areas in which they work. We are empowering the chief superintendents to say, "We will give you more gardaí and we will give more autonomy but it is up to you to match that to the demands of the local service". One can see from the figures on the slide that since 2017 we have brought more than 2,000 new members into the force. An additional 1,000 staff are ready. We have seen a reallocation because 480 Garda staff or members have been released to undertake front-line operational duties.

In the next part of the slide, it can be seen that an additional 1,500 Garda members will be

brought into the Garda college and more than 1,200 Garda staff over the next two years, which will result in more than 1,000 members being released to undertake front-line policing. This is, again, being done so that divisional officers can give a bespoke policing service to local communities and fulfil our mission to keep people safe in their local communities.

Enhancing the powers of local divisional officers and giving them more autonomy to deal with a greater range of services will allow our national services to focus on dealing with more complex and sensitive cases, which are high profile at times, whether that is international human trafficking or the work that is being done by the Garda drugs and organised crime unit. In the past few days, some great work has been done by the unit to bring people before the courts and taking assets from people who have been involved in crime.

Divisions will be the focus of how we deliver our service across the country, and by enabling our local divisional officers and divisions to do more locally with more services and resources then, at national level, we can concentrate on using our elite units to focus on delivering on the more complex, sensitive and high-profile crimes. One will be able to see that across the organisation. For example, we have more cybercrime facilities at local level because every criminal has a phone and we know that nowadays that is a central aspect in how people commit crimes and economic crimes. We need to have the capabilities both nationally and locally to deal with that challenge.

We can provide armed support units across the entire country. Indeed, we are expanding the service in the Border areas.

We have a new investigation management system so that our members can investigate crimes. They can upload to the system all of the work that they have done so their managers can readily see all of the work that is being done. The new system enables us to do our work faster and quicker.

I have given some examples of what we can do and provide. Ultimately, this is about how we can improve our performance across the organisation. As one can see from the slide, we are putting supports in place across the organisation. Since 2018, there have been an additional 172 inspectors and 422 sergeants to support our people who deliver front-line policing. At national level, we will appoint a deputy commissioner to lead our transformation programme and ensure that we improve our performance across the organisation both nationally and local levels. A superintendent will lead our performance and accountability in delivering the change programme across the organisation. From top to bottom, people will see greater accountability and a better focus on how we deliver services.

The next slide depicts the changes we can already see. We have begun the restructuring programme and reduced the number of regions from six to four. We have moved to streamline and flatten the organisation both at regional and divisional levels. At regional level, we have retained the strategic parts of the organisation, in terms of the Border region and the north west, and merged them to make one unit. The Dublin metropolitan region, DMR, is basically staying as it is. The eastern region encompasses all of Leinster and the area around the DMR, and that will be the new eastern region. The new southern region encompasses the existing region plus the Tipperary and Clare divisions. The structural changes have taken place at regional level.

The next slide shows the changes that are taking place at national level. We have reduced the number of divisions from 26 to 19. I have outlined the changes that are taking place in streamlining and enabling the divisional officers who will lead the new divisions that comprise

between 600 and 800 personnel. The divisional officers, therefore, will have a larger number of personnel who are capable of delivering a wider range of services across the entire organisation.

What will we see next? Changes have taken place in the regions through restructuring. We have demonstrated our commitment to moving to 19 new divisions. Over the next two to three years, one can see from the table the number of additional gardaí who will provide front-line policing, and the increased capabilities that we will have at local level to deliver a range of policing services locally. Ultimately, our model is about changing how we police and moving away from the district model to the new divisional model. The goal of the organisation, be it at regional or national level, is to support the bespoke delivery of front-line policing services with the additional resources that the commissioner has received as part of the Commission for the Future of Policing in Ireland. I have given a brief overview of the operating model and we will now take questions.

Chairman: I thank assistant commissioner Finn for his presentation. That concludes the opening presentation.

Before I open up the debate to members, I wish to make a few comments. While this is a work in progress, it is appropriate, as Chair, that I acknowledge that there is evidence of increased Garda footfall in communities across the country. That situation is in evidence in my own part of the country and elsewhere, which I have had reflected to me. Let the good work continue. I will now open the floor for questions. Many Members have indicated.

Senator Martin Conway: I welcome the Garda Commissioner and his team, Mr. John Twomey, Mr. Michael Finn and Mr. Joseph Nugent, as well as their colleagues. The Commissioner has just completed his first year in the job which I sincerely hope he is enjoying. He has taken the organisation in a professional direction and instilled confidence. The vast majority of the public are on his side and public confidence in the work he is doing is at an all-time high compared to his predecessors. That has to be welcomed. I hope he is enjoying the important work involved in his new role and the associated challenges.

It is commendable that Mr. Harris has introduced significant structural changes after less than 12 months. Most people welcome the proposed reduction in the numbers of senior managers, namely, chief superintendents and superintendents, and the increased numbers of officers on the ground, especially those involved in community policing. Also welcome is the assurance that gardaí are moving from administration tasks to do the work they were trained to do within communities. I would love to see that happen in other organisations. If the Commissioner is considering a career move, perhaps he could move to the HSE because that organisation seems to be moving in the opposite direction.

I agree with the Commissioner's comment that change is difficult and challenging. That is particularly the case within communities when they see change. I am the type of person who defends it when I believe it is being done for the right and appropriate reasons and the correct rationale behind it. I want to talk briefly about the changes the Commissioner is proposing to make in the mid-west and the joining of the divisions in counties Clare and Tipperary, in particular. We do not have the facility to display PowerPoint slides, but I want to show the Commissioner a picture of a bridge that is the only connection between counties Clare and Tipperary. It is small and we are considering investing in a new one. It connects Killaloe and Ballina. I highlight its position as the map to which the Commissioner referred did not reflect the waterway between the two counties.

Mr. Drew Harris: That is fine.

Senator Martin Conway: I would have thought counties Clare and Galway would have been a good fit. Looking at what the Commissioner is proposing for regional structures, the four regional divisions, I can understand why County Clare is included in the Munster region as opposed to Connacht. Counties Clare and Limerick, however, would certainly have been a better fit because many communities straddle the border and there is road connectivity between the two counties. I am open to being convinced that it is being done for the right reasons. I would like the Commissioner to tell me the rationale and thinking behind creating a division covering counties Clare and Tipperary.

Mr. Drew Harris: In starting this project I set out a number of design principles. They were drawn from my experience but also from international research and work done by the Garda Inspectorate and the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland. One of the design principles concerns what is a viable operational command structure for a chief superintendent to take on. We looked at the scale of the command structure and the work that would be associated with it. The Senator made a number of suggestions. We considered all of them. However, joining counties Clare and Limerick would have meant having a really lopsided model, given the scale of the command structure. We would have been creating a division that was considerably larger than the others.

In creating this model I set out to ensure chief superintendents would take responsibility for the local areas. I have freed up time for them by creating an administrative peer within a division. That frees them and the other superintendents to concentrate on police work. In addition, I have given them additional sergeants and inspectors. This is about chief superintendents being responsible for operational delivery, supported by the structure around them. I appreciate entirely that counties Clare and Tipperary are divided by a considerable waterway and that there is only one bridge. I see local delivery of operations on a day-to-day basis being undertaken by sergeants and inspectors, with superintendents overseeing that work and the chief superintendent having oversight of the entire division. That is our basic model for how we will deliver policing services.

All of these aspects involve an element of compromise. The compromises we have had to make in this case concern not only geography and the population numbers we could face but also the specific demands involved. That has driven some of the decision-making and some of the decisions may be contentious. However, in delivering this model across all of Ireland we have made the best fit in respect of what we want to see as our delivery model, namely, the divisional model. We have to try to fit it as best we can with geography and population. I appreciate the suggestions made by the Senator, but these models have been thought through. We considered that it was not sustainable to give one individual oversight of counties Limerick and Clare or counties Galway and Clare. It would be too large a command structure, too wide an expanse and place too many demands on the officer concerned.

Chairman: The assistant commissioner, Mr. Finn, wishes to come in.

Mr. Michael Finn: We did take cognizance of the fact that counties Clare and Limerick had a unique and close working relationship. We moved County Clare from the western region into the southern region in order that counties Clare, Tipperary and Limerick would be all part of the new region. Therefore, we have recognised and addressed the issues raised.

Senator Martin Conway: That is fine and I appreciate it. I did not make my comments

lightly. I respect the fact that much consideration has been put into this model. However, there is one major issue that is concerning the people of County Clare. We have to remember that it is unique. We have an international airport at Shannon where there is an ongoing security threat as a result of the use of the airport for refuelling and stopovers by the United States military. There is a constant Garda presence. Many of the Commissioner's colleagues were based in County Clare in the last three or four months when President Trump and Vice President Pence passed through the airport. We also have the second busiest tourist attraction in the country, the Cliffs of Moher which are visited by more than 1.5 million people every year. Hundreds of thousands more visit tourist destinations in the rest of the county. People could live with the new structure, but the single biggest concern is that the divisional headquarters is being moved from County Clare to County Tipperary. It is an open and shut case that the divisional headquarters should be located in Ennis because of the international airport at Shannon and given the significant tourist numbers with which we are dealing in County Clare. We only have to look at the profile of police activity in the county in the last six months to see that that is the case. This issue is of such concern to the people of County Clare and their representatives that a special meeting of the local authority, Clare County Council, will take place next Monday to discuss it. I am seeking an assurance from the Commissioner that the divisional headquarters in the Clare and Tipperary division will be located in Ennis.

Mr. Drew Harris: I thank the Senator for his representations. I want to give some assurance about how we see the Clare and Tipperary division. We have yet to come to a final determination on where we will have the divisional headquarters, but I have listened carefully to the representations made in that respect. Wherever the headquarters is located, I am absolutely determined to ensure the superintendents, particularly those who are community focused, will be dispersed geographically. As far as is possible I will also be asking for the detective superintendents to be dispersed. The chief superintendent will not be sitting in a corridor with the four superintendents in the next offices. They need to be dispersed.

Second, when deciding on the command structure of any of these divisions, we take local characteristics into account. We take account of critical infrastructure such as airports, the crime profile, the population profile, major events and the tourism profile. Those things are all under consideration. I note the increase in supervision which we have had already in the form of sergeants and inspectors. Supervision will be increased further as we appoint a further 150 sergeants and 75 inspectors. We will have plenty of supervision and command on the ground, including operational command and tactical command. We will also have additional numbers. We have described those already. I refer to the increase in the overall size of the organisation, as is evident today. Including Garda members and Garda staff, we are larger than we have ever been. Our numbers are set to increase further. I am also determined to ensure that we maximise our overall impact, including community policing, the work of the divisions and the work of national units. A lot more will happen over the next two years. I hope that reassures local communities about our presence, our command and control of these various situations, and our ability to respond to events such as a presidential visit.

Senator Martin Conway: I thank the Commissioner. I wish to make a suggestion to him that I have spoken about previously and that he has been agreeable to. It would be very useful if in the near future he could attend a meeting of the Clare joint policing committee to go into detail on his thoughts and observations in this regard and listen to the concerns of its members.

Chairman: I am sure the Commissioner will note the request.

Senator Martin Conway: I have a couple of other questions.

Chairman: I note, not just for the benefit of the Senator but for all members, that there is a significant turnout today. I ask everyone to be cognisant of that.

Senator Martin Conway: I will not take too long. The last time the Commissioner was here we spoke about the Majella Moynihan case. I know he has engaged with that. He advised that An Garda is carrying out an overall review of historical cases. I would like a quick update on those historical cases. Has the Commissioner identified areas in which An Garda Síochána needs to issue apologies to people who were wronged by the force?

Mr. Drew Harris: It has to be appreciated that these records were converted to microfiche. We are still carrying out our searches of them. At the moment we can find no other cases where a disciplinary process was entered into. That particular case seems to be the only one in which a disciplinary process was initiated. There have certainly been comments about unmarried female members of An Garda Síochána becoming pregnant, but there does not seem to be any follow-through in the form of a disciplinary process.

Senator Martin Conway: That is fine. Finally I wish to ask the Commissioner if he is preparing for a no-deal Brexit. Has he identified a need for extra resources in the Border areas? Is he preparing for Border patrols? Does he expect that there will be Border posts in the North? I would like to get his thoughts on that very serious issue which is only a few weeks away.

Mr. Drew Harris: This is a very serious issue. As yet, like everyone else, I do not know what Brexit we will get and therefore what its ramifications will be. I have always spoken about three elements; organised crime, the threat of dissident republican groups, and the impact on local communities. We have drawn up our own planning for this. We are working closely with the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Next week we will have our annual joint agency task force meeting, at which we set out the agenda for dealing with organised crime, including organised crime against Revenue, for the year ahead. We have also focused on rural crime, including plant theft etc., over the past year. We have had many successes around drugs and have assisted other agencies in respect of Revenue fraud and evasion and the theft of plant.

In respect of the threat from dissident groups, regrettably we have already seen six national security attacks, as they are termed, in Northern Ireland this year. We have had to cope with dealing with that demand by supporting our colleagues in the Police Service of Northern Ireland and conducting our own investigative effort against these groups. There has already been an uptick in demand there. That has placed a strain on the organisation, but we are prepared for that and are working hard to thwart those threats.

Last, we have increased numbers in the Border area. We want to make further investments in the armed support unit, particularly in Cavan. That is under way. Moreover, through the new operating model we will start to enhance our community policing in the Border area further. We are in an advanced state of planning and preparation for October and what it will mean in the short and medium term for us, for policing in the whole of the island of Ireland, and for our work with the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Senator Martin Conway: Is the Commissioner expecting violence if there is a no-deal Brexit and a Border is imposed?

Mr. Drew Harris: I will not speculate on what the Border infrastructure will be. I am responsible for providing a policing service to protect society and other agencies within society. We operate against the threat of smuggling and other organised crime using an intelligence-

based response. That is about focused operations. That is where I envisage this developing: working with partner agencies, supporting them and developing intelligence and specific operations and investigations.

Deputy Jim O’Callaghan: I thank the Commissioner and his team for coming. It is important to state at the outset that the political system called for a lot of reports into Garda reform. Most of us supported the recommendations. One of the main recommendations was structural reform. I wish to recognise that. On this side of the table we must be consistent in what we look for and acknowledge when it is delivered. Am I correct in stating that the primary purpose of these reforms is to get more gardaí out on the street?

Mr. Drew Harris: Yes, in that I want to make sure that the resources I have are directed towards operational delivery as much as possible. I want to maximise operational delivery, not just at the local level but also at the national level. Another very important goal is to invert the thinking in the organisation. The primary means by which we will deliver the policing function is through these divisions. The regional units, the national units and the headquarters units are all acting in support. We are effectively localising our policing as opposed to bringing it back to headquarters all the time. I want the divisional officers and their gardaí to feel able to make decisions at a local level and to ask for support when they need to.

Deputy Jim O’Callaghan: Does the Commissioner think there will be a public benefit of the reduction of divisions in the form of gardaí on the street?

Mr. Drew Harris: We are a growing organisation. If there were no structural changes, we would still have additional staff. However, we are moving from 124 administrative units to 19. We have also changed our divisions. Personnel will be freed up as a result. Some of those will be administrative personnel. We want to see how we can use them so that they can free gardaí for front-line duties. There are other roles such staff can take on. The focus has been on organisational support. Now we need to move into an arena where we will use Garda staff to provide operational support. It can be provided in carrying out such tasks as engaging in front-line duties, something we have already done in respect of command and control structures and the CCTV suites. There are a number of other areas where we can employ staff to displace Garda members.

Deputy Jim O’Callaghan: I note that there are no changes proposed in Dublin city and country and the cities of Limerick and Cork. Do I take it that these cities will not gain the benefits of the reforms? Why have no changes been proposed?

Mr. Drew Harris: The new divisional structure will apply to all 19 divisions. In effect, all divisions will have a corporate structure, part of which will be administrative functions. All divisions will receive administrative support. All of them will have a superintendent for governance assurance in dealing with all issues surrounding risk management, industrial relations and human resources processes, as well as disciplinary processes. In effect, we are taking administration tasks from other superintendents, namely, detective superintendents and communications superintendents in order that they can engage primarily in police work.

Deputy Jim O’Callaghan: Is it the intention of the force to try to have more Garda officers on the ground, for instance, in the cities of Dublin, Cork and Limerick?

Mr. Drew Harris: Yes, very much so. It will be delivered not only by numbers but also by rostering arrangements. Tomorrow when we meet as a senior leadership team, we want to sign

off on the management position for roster reform. It is important that we have rosters which reflect demand. It is important that we have the right people in the right place and at the right time.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: One of the concerns politicians across the board have is that as a result of the merger of divisions, the former divisional headquarters which will no longer exist and that the process will involve a downgrading of that station. Is there any substance to that concern?

Mr. Drew Harris: Some stations may no longer have a chief superintendent. In fact, there will be eight fewer chief superintendents engaged in divisional policing. What I point to, however, is that superintendents will be dispersed throughout the divisions. Where we are taking out a superintendent, the post will be replaced by an inspector post. There will be additional inspectors and sergeants to ensure the community will know that there will be somebody to whom they can go and in whom they can put their trust in terms of delivery. What has been fed back to the management structure is that the relationship with the chief superintendent is very important. However, people also want to see the presence of a blue shirt on the ground. They want to be able to build a longer term relationship with a sergeant or inspector. That is very effective.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: When Mr. Harris refers to the presence of a blue shirt on the ground, he is referring to members of An Garda Síochána?

Mr. Drew Harris: Yes

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: Let me take the example of Donegal and Sligo-Leitrim. What decision has been made on where the divisional headquarters will be located and what impact will it have on the station that has missed out and will no longer be the divisional headquarters?

Mr. Drew Harris: In some ways the impact on the station is neither here nor there. The impact on the public is minimal.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: It may have an impact in terms of-----

Mr. Drew Harris: It will free up some space.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: Will the service provided for the public improve?

Mr. Drew Harris: The service provided for the public will improve because we are freeing ourselves from administration tasks. A lot of this is not just about the lines on the map but our policing processes. Next year we will take out wasteful and duplicated work in communications within the organisation. That will also free up time. The ethos within the organisation is based on decisions being made appropriately at a local level such that there is an understanding of what is the responsibility of a division, we are clear on what our processes are and where responsibility and accountability lie. Not only the chief superintendent but also his or her staff will have a better awareness of for what they are responsible and for what they can be held accountable. Therefore, they will be aware of what decisions they can make. A lot of stuff floats up through the organisation and sent upwards. When I say people are autonomous, they are autonomous in terms of operational delivery in their area and making the best choices against the local policing plan. I think there will be an improvement as has been shown in other jurisdictions where this model has been applied.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: In terms of consultation, obviously, there is concern emanat-

ing from superintendents and chief superintendents. Is Mr. Harris consulting them on their concerns?

Mr. Drew Harris: Yes, very much so. The real work starts now. We have been talking about this issue. Let us go right back to 2014 and the initial Garda Inspectorate's report and the commission's report of a year ago. The Government adopted it to have a policing service for the future. All of this has been well trailed. We have talked about it at commissioners' conferences and the associations' annual general meetings. We are at a point where we are working through the implementation process but also the changes we have to make to process. The superintendents and chief superintendents with other ranks are essential in its successful implementation. In effect, in some ways, the lines on the map are the easier piece, the more difficult piece is we are taking out an administrative layer in districts. We have to replace it with a process which is more sleek and streamlined to have decisions made faster.

Mr. Michael Finn: In the context of engaging with An Garda Síochána, I think the new service will make it easier because we are centralising all administration tasks and supports. Rather than having to write to different districts to find out who the best person is to deal with a query, in the four pilot areas where we are running the new service we have put staff in place centrally in order that if one wants to contact An Garda Síochána in the particular area, one writes to one location and the matter will be dealt with from there. From the public's perspective, it should be a lot more efficient.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: A number of my colleagues who are Deputies in Border constituencies are very concerned about the threat posed and uncertainty caused by Brexit. In reducing the number of divisions covering the Border region from four to two is the Commissioner concerned that it may have an impact? What does he believe is the current capacity of An Garda Síochána to deal with a hard Brexit? Is An Garda Síochána ready for it?

Mr. Drew Harris: We will want to be certain about implementation, the processes and so on before we go to the Border divisions. There is enough happening in them without telling them that on 1 November there will also be structural change. We will hold off on making changes in the Border divisions until we have some certainty on what the position on Brexit is likely to be.

We have our plans to deal with a Brexit scenario. We have been in consultation with the Department of Justice and Equality on some of the legal issues that will open up. Obviously, many of the EU treaties used in dealing with organised crime issues will fall away. I am referring to such things as tracing financial assets, for instance, because the United Kingdom is leaving those arrangements. We will still obviously have full use of them with our European partners, for example, the European arrest warrant. We will, however, have to fall back on a far more complex process rather than the European arrest warrant, but, overall, we are ready. We have, in effect, been thinking about this matter for two years and building up resources in the Border area during that time. In November we will have a further passing out parade. That will allow us to further supplement some of Border county divisions. We have also built up our resources in the armed support unit. We have about a further 30 members who are trained and ready. We are looking towards the introduction of an armed support unit in Cavan to reduce response times in the Border area. We are also looking to the national units. We have to think about the economic crime bureau and also if we need to allocate further resources in dealing with the confiscation of assets. We have been through a big training programme on asset confiscation, in which each division will have specific members trained. There has been a big uplift in our capability and there is more to come. A lot of it is in the context of the overall policing of Ireland, but we are aware of the challenges Brexit may bring.

Deputy Jim O’Callaghan: I thank the Commissioner and the Chairman.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: I thank the Commissioner, Mr. Drew Harris and his colleagues for coming before us today. I wish to raise the issue of the reopening of Rush Garda station, which was announced two and a half years ago, following a review of the closure of Garda stations by the previous Government. It was one of a number of Garda stations where the proposed reopening was announced two and a half years ago. I have been raising the issue constantly at this committee and in the Seanad because for a long time there was no progress in respect of the actual reopening of the station and there was no information on it coming through to the local community.

Rush, north County Dublin has a population of more than 10,000 people and is located in the fastest growing part of the country. Dublin Airport is not far from Rush and the M1 motorway adjoins it. It was eventually announced that the Garda station would need to be refurbished substantially before it could be opened. This refurbishment has been ongoing throughout the summer and in July I wrote to the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Minister of State with responsibility for the OPW to see when the work of refurbishment would be finished and the station would open. I was told by the Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Kevin Boxer Moran that it would be handed to An Garda Síochána at the end of September. Has Mr. Harris had any correspondence from the OPW on the handover of the station at the end of September?

Mr. Drew Harris: I will ask my colleague, Mr. Joseph Nugent to answer that question.

Mr. Joseph Nugent: I am not aware of any correspondence on that. I know the works are close to completion. I am always nervous about making commitments about builder completion times on the back of what has happened in the past, but I am assured that it will be completed, handed over and in place by the end of the third quarter. We are in that same ballpark, so I do not anticipate any significant delays around that issue. The building work is almost complete but at this stage I do not have a formal date and I would be uncomfortable giving the Senator a date today.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: It is now 18 September. Would it be unusual that the Garda Síochána has not received any correspondence, so that it can forward plan the staffing arrangement?

Mr. Joseph Nugent: No, I do not believe so. I do not think there is anything unusual or difficult around this. The matter is proceeding normally with the OPW. The builders will conclude the works and it will be handed over by the OPW. I am not aware of any problems around a delay in the opening of the station, but I do not want to set the expectations of people in north County Dublin that the station will open on a particular date and then there is some building issue that needs to be resolved. When the Garda station is handed over, there is still some work for us to do. We need to put in some ICT and furniture and so on. I am happy to revert to the committee or to the Senator after having double checked the dates.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: Is it the case that as far as Mr. Nugent is concerned it is on schedule to be handed over to the Garda Síochána at the end of September?

The handing over of the Garda station is one thing but as Mr. Nugent said he will have to equip the Garda station. The people in Rush are very concerned about the staffing level in the station. It is one thing opening a building but we need extra gardaí to staff it and the people in

Rush and the surrounding areas are worried that gardaí will be taken from existing Garda stations and put into Rush Garda station, so that there will be an overall decrease in the number of Garda out on the street.

Has the Commissioner considered the allocation of extra Garda resources to the Garda station when it does reopen?

Mr. Drew Harris: Yes, we have and we have engaged a party of one and five, that is one sergeant and five members for Rush Garda station and those arrangements are in place.

As the Senator's question states, the divisional officers also asked for a supplement of one and five to backfill.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: Will that one and five be extra gardaí in addition to the number already there?

Mr. Drew Harris: I have to look at that in terms of the full request for resources, particularly when I look towards the November passing out parade and as we free up resources as well. I am receptive to that, but I cannot give an assurance today. Perhaps I can write to the committee secretariat and give the fixed position on that because the decision has not yet been made, however the number of one and five has been identified.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: There is a substantial population in Rush and in the surrounding areas and much of the housing needs of Dublin is actually being facilitated in north County Dublin, so the population is rapidly expanding. We need extra Garda resources.

Mr. Drew Harris: That case has been made and it is very clear from the expansion of the supply of housing that the population will expand. We are very mindful of that when we are assigning Garda members and Garda staff. That is a very important element in making those decisions.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: What is the date of the passing out parade in November?

Mr. Drew Harris: It is on the last Friday in November.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: That is 29 November.

Mr. Drew Harris: It is on Friday, 29 November.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: I thank Mr. Harris.

Chairman: I thank Senator Clifford-Lee and Commissioner Harris. I invite Deputy Colm Brophy to contribute.

Deputy Colm Brophy: I thank the Chairman. May I say at the outset that it is wonderful at the end of Mr. Harris's first year as Commissioner to be meeting him and having such a positive engagement with An Garda Síochána? I acknowledge as the Chairman did at the start of the meeting today, that since I became a member of the Oireachtas committee on Justice and Equality, we have had so many engagements with Mr. Harris's predecessors and with An Garda Síochána that were caught up in the controversies of the day. To be attending a meeting that is discussing positive things such as redeployment of Garda, structural change, looking at the future and also to do that against the backdrop of a policing authority report coming out, acknowledging not just the success rate of the implementation of that change and the hitting of

targets but also recognising that there is through the current leadership team a dynamic element to that change and I want to see that. It is incredibly positive.

I wish to drill down on a number of issues. There are pilot schemes and they have been obviously successful. Can Mr. Harris give us a brief outline of how the public would see the difference between the service that was being delivered in the past and the service that is now being delivered? Obviously that gives us the best feel of what the public will eventually hopefully see on a national basis?

May I clarify something on the divisional regional structural change and the worry that might exist around divisional command stations. My understanding of what the Commissioner is trying to do is to effectively enhance the delivery and the quality of all stations throughout the new divisional regional structure so that there is a much more equal spread of ability to deliver both localised policing and directly implement those decisions so that it is not really a loss but an enhancement across an entire area. I am interested in an update on ICT and where we are on that. It has been a bugbear for quite a while and I would be very interested to hear about the funding that the Government has provided.

I know that when there is structural change there always are reservations and it is vitally important not only to bring the people to whom you provide the service, which is the public but also the members and staff of the Garda Síochána with you. I would be interested to learn about the experience of the officers in those pilot programmes, and whether the officers think it is a better structure to work within. One of the things in terms of the consultation process that I know was shown up very clearly was the level of dissatisfaction within the membership of An Garda Síochána in the very top down non-consultative, non involvement way in which the previous structure worked. I would be interested to see how that has played out.

Again in the context of this terrific redeployment to the front line, Mr. Harris answered one of my colleagues by saying that it was obviously to deliver better services. Are the witnesses talking about community policing still being at the heart of the process? That is really part of what the reform programme is about, and it should be the end goal of every structural change and every method that has been introduced to make change. In that context, perhaps the witnesses will talk about the fact that An Garda Síochána has met its targets for quarter 1 and quarter 2 for the 500 plus redeployment of gardaí. Where have they gone, primarily? What types of roles are those gardaí filling and are they touching directly in the area of community policing? In general, I believe that what has happened so far within a 12 month period has been a terrific success story.

Mr. Drew Harris: I will ask my colleague, Mr. Finn, to refer to the pilot areas and the experience of that over the past two years.

Mr. Michael Finn: We have four pilot areas in Cork city, Galway, Mayo and Dublin South Central. This local policing model only started officially in the first quarter of this year but we have been planning for it over a two year period. There has been wide consultation on the local policing model and how it is going to be delivered at local level. On the initial impact, we have had only one quarter where we have had it fully operational, even though we have been ramping it up since last year. The impact locally has been very positive. This is primarily because we have been able to take the savings we achieved as result of centralising our administration and civilisation programme - where we put civilian staff into the control rooms - which allowed us to put gardaí back out onto the front line policing the State. Immediately there is a win for the public because we are able to beef up community policing teams. That is one example in

an urban centre. Divisions such as Galway or Mayo, for example, would have the benefit of allowing more gardaí to go back into some rural stations. That is the emphasis in places such as Galway. From talking with Chief Superintendent Tom Curley I am aware that this is what he is trying to achieve initially. During the period of austerity we took a lot of resources out from those smaller rural areas and sucked them into the centre, effectively to keep our 24-7 services going. Now the chief superintendent in the Galway division is able to put gardaí into those smaller, rural stations and increase our footprint. That is where we are getting bang for our buck in the impact of our operating model and changing our structures.

With regard to the public, it is now easier for people to engage with us. In the past a person might have had to write to three or four different superintendents to get an answer to a question. Now a person may write to divisional HQ, which will look after all of the administration. We have taken the administration away from the superintendents and we have also taken away a lot of the work they may have done in the past such as going to court or having to investigate complaints, which was taking perhaps 30% or 40% of their time. We have taken that away from superintendents so they can spend more time out there engaging with their communities, and understanding what needs to be done for delivering that policing service locally.

These are some of the benefits we have seen in the four pilot areas where we ran the local policing model, which is one part of the overall operating model we are bringing about. While the local policing model and structural changes are the very public dimension of the reform a lot of it is about streamlining our back office services and trying to reduce the administration, right from the top of the organisation down to the bottom. It is about freeing up local gardaí so they can be deployed back out into front-line policing. Another example is the airports. If one goes through Dublin Airport now one will not see gardaí manning the booths like we had in the past. The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service does that now. Those resources can now be deployed back to increasing our drugs and organised crime units right across the State. The feedback has been very positive so far.

Deputy Colm Brophy: That is the public element of the feedback, which is vital, but I also want the witnesses to tell us about the whole area of reservations, which we have heard about. It is justifiable for people who are working in a job to have reservations about change. How have the officers and civilian staff been deployed within those models? Do the representatives have any feedback yet on the officers and civilian staff reaction to these new structures? Are they finding it to be a better way of policing and delivering policing? Are they finding their working environment is better? What is the feedback so far on that?

Mr. Michael Finn: The superintendents are already seeing the benefits of not having to be tied up on daily administration, not having to go to court and not having to investigate complaints, which was probably a big bugbear for them as it was taking a lot of their time away. They can go back to community engagement. The feedback we have had from superintendents so far has been very positive. Are they achieving the full benefit of it yet? Not exactly; not until the investigations they currently have in their in-trays are washed out. Then they will see even more benefits from the reform. As they go along they will see the richness of it, plus the fact that we have taken a lot of simple administrative tasks away from them. As that begins to progress and we expand it across the country then all boats will be lifted by reducing that administrative burden and the amount of time that is tied up in that work. This is really where one can see the benefit. Our own Garda staff who do the back-office support can see that they are building their teams and their teams are becoming more experienced and more efficient as this gets rolled out. There is also the learning we acquired from having piloted the model in four

areas, which can be taken to the other divisions so they will not have to go through the same pain of trying to implement new processes and new procedures. We will be able to ramp up the speed at which we can deliver the model across the State, using the learning from the first pilot areas moves on. The feedback so far has been positive internally and from the community.

Mr. Drew Harris: I will touch on some of the other matters. Where we have replaced a Garda member with a staff member, by and large that garda has stayed in his or her local area and has started to deliver policing. We have already outlined some of the impact of that such as being able to supplement the response units and the 24-7 units. We have also been able to re-staff stations that we had retained but within which our presence had not been retained, with only a nominated member or a couple of members assigned to the station. That has been a big advance. This also applies to our other community policing teams in the cities. Some of those redeployments have been in headquarters where perhaps a superintendent, inspector or sergeant had held a role and once they finished in that role had moved on, and they were then replaced by a staff member. In effect that prevented somebody else being brought in. We are keeping a focus on operational delivery by sworn members of the organisation. We see this as a positive. The next step will be different because we will be identifying roles currently being undertaken by members, which will have a more direct impact with the public. I refer to the front desk type role. We have a lot of resources tied in to providing front desk services and 24-7 services in lots of areas, and in maintaining that using Garda staff members. Again, this would release sworn Garda members for patrol duties. The focus is very much on community policing.

It must be said about An Garda Síochána that it has a strong community focus and there are very fine people working in the organisation. They have asked for many of the reforms we are now putting in place. We can see this through the cultural audit. They want to be freed up from bureaucracy and they want to get out there to provide the service to their local communities. There is a great attachment between the service they provide and the local communities. We want to make sure that this is not eroded and that it is enhanced.

There is a 90% confidence rating in the organisation, which is very significant. Regrettably, the senior leadership team is languishing at around 42% to 45%. We have a lot of work to do to make sure the public can see that we are leading an organisation and making sure we are providing all the supports we can to personnel on the front line, whatever it might be. It might be community policing and it can be the national units and specialist detective work. We are also a national police service and we have a wide range of demand placed upon us.

On the issue of information communications technology, ICT, one of our focuses is to try to make things easier for the individual garda out on patrol. The mobility programme is a particular focus for that. Members will have a phone that will have functionality to allow the garda to take a photograph of a licence or a number plate and then get connectivity back into our records. This is a significant improvement. It worked very well when we piloted it and now we want to run it out to roads policing and to critical areas where there is a lot of policing demand. That will start this year and should be rolled out by the end of 2020.

I have mentioned some of our other significant programmes, including the resource deployment management system, which is essential in order that we know where our people are, what they are doing and when they are there. The paper-based system we have at present does not really give us the management tools we need to achieve that. This important initiative is not being introduced as a cost saving but as a management tool. I think it will make a significant enhancement because we will know better where our resources are at any given time. The investigation management system will also give us much more information about the demands

that are placed on us. When all of this is considered alongside developments like the second generation of the command control system, it is clear that we are starting to build up a better picture of the demands that are being placed on us and of how we are spending our resources in meeting those demands. We are also better placed to assess whether there is more we should do in terms of the structure of the organisation and the skills within the organisation to meet changes in demand.

These ICT systems are very significant. ICT will always be going through evolution and change. We are probably skipping a generation of criminal justice ICT systems, but that is all to the good. We can learn from what others have done. We can implement the things they have found useful while being innovative in our own right in terms of what we want to achieve.

Deputy Colm Brophy: That is interesting. I have heard anecdotal examples of the ability of gardaí in the Dublin area to identify a vehicle that is not taxed. Compared with what was there, it is such a change for gardaí to be able to stop someone instantly. The visibility of enforcement in the drink-driving area has quantifiably stepped up in the past 12 months. It is approaching the point it was at before it was, unfortunately, affected by cutbacks a number of years ago. Once more, there is a palpable sense that the Garda has a visible enforcement presence.

I would like to ask the witnesses about another technological change. We know where we are at the moment with regard to statistics and reportage of crime figures. How much progress is being made? How quickly will the Garda, as a police force, be confident about the reportage of the figures and happy that it is able to give the most accurate and up-to-date crime figures?

Mr. Joseph Nugent: I will take that question. There have been ongoing, frequent and regular discussions between the organisation and the Central Statistics Office, CSO, on these issues. We are very conscious of the need to provide public confidence regarding these figures. It is critically important to everything we do. Trust is huge for us. Next month, we will appoint a chief data officer who will be responsible for driving through the quality changes that have been recommended. We have not been sitting and waiting for this individual to arrive. An individual with international experience in this area has been working with the Garda, working on our systems and recommending how best to go about making the changes that are needed. Those changes are being delivered.

I would not like to say that this will happen overnight. A body of work is needed here. While there is no particularly significant problem in this area, a great deal of work must be done to provide the sort of robust processes that one would want from this area. We are committed to making the change. The permanent allocation of an individual who will have responsibility in this area will be of great assistance. Equally, the experience of the international person who has been with us for almost a year has helped us to make progress with this matter.

Deputy Colm Brophy: I thank all the members of An Garda Síochána, as I always do, for their service to our country. It is important to acknowledge that we value and recognise the fact that members of the force sometimes put themselves in harm's way as they serve the people of our country. Regardless of the ups and downs, I believe we appreciate their work.

Chairman: I thank the Deputy. Deputy Connolly will be followed by Deputy Martin Kenny.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Cuirim fáilte roimh na finnétithe. Is iontach an rud é go bh-

fuil ardbhainistíocht an Gharda Síochána sásta teacht os á gcomhair agus os comhair an Choiste um Chuntais Phoiblí freisin. Molaim lucht an fhórsa. Is é sin ceann de na bealaí inar féidir leo muinín a chothú. The witnesses are very welcome. It is very good that Garda management personnel have come before the Joint Committee on Justice and Equality. This is my second meeting as a member of the committee. While I welcome those who are in attendance, I must point out that as I look at them, I search in vain for any sign of gender equality. Given that we are talking about transformation, maybe that will come another day. We seem to be going backwards in terms of gender equality in this area.

I will have to be brief because I am due to speak in the Dáil, unfortunately. I wish it were not the case. It is important to note that the transformation we are discussing is coming about on the back of very serious reports and on the back of people's pain. Nothing was learned from the Morris tribunal, which cost the country a fortune. The O'Higgins report was followed by the Charleton report, which touched on the Garda in addition to other matters. It is very important to mention these reports because they are why we are here now looking at these glossy brochures.

The first practical thing I would like to note is that Assistant Commissioner Finn welcomed the opportunity to make an overhead presentation as a means of communicating to those members of the force who may be watching today's proceedings. Perhaps I am misreading the situation, but that suggests that there has not been adequate consultation.

Mr. Michael Finn: I suppose we are conscious of the fact that our members may be aware of our presence here, which is a positive thing, and may have watched our presentation. We have been meeting people across the entire organisation. All of the staff associations have received presentations on the operating model and on where we are going. We are keeping them as briefed and as updated as we can. They might sometimes be frustrated because they do not have all the information we would like to give them at once. We certainly communicate with them extensively as soon as we have information for them. That is certainly part of our programme.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: As I have said, I am under time pressure because I would like to mention a number of things. It is extraordinary that we have to go down the road of embedding a code of ethics. It is mentioned on page 19 of one of the documents that we have been furnished with that 95% of Garda personnel are to be trained in this code of ethics and all trained personnel are to have signed up to the code by the fourth quarter of the year. Where are we with that? Where are we with the Crowe Horwath report, which is mentioned on page 16? It seems that an action plan for the report was to have been agreed in the first quarter of the year and its implementation was to have commenced thereafter. Where are we with that? The report in question was commissioned by the Policing Authority on the back of what happened with the figures for mandatory intoxicant testing and the fixed penalties. Where are we with that?

I am not happy with Mr. Nugent's reassurance that work is under way on statistics. The need to be able to rely on statistics and on what is being reported in terms of crime and in terms of the other context goes to the kernel of public trust in the Garda. The Committee of Public Accounts was told at some stage - it may have been by the CSO, but I stand to be corrected - that there is absolutely no way that reassurance can be given in respect of these figures in the immediate future. Has the force arrived at a point where it can tell us at what stage in the future we will be able to rely on its figures?

My final question relates to the press office. When the new divisions are in place, will there

be a single national press office or will there be a number of press officers? I welcome the emphasis on community gardaí on the ground. I despair that it has taken so many reports and so much hurt for us to go back to the idea of having a trusted police presence on the ground, which we all knew was the right thing in the first place. That is what we always wanted to do because it is what communities want. Will the press office be broken up along with everything else that is being broken up? Will there be a press office in each division?

Ní bheidh mé in ann fanacht leis an bhfreagra, ach beidh mé ag léamh an Tuairisc Oifigiúil. Tá ceist agam maidir leis an nGaeilge. What is the position on serving Gaeltacht areas and people with Irish? What progress has been made in that regard?

Mr. Drew Harris: I will take on some of these elements and my colleagues will take on the others. I am very conscious that the integrity of the organisation is wrapped up with the quality of our statistics. People should be assured that what we are saying around how well we are doing is absolutely correct. We are still using printer-and-ink processes. We have not moved to digitise the command and control system or our investigation management system. Those upgrades and that knowledge will help us a lot with our processes. We have our own Garda information service centre, GISC. That is constantly working to ensure that our records are correct. We are not sitting back and doing nothing.

Regarding our statistics, we have to be in a position where we can give considerable assurance on our processes. I do not envisage being in that position until we have further digitised calls from the public and how they are responded to, and thereby ensure stringent quality assurance on how matters are resolved and reported. There is still considerable work to do there.

In respect of the press office, there will still be a central hub sitting with me in the Phoenix Park, but we will have a press officer with the assistant commissioner at each regional level. As we adapt to social media, we want to make sure that each of the divisions, the local areas and the local community policing teams have a social media presence. We wish to make ourselves available to the public by that means. It is a good means of sharing information and working with others. Today at the National Ploughing Championships, we are launching a scheme around rural safety. That has a social media element to help share information-----

Deputy Catherine Connolly: Can the Commissioner give a date when we will be able to rely on statistics? That is what I asked and I would like the question answered.

Mr. Drew Harris: That is not my judgment to make. I have to assure the Central Statistics Office, CSO. Realistically that is two years off because I have to wait until the processes are in place.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: I just wanted to hear that.

Mr. Michael Finn: We are working closely with the CSO to give reassurance. I met representatives of the CSO only last month to tell them about the progress we have made to ensure we capture all of our data. All of the calls that come into the control room are now captured on our call and dispatch, CAD, system and automatically transferred to our PULSE system so we do not miss any calls. That is just one dimension of improving the quality of our data. We are working with the CSO on that.

Mr. Drew Harris: The code of ethics is still a focus. The training continues.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: When will it be done? Will it be finished in the fourth quar-

ter of this year? If performance indicators are put in place, will they be complied with?

Mr. Drew Harris: It is unlikely that we will have 100% sign-off on a code of ethics this year. I am not sure that is possible. The Policing Authority has asked for that, but it may not be possible because some individuals are not available for training or are overseas, etc. A target of 100% will be difficult to reach. Beyond that, 83% of the organisation has now signed up to the code of ethics. Another aspect of the code of ethics is the increased focus on human rights, which will be laced through all our policies and practices. A garda cannot be promoted or transferred unless he or she has signed up to the code of ethics. We have narrowed the ground on which individuals can stand. If a garda wishes to advance in his or her career, he or she must sign up to the code of ethics. That will remain the case. We have a remaining group that we want to work with, but the figures are not anywhere near as bleak as they were last year. We have added another 30% to those who have signed up. We will continue to focus on that.

Mr. Michael Finn: We had reached 87% by the end of August. By the end of the year, we should be able to fill the gap. There will be a small cohort left over, people on maternity leave, etc., but we are in a pretty strong position.

Mr. John Twomey: Regarding the implementation of the recommendations, we are working with the Policing Authority and we will provide an implementation plan with detailed timelines before the end of this quarter. Some of the short-term recommendations have been implemented. The comprehensive plan is monitored on a quarterly basis with the Policing Authority. Some of the recommendations are long-term structural or legislative changes that require agencies other than An Garda Síochána or are being led by external agencies, so it is probably not possible to say when they will be concluded. Some of them will require legislative changes in the Dáil. Several of the short-term recommendations have been implemented. A final document with more specific timelines will be agreed with the Policing Authority before the end of this month.

Deputy Catherine Connolly: B'fhéidir go mbeidh Mr. Twomey in ann na sonraí maidir leis an nGaeilge a fháil amach.

Chairman: Would the witnesses like to reflect on the question of the use of the Irish language within the service? Unfortunately, the Deputy was unable to remain but the question stands.

Mr. Drew Harris: I have engaged with the commissioner and this remains a standing item in our management meetings. If I can be permitted to give a written response, I can give a fuller response on what we have done on policing in Gaeltacht areas.

Chairman: The Commissioner will surprise us in future occasions-----

Mr. Drew Harris: Yes.

Chairman: ----- with a cúpla focail. That will be most welcome.

Mr. Michael Finn: Anecdotally, my colleagues from the west will say they have recently allocated additional Irish-speaking members to the Gaeltacht area. I know for a fact that this has happened recently. We can provide the exact number at the next meeting. I can say that it has happened over a short time in the recent past.

Deputy Martin Kenny: I thank the Commissioner and his colleagues for the presentation.

Much of what is in the new model for policing is a reflection of the recommendations of the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland. I see that dotted throughout. I refer particularly to the new divisional boundaries. A lot of that is set out in recommendations Nos. 21 to 26 and the report's fifth principle. I see a lot of this throughout the new model.

One of the issues that jumps out immediately concerns the additional resources that will be needed to deliver this. This particularly applies to something that most colleagues deal with in their local areas: a particular garda in each division dealing with people looking for immigration stamps and so on. All of that will now be moved elsewhere, which will free up resources within An Garda Síochána. If that work is moved to other agencies, have they been allocated additional resources to deal with it? The witnesses say that work accounting for up to 30% of Garda time has now been shifted to other agencies. Some of those agencies fall under the auspices of our health service. The Courts Service will probably have to increase its level of activity to do what Garda used to do. Are additional resources available? Has the Commissioner been assured that other agencies will be able to deliver?

The other issues of concern related to what will happen in regard to the new divisions. There is some concern out there. I refer to Sligo-Leitrim and Donegal coming together as one large area and the level of resources allocated to it. I understand that the envisaged outcome is approximately 800 to 900 gardaí in each of the 19 divisions.

Mr. Drew Harris: Yes.

Deputy Martin Kenny: What is the current strength and how does it compare to that?

Mr. Drew Harris: At the moment, Donegal and Sligo-Leitrim are just a little below 800. I have the precise figure here, which one of my colleagues will be able to find. I am being cautious about those divisions merging at this time. We want to be sure about the implementation, particularly the back office implementation, before we start to address the Border divisions. However, the chief superintendent leading that division will still have 800 staff available for local policing. He or she can draw on national and specialist support. He or she will have a body of staff enabling him or her to deliver the policing function and will have the backing of both regional and national resources. He or she will have a good, solid command and can surge that across the division, as needed, to meet specific requirements in addition to the requirements associated with community policing, investigating crime, etc.

Deputy Martin Kenny: What about the resources agencies will require to meet the large burden placed on them?

Mr. Drew Harris: The commission has identified a series of areas in which our involvement was regarded as unnecessary and in respect of which agencies should be taking on the tasks. The Deputy is correct in identifying that. We are working through these areas with the Department of Justice and Equality. Some of this obviously requires a resource uplift because we spend a lot of time on court security, for instance, but also in other areas. We have talked about immigration, in which we had significant involvement. We have now moved from that. Beyond that, we just need to take it in stages. For us to say we are finishing in a certain area in three months is undoable. We cannot say to the Courts Service that we are out of there on 1 January. The service itself needs to think about the roles we take on. The same applies to the Prison Service. It must be asked what roles we take on, how we currently work together and how to move forward. Can technology provide some answers concerning individuals on remand going backwards and forwards to court? Can it be done by video link to remove the

reason for prisoner transfers, completely in some cases? Can other technological solutions be applied?

There is a lot of thought being devoted to this. It was the subject of work over a couple of years and this has revitalised that. We hope to see, in the next two years, some of the responsibilities migrating across. It will probably be for the Department. A lot of this is within the family of the Department of Justice and Equality. It will decide on how the resource cake is divided up. That will follow undoubtedly. I will make my case but I am sure my peer group will also make its case. It will be a case of saying, "If you are not doing this, then we need the money to buy in the service in whatever shape or form is necessary." It is not straightforward. With regard to some of the things we are doing, we probably represent the most expensive way of doing them to the Exchequer. There are probably more cost-effective ways of proceeding, particularly regarding court security.

Deputy Martin Kenny: If there are to be courts services, prison services or agencies looking for additional money from the package of money that comes through the Department of Justice and Equality, will there be a reduced allocation for An Garda Síochána because agencies will take on its work? That is the danger I see. Since there are recommendations to have a ring-fenced budget for the recruitment of and an ability to recruit specialists in technology and to move forward with the national security issues, the Garda will require additional resources. How much assurance has Mr. Harris got from the Minister that the package of money will be available?

Mr. Drew Harris: This report is on a policing service for the future. The development of our capabilities in securing the State are part of the policing service for the future. There is a Government commitment to support us on that. We are working through how it will evolve and our future requirements in countering the various threats we face as a nation.

Deputy Martin Kenny: With regard to an associated issue, the training of gardaí, it is welcome that there are many new recruits and that the service has been strengthened in that respect. There are recommendations that suggest a movement towards a degree-level qualification in policing studies through universities. Does that movement mean a phasing out of Templemore? Does the Commissioner envisage this?

Mr. Joseph Nugent: One of the recommendations made in the implementation plan was that an expert-level group be established to advise on training and development within the organisation, looking to best-practice individuals who could advise on how we should go about delivering training in the future. While these proposals exist, they are just proposals. We will look to the group to help us and guide us on the best way to go about delivering on this. A body of work is still needed before we take on board some of the specific proposals to which the Deputy referred.

Deputy Martin Kenny: There are now four regions. With regard to the movement of gardaí within regions, the issue of new recruits who may, for whatever reason, wish to apply to be within commuting distance of their home, because of elderly parents or otherwise, arose recently. Deployment in Dublin may not have suited a garda from west Mayo, for example, and he or she could apply to be closer to home. I understand there has been some resistance to this and that the rule has changed such that gardaí are no longer allowed to apply for deployment elsewhere. I would like clarification on that. If gardaí are within a particular region, will they remain there, or will there be a crossover or movement?

With regard to the rotas, we often hear anecdotally that in a busy town on a Saturday night, there might be only two gardaí on duty while there may be nine on a Monday afternoon, when they are not required to the same extent at all. Is work being done to ensure rotas reflect the level of need rather than what is convenient?

Mr. John Twomey: I shall make two points in response. First, on the movement of personnel, there has been no change to the rules and regulations. The same principles still apply. It has always been a principle in the organisation to try to facilitate gardaí were possible. There are rules on distances but there has been no change to them. Almost monthly, personnel move around the country. For example, there could be a move from a rural area to an urban area, depending on the garda's domestic circumstances. The position has not changed and there is no discussion about changing it.

Second, the Commissioner mentioned the rosters. The current rostering system is a new system that has been in place for the past couple of years. We are in discussions with the associations about adjusting it. We are constantly seeking to improve it to ensure a greater supply-and-demand fit. It is ongoing work. It is also included in the work of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland. The Commissioner said that the senior leadership team would agree its position tomorrow. It is hoped to continue discussions with the associations on the changes.

Deputy Martin Kenny: The Road Safety Authority expressed concern over road safety not being front and centre under the new model of policing. Perhaps there is an opportunity to explain the position of this. Road safety is one of the key areas in keeping people safe.

Mr. Drew Harris: We have increased our number of lifesaver-type detections that prevent serious collisions. To the end of August, specifically in terms of those who might have been driving while intoxicated, we detected 5,311 individuals. The figure is up 8% on last year. It is a very worrying trend. We are very aware of our ongoing responsibility to ensure road safety. I have written to the chief executive of the Road Safety Authority offering assurance on our ongoing commitment to have an assistant commissioner with specific responsibility for road policing and community engagement. That has been kept within our organisational chart and it remains the responsibility of an assistant commissioner. There has been no downgrading of that. Under the new divisional model, one of the community engagement superintendents will also have direct responsibility for roads policing. We want to keep the focus on it. Roads policing is important for the prevention of deaths on the roads. However, it is not just about the roads policing section. It is also about what other members of An Garda Síochána do regarding roads policing as well as being the responsibility of all members of society in terms of our behaviour on the road. It is very worrying to see a further increase in the number of individuals detected driving under the influence of alcohol. Our commitment on this issue continues and I have assured the Road Safety Authority, RSA, in that regard. I will meet it shortly regarding any further concerns it may have. We have a good working relationship. We see ourselves as being in partnership and that is how the relationship will continue.

Deputy Martin Kenny: It is welcome that the Commissioner will soon meet the RSA and that there is movement in that regard.

Chapter 13 of the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland recommends that the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, GSOC, be superseded by a new complaints body. Has there been any progress in that regard? Where does the Commissioner see that going? It is also recommended that a new oversight board be created. Will that lead to a situation

whereby An Garda Síochána will have more efficient and effective internal governance that, in particular, will deal with senior management as well as rank-and-file gardaí?

Mr. Drew Harris: I am not sure that the two recommendations marry up. A board is to be introduced to provide an additional element of oversight of the practical day-to-day working of the organisation. All members of the Garda may be subject to investigation by GSOC as it is constituted. It is entirely independent of the Garda and may undertake an investigation into any member of the organisation if such is warranted. The role of the new body in respect of crime and discipline investigation is set out in the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland. It is hoped that further regulations to address poor performance will be brought in. These will not necessarily involve having to prove a breach of discipline but rather an assessment of the performance and ability of an individual and consideration of whether he or she should remain a member of the organisation if he or she does not have the ability to perform the required duties. That assessment falls under the performance regulations, which will probably also take in an element of attendance. I envisage that those powers will stay within the organisation, whereas the body that supersedes GSOC will deal with public complaints, allegations of crime, etc.

Deputy Martin Kenny: Is it appropriate for that role to remain within the organisation?

Mr. Drew Harris: At some point it must be asked what am I responsible for managing. If I cannot deal with performance, then I am powerless in terms-----

Deputy Martin Kenny: I am referring to oversight of performance.

Mr. Drew Harris: Oversight is not management or supervision. I am responsible for leading the organisation. If I do not have levers in respect of management, performance etc., and behaviour in particular, then this is an empty husk of a job. I would have all of the responsibility but none of the levers to deal with issues that arise. Either I have the ability to set the tenor of behaviour and the standards in the organisation and see them through or I do not. It would be very difficult to lead an organisation of this scale and importance if some power was not vested in the office of the Commissioner.

Chairman: If the witnesses wish to take a five-minute break after our next speaker, Deputy Fitzpatrick, has concluded, we will certainly accommodate them.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: I welcome Commissioner Harris and his team. I am delighted that their mission for the next three years is to keep people safe. There was a serious incident in Blackrock, Dundalk, at approximately 2.50 p.m. on 10 August. A 93 year old man was working in his garden when another man walked up and asked him for some water. The elderly man went to his back garden to get the water and the other man stabbed him. The pensioner's wife was looking out the window and the attacker cleared off. This occurred in daylight in front of a Garda station, a community centre and a school. There was significant footfall in the area. The attacker had no fear whatsoever. This is about keeping people safe. The man who was stabbed spent weeks in hospital. His wife, who was in the kitchen when he was stabbed, would not return to her home. Their family is in serious fear. The entire community wants to know what is being done. The family are very unselfish. They are not worried about themselves but rather elderly people in urban and rural areas. There is much discussion of new plans going forward. This family wants to know what the Commissioner can do to ensure that this type of incident does not happen again.

Chairman: It is a legitimate question. The Commissioner was not notified of it in advance of the meeting. I may be wrong, but I think the matter is before the courts and, as such, I urge caution in that regard.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: I am asking about how the family can be reassured.

Chairman: I acknowledge it is about the family.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: I am not referring to the specific case that is before the courts. The family asked me what procedures are in place or what will be done to prevent this from happening to other families. My question has nothing to do with the court case.

Chairman: I acknowledge that, but it is my responsibility to witnesses as well as members to share any relevant information I may have. That is the only caution I am offering. It is a legitimate question.

Mr. Drew Harris: I will be careful not to refer to the specific incident, but I wish to declare my revulsion at it and express my hope that the injured party has made a good recovery and will continue to make progress. On the prevention of this type of incident, we are a police service, but a police service is, in effect, an extension of good citizenship. Our goal is to ensure that we can prevent and detect crime, with prevention being the most important element of that. We want the public to have confidence in An Garda Síochána and see it as a reassuring presence such that people know that if they see or hear something suspicious, they can make contact with the Garda and we will respond properly to that. It is to be hoped that through such co-operation we can prevent serious incidents such as that referred to by the Deputy from occurring. There are daily successful interventions through patrols, the use of intelligence and acting on information that comes from the public. We work best when we work closely with local communities and receive information which allows us to act on their concerns and prevent crime or, where crime occurs, apprehend those who engage in it. That is society's role in terms of good citizenship. We are here to protect members of society and will do our utmost in that regard. We are all dedicated to it.

Regrettably, I cannot give an assurance that an incident such as this will not happen again. I wish to ensure we work along with other agencies to minimise the chances of it happening by addressing the various factors involved, including the means of attack. Among the most important elements in so doing are our relationship with the community and how we act on any information we receive. If I may, I will speak privately to the Deputy after the meeting. If there is more we can do to reassure this particular family, we will do so.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: I thank the Commissioner for his response. I invite him to visit the Blackrock area when he is next in Dundalk and see what kind of community it is. It is a beautiful community that does not deserve this kind of publicity. The good news is that the person who was stabbed has made a recovery and he and his wife have moved back into their house. It would be nice if the Garda Commissioner would call in if he is in the area. The next thing I wanted to talk about with the Garda Commissioner is community policing. Can the Commissioner tell me what changes will be made to community policing under the new plan? He talks about more visibility, responsive problem-solving and engaging more with the community and with stakeholders. I keep emphasising that policing is about keeping people safe. What is the difference between community policing under the plan and community policing as it has been carried out in recent years?

Mr. Drew Harris: As has already been said within the committee, in effect we are going back to a more locally-based and locally-responsive model. The divisional model formalises that within the organisation. The divisional officer will have responsibility for the local community and for the delivery of a local policing plan, working with the joint policing committees and the various communities. A considerable proportion of these officers' effort - and as I have said, between 50% and 60% of their resources are dedicated to community policing - will be expended on delivering our community policing function. More and more we can see that it is not only down to what we do as An Garda Síochána, but is about how we work with other agencies and the relationships we form and partnerships we have. These allow us to jointly identify and deal with some of the more persistent problems around anti-social behaviour through, for example, preventing street-level drug dealing and dealing with very serious crimes, such as domestic abuse, which have a devastating impact on families and relationships but can also have a devastating impact on an area or location.

Overall, by freeing up divisional officers and allowing them to be more operationally autonomous and by freeing up personnel in order that these officers will have the personnel to deliver this policing function, we believe that we will see an increase in the quality of policing and an improvement in the amount that we are able to provide through the development of a policing service for the future. As we get on to a more formalised footing in our relationships with other State agencies, we can start to have a real impact on quality-of-life issues that are impacting on critical neighbourhoods. As I have said, much of that relates to the abuse of alcohol and drugs. We are, perhaps, not best placed to deal with individuals who are addicted; it is more of a health issue. It is about how we work with the HSE in that respect.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: The Commissioner talks about protecting the people and improving data to enhance the Garda's ability to do so. He talks about reducing crime and responding to threats. He also talks about confronting those involved in organised crime. I thank him for the help he has given to the people of Drogheda over recent months. Drogheda has been through a very bad period and An Garda Síochána has done a fantastic job in combatting crime in the area. That is welcome. The Commissioner talks about depriving criminals of the proceeds of crime. I can see that happening in my own town of Dundalk and in Drogheda. He also talks about improving the investigation response to crime and the forensic capacity of the organisation.

I want to talk about improving data and forensic capacity. I come from Dundalk, County Louth. I have noticed a serious issue and I do not know whether the Commissioner is fully aware of it. More than 400 people from County Louth are reported missing every year. Information on missing person reports is included in the Garda annual report. Statistics are also available on a county-by-county basis. County Louth has one of the highest rates of missing persons per head of population. I am very concerned about that.

I will ask three or four questions and then the Commissioner can give me his answers. What is the view of An Garda Síochána on the high number of persons reported missing in County Louth, that is, 400 people? We should be thankful that many of these missing people are found safe and sound. Sadly, a number are found deceased and others remain missing. Can the Garda provide details of the number of missing persons who are found deceased and the number of people who remain missing, both nationally and in my native county of Louth? As an island, unidentified remains are washed up on our shores or found in other circumstances. Can the Garda give an indication of the number of unidentified persons discovered in Ireland? Are there records of all cases and, if so, where are they kept?

At times, only partial remains are recovered. What procedures are in place for such cases? What efforts are under way to obtain DNA samples from the partial remains found over the years? As the taking of DNA samples for the Garda database is a relatively new initiative, what actions are the Garda taking to solve cold cases involving the unidentified persons who have been buried in cemeteries across the country where no DNA samples were taken? Other countries, such as the UK, are carrying out audits of cases of unidentified remains on a county-by-county basis. In some instances exhumation is carried out to obtain DNA samples. Is a similar project planned for Ireland? If not, why? It would solve many cases for families, as it has done in the UK. Audits also solve some cases. We all know that it is not nice to be missing a daughter, a son, a brother, a father or a mother. There are an awful lot of unmarked graves in this country. These are relevant questions in the context of the new database. Will the Commissioner give me some answers?

Mr. Drew Harris: I am very much aware of the trauma surrounding individuals who go missing for years where no one has any idea of what happened to them and no body is recovered. I have met various groups in this regard. I am aware of an operation involving an Garda Síochána and Forensic Science Ireland which has identified individuals who were buried long ago through the use of DNA testing. These are individuals who were primarily recovered from the sea, who were not identified at the time, and who subsequently have been identified. As the Deputy is asking me for some pretty specific detail, I would like to formulate a written response. It is very opportune time to do so as it is not long until the annual service of commemoration for missing persons in Ireland. It is an issue of which we are very mindful. We are aware of the ongoing hurt and misery associated with these cases. There is some hope in this respect as a result of the work that has been done over the last two to three years. Bodies and individuals have been identified and returned for burial in marked graves. I will get those details and submit them to the committee in writing because I want to be 100% precise.

With regard to reports of missing persons, I will need to get the data relating to Dundalk and to Louth generally. I had not realised that Louth was an outlier in respect of the number of people going missing. We can, perhaps, get some idea as to why that is the case. Some factors may be unknown to us. That knowledge may lie with other agencies. We can, however, give some analysis as to why that may be the case. Again, I will provide a written response in that regard.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: In the UK, the Lord Chancellor appointed a chief coroner who has a full range of powers to drive up standards. What is the view of the Garda on how the coroner service in Ireland could be more proactive in assisting in efforts to identify remains found in each coroner's jurisdiction? Would it be beneficial for coroners to continue to be actively involved in reviewing cases and to become involved in a review of cold cases relating to unidentified persons who were buried in cemeteries and, in some cases, forgotten? Would An Garda Síochána support a public database of unidentified deceased persons in Ireland similar to that in the UK and the US? Will the Commissioner respond to those points?

Mr. Drew Harris: The officer of coroner is a very ancient office which long predates my own. It would therefore be wrong for me to make suggestions to coroners. I may, however, take the Deputy's points away with me and consider them. There is, perhaps, a better story or account of this which we could give and I would like the opportunity to submit a written account. Work such as the Deputy is suggesting in respect of searching for remains is ongoing. Familial DNA is being used to make positive identifications. All of that is under way. Perhaps I could be given the opportunity to submit a more substantive response in conjunction with

Forensic Science Ireland.

Chairman: We will circulate that response to all members once it is received.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: I would like to talk about the new divisional model. As the Commissioner knows, I come from Louth. Many people there are very concerned about the new changes. Will Louth and Monaghan lose their divisional headquarters to Mullingar? This question is often asked. Will sufficient resources be available to cover the whole expanded area? Will local Garda districts still be headed by a superintendent?

As the Commissioner knows, we have had a fair bit of trouble in the past few years, with two gardaí in County Louth being murdered. However, we have great confidence in the way the system is being operated. With Brexit, all we hear in the news is that the PSNI has asked for hundreds more officers and that it is getting them. Has the Garda Commissioner asked for extra resources? I was disappointed to read in the national newspapers in recent days that the overtime bill had increased by 20%. Much of it may be due to the visit of the President and the Vice President of America. There is talk that there is an extra €15 million to €20 million for overtime and that the Garda is expected to take it out of its current budget. As I said from day one, I offer my full support to the Garda. The Commissioner has a good team and I think they are doing everything right. I grew up in Dundalk and know, having seen what happened there, that nobody wants to see the Troubles come back as a consequence of Brexit. We can all see what is happening in Derry. The Border is more than 300 miles long. Even in County Louth, it runs from Cullaville to Omeath. There are nearly 50 border crossings and in recent years many small roads have been built along it. Much good work has been done. I know of the Commissioner's connections with the PSNI. The Garda and PSNI have worked well together for a long time. Nobody wants to see the United Kingdom leave the European Union, but there is uncertainty. Things are fine and people do not like to see changes, but they are concerned about the new divisional plans.

Mr. Drew Harris: With regard to implementation, we will come to the Border divisions last when we are certain about how the model works. We recognise this in the period we are entering, with Brexit firmly on the horizon. I also give an assurance about the capacity of An Garda Síochána in counties Cavan, Monaghan and Louth. The divisional headquarters will be well situated in the region. We are conscious that that division, with the Sligo and Donegal division, is policing the Border. Depending on what happens with Brexit, it could also be an international border for the European Union, something we have to factor in too. We have to factor in the various demands that have been talked about, including the threat mentioned by the Deputy and also organised crime. We have to address the issue of how secure people feel to ensure they will not feel raiding across the Border can happen. We will continue to work closely with the Police Service of Northern Ireland in that regard. It will include joint operations on either side of the Border, all of which are set to continue.

The Deputy mentioned incidents in Derry. When such incidents happen, we are always quick to respond on this side of the Border, in County Donegal, to make sure we support the PSNI. It would be the same across the Border. People expect this of us. I offer the Deputy assurance about the numbers we will have available. We have divisions which are responsive and focused on local delivery. We will also be there as an organisation, both at regional and national level, to support them with additional resources, including specialist resources. People have expressed concerns, but they should be set against what happens. The division will have a dedicated detective superintendent to oversee the investigation of crime. It will have a detective inspector appointed to the protective services unit to oversee the investigation of crimes

against the vulnerable, including domestic abuse, serious sexual assault, child abuse, etc. We will bolster the number of inspectors and sergeants and free up officers from many administration tasks. Our focus will be on delivery of the local policing plan. There are many positives which should be set against the merger of the divisions.

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick: I have asked the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Flanagan, many times about the upgrading of Dromad Garda station on the Border. It will play a vital role, regardless of whether Brexit goes ahead. Does Mr. Harris have an update? I know that the Garda station was bought a number of years ago. It is located just off the motorway. Given how Dundalk has grown so rapidly in recent years, with the extra resources, it is nearly impossible to find a parking space close to the Garda station if one has to visit it. We received a commitment from the Minister that he would release funds to upgrade the Garda station. The Border is completely open. If Dromad Garda station was to be upgraded, it would make a significant difference to the area.

Chairman: Does the Commissioner have a response?

Mr. Drew Harris: We can take that matter away. We have to consider our entire estate across the country, especially in the Border area, and the increasing number of personnel we have available.

Chairman: Before I call Deputy Pringle and while I am not focusing on him, I am conscious of other members and colleagues who wish to present and ask speakers to be as crisp as possible to give everyone else a chance to contribute.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I will be as concise as I can. I have about five questions and would like to receive a response to each one rather than ask all of them together.

I note what Mr. Harris has said about Border areas and how he is waiting to see what will happen with Brexit and such like before he rolls out the new model. That makes sense and is fair. I come from Killybegs in south-west Donegal. We will be farther away from the police district head office. My experience is that the farther one is from the head office, the less one will see and the less that will actually happen. That may not happen with this process, but my fear is that it will. In my part of County Donegal there are a number of Garda cars with more than 300,000 miles on the clock. That presents a difficulty. At weekends gardaí are left on their own in stations. We have no resources for training on how to deal with cybercrime. Training stopped at level 2 interviewing. There is a no-deal Brexit plan, which is understandable, but members of the force believe there is not one. There are not enough gardaí to keep open the stations which are supposed to be open. How will that change with the new process? In Killybegs there may be a disco on a Saturday night, with perhaps 400 or 500 young people and one garda to police it. That is not safe for the garda, let alone members of the public. It is not acceptable for one garda to operate alone. How will that change under the new plan?

Mr. Drew Harris: There is roster reform. The current roster loads staff towards the beginning of the week. We want to change it in order that it will more accurately reflect the demands placed on us to provide a service. Much of it is about the night-time economy across Ireland. The second thing we want to achieve in changing the roster is the provision of training time in order that we will not be training in overtime, that it will not necessitate backfilling and that training can be done while on duty in order that members can avail of training regularly such that it is part of their cycle of shifts.

Brexit planning has been ongoing for 24 months. Those who are perhaps unclear about what we have decided probably need to speak to their regional AC because there has been a lot of meetings, conversation and consideration of how we will manage Brexit, the various scenarios that might arise and how we will deal with them and liaise with the PSNI. A lot of Brexit planning has happened. I entirely refute the suggestion that there is no Brexit plan. We have made, as best we can, provision for what Brexit may bring. We have had to deal with some of the things we feared would happen because there has been an increase in the number of attacks by groups such as the New IRA in Northern Ireland. That has a consequence for us in terms of operations.

I appreciate that the committee submitted five questions. At the moment, Donegal and the Sligo-Leitrim division have 794 personnel in total between them, comprising Garda staff and members. That figure is set to increase. It is a sizeable command for the chief superintendent to lead and the division will have flexibility in how it uses resources to meet its policing plan and local policing plan issues. I want the chief superintendents to deliver a bespoke service that answers local needs.

I am conscious that some of the divisions encompass large geographic areas. In terms of personnel, they would marry with some of the divisions in the DMR, but they are far more concentrated. I am conscious of how geographically dispersed some divisions are and I am determined that our services will be spread equally and there will not be an Eircode postcodes lottery in the service people receive from An Garda Síochána. We have built up some of the specialisation within divisions because the work is becoming more commonplace. Regrettably, increased reporting of economic crime, including fraud, as well as other crimes I have mentioned such as domestic abuse, serious sexual assault and child abuse, means that there has to be more of a divisional response to address these matters. They are illustrative of how demand has changed.

I appreciate that the committee has submitted five questions and I have prepared responses for them.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: We will deal with some of them. Other matters will arise as the meeting progresses. I will not ask some of the questions I have submitted because other members have asked them. There is no point in going over the same ground. The purpose of the questions was to give a sense of what the meeting would involve.

I refer to training for gardaí. I understand they have been trained in bicycle use and patrolling, but have not been given any equipment or suitable clothing. This will not be available, I believe, until the end of next year. How has that programme been co-ordinated? It must be frustrating for members as well as the public that things are not happening on the ground. As the new model is rolled out, will one garda no longer be left alone to police a disco at the end of the night?

Mr. Drew Harris: We want to avoid that no matter what model we have through the rostering system.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: That has been going on for a number of years.

Mr. Drew Harris: I know it has been going on. A roster has been in place for, I understand, four years. Part of the commission's report and various other reports have mandated us to revisit that roster and that is what we are doing. We want to change the roster so that there are more personnel on duty at the right times and the situations described by the Deputy do not

arise. Even outside of the structural changes we are making, there is important work to do on the roster and making sure staff are on duty at the right time.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Okay. I refer to the measures and new plans in respect of the consultation with joint police committees, JPCs.

Mr. Drew Harris: Yes.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Have the committees been consulted?

Mr. Drew Harris: No, but we will provide information for the chief superintendent so that they can be briefed. I have said that my senior team and I will make ourselves available to any of the JPCs. We are happy to attend a meeting and explain the restructuring and advantages in terms of the policing service it will deliver.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Has the work of the committees fed into this process? Are they relevant?

Mr. Drew Harris: They are not irrelevant; they are very important as a local forum for accountability. They started after a number of reports. I could start in a number of places, but I will start with the inspector's report of 2014, which referred to the structure of the organisation and how it needed to change. That point was repeated by the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland and the Policing Authority in its report, which also commented on the provision of the policing service and our responsiveness to changing demand.

The district model could not survive. There was far too much administration and bureaucracy and the packets of personnel were too small. We were not able to provide the specialist response required for some of the increasing demand, particularly around crimes against the vulnerable. Local specialisation can be created within bigger commands to deal with issues that are regrettably commonplace such as domestic abuse, serious sexual assault and child abuse. This is about enhancing the service to the local community and not having, in effect, an Eircode postcodes lottery in the provision of a policing service by An Garda Síochána.

We have spent a lot of money on administration and structures, which was money I did not have to spend on other things. I have described them as being a burden in delivering a policing function. I want to break free from that and focus more of our time and effort on the provision of a policing service. That is what this is about. One of the messages we will give to the JPCs is that we are a growing organisation, but are focusing that growth on community policing in local areas. We are taking out a tier of administration so that we can focus more of our resources on other areas. We are focusing on local accountability and delivery, which is the position of JPCs, and we will deliver a local policing plan. A lot of this is about trying to address the top-down direction of the organisation and giving people in the organisation autonomy to deal quickly with the situations they face and work closely with their partners. We want to include members of the JPCs in that process.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: A report from the Policing Authority published earlier this month showed that the response time for the armed support unit in Donegal was up to three hours. Furthermore, the report revealed that gardaí in Donegal had to source backup from Claremorris in County Mayo, which is 1.5 hours away from Donegal. Is that adequate, in particular given that it is a Border region?

Mr. Drew Harris: We are aware of the provision of the national service, which is the armed

support unit. The resources that came from Claremorris were also an armed support response. That is why we want to build up resources in Cavan and create a new armed support unit there, and, in addition, build up resources in Ballyshannon and Dundalk. We are conscious of the location of armed support units and how they can support local policing. We have introduced this over the past three or four years and it has been a success. Local gardaí like to have the service available, but we are very conscious of some of the response times. We are moving to address these, which will involve investment in people and vehicles in Cavan, Ballyshannon and Dundalk.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: On the question of the reporting of wrongdoing, there does not seem to be any mention of whistleblowers in the police plan. This would be a very important part of any attempt to change the culture of the organisation.

Mr. Drew Harris: I will take the Deputy's feedback on that.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Whistleblowers should be facilitated and encouraged, and Garda management should be proactive in encouraging people to come forward about problems.

Mr. Joseph Nugent: I take the Deputy's point that it is not in the policing plan but a new protective disclosure policy is close to being agreed and there have been discussions with the representative bodies on the matter. It is something we will take away from this meeting.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Given the history of the past few years, it is very important. All members of the force should feel they can come forward.

Mr. Joseph Nugent: I have spoken about the principle on a number of occasions. We are very supportive of people speaking up and coming forward and this is embedded in our code of ethics and in the things which we hold true.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: The presentation referred to the increase in Garda numbers, which is welcome. Since 2017, 2,090 gardaí have been recruited and there will be a further 1,500 up to 2021. How many of these are additional gardaí? Some will retire in that period. What is the figure for the increase in Garda numbers?

Mr. Drew Harris: On 31 August this year, we had 14,234 sworn Garda members while on 31 December 2014, we had 12,799, which is an increase of almost 1,500. We will need a further increase of 800 to get to a strength of 15,000. It is also important, however, to talk about how we use these Garda members. Garda staff have also increased and numbers now stand at 4,000, 1,000 of whom will enable us to displace gardaí to front-line duties. That is yet to happen and it is quite a challenge because we do not have 1,000 sworn Garda members doing administrative duties and we will have to be more inventive about what roles staff can take on, such as organisational support roles like front-desk roles, CCTV, command control, etc. We see staff doing these jobs into the future.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Mr. Harris is saying that achieving 800 additional Garda members means taking on between 1,600 and 1,700 recruits.

Mr. Drew Harris: It would be about 1,500. There are approximately 320 cessations per annum.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: The Garda needs to replace 320 just to stand still.

Mr. Drew Harris: Yes, this just marks time. We have brought in 600 this year and there has

been a real increase in the organisation of approximately 270.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: The figure for the real increase might be a more useful figure to show.

Mr. Michael Finn: It is shown on the slide.

Chairman: Deputy Chambers is next. He will be followed by Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile and Deputy Denis Naughten.

Deputy Jack Chambers: The Commissioner signalled that he wanted to take a break.

Chairman: Of course. We will suspend for the required period.

Sitting suspended at 12.04 p.m. and resumed at 12.09 p.m.

Deputy Jack Chambers: Deputy Pringle raised a point about retirement projections. What are the retirement projections? There was a significant recruitment drive in the 1980s and there is a vacuum now. When will that kick in and how will it affect the net return? The presentation referred to a net increase of 800, taking attrition into account. When will a retirement cliff edge occur again and what will the numbers be?

Mr. Joseph Nugent: We average between 330 and 350 retirements per year at the moment. There might be a slight increase next year, resulting from pay increase matters that have matured. There might be an increase in the numbers going, but it is a little difficult to project. On the longer-term projections, I will have to revert to the Deputy with more details at a later date. That is where we are now. I hope that is okay.

Deputy Jack Chambers: That is fine. I thank Mr. Nugent. In terms of the reorganisation that is occurring, there will be little or no change in Dublin. In Dublin city we have two divisions, the Dublin metropolitan region, DMR, south central and north central. Has consideration been given to enhanced co-ordination between the two? Both divisions obviously have a serious amount of work to do, but when one thinks about it, the Liffey separates two strategic areas. Was any consideration given to combining the two divisions? I know that is different from some of the requests that have come from other areas in terms of concerns about mergers. Looking at the broader Dublin region, it can be seen that there are two separate structures within the city centre. Was that given any consideration?

Mr. Michael Finn: I will address that issue. In fact, the DMR will be impacted by the changes, although not structurally. The divisions will not be joined up to make one bigger one but we will be introducing the new model there in terms of having our administrative units at divisional level, as well as our crime superintendents and governance superintendents. That will apply throughout the country, including the DMR. One of the divisions where that was piloted was the DMR.

In terms of DMR north and DMR south, one of the issues emerging from our restructuring process is that there may be capabilities that can be merged across the DMR itself because it is a relatively small geographic area. Events management, for example, could be shared across a number of divisions. We are looking at that now in terms of how we roll out the entire model.

Deputy Jack Chambers: I want to ask about Garda overtime. In my own constituency, the K district, we have Farmleigh and the Phoenix Park, which have serious security requirements from a national perspective that are drawn from the local division. Is additional overtime

given at a local level when the division has to deal with national requirements? Also related to overtime, has an additional overtime budget been discussed with the Department of Justice and Equality? Have there been discussions on managing overtime in the context of unplanned national visits like the visit of the Pope last year and Vice President Pence this year, as well as other national visits that will inevitably occur? How is An Garda Síochána planning for that in terms of the spillover effect outside of the other overtime which occurs on a planned basis?

Mr. Drew Harris: Overtime distribution within the organisation is weighted towards operational requirements. About 20% of the overtime is used up in the quarter-hour briefing at the commencement of each turn of duty, which is a considerable amount. Another 25% is used in ancillary work concerned with court security, court attendance, escorting prisoners and so on. A considerable amount of our overtime is drawn into things that may not necessarily be adding to the policing plan overall. We are very conscious, then, of what is left in terms of its distribution and its control. That has been a focus for this and other years.

This year in particular we are very determined to stay within our annual budget. We were under extraordinary pressure, not just with overtime, in the context of the visits of both President Trump and Vice President Pence. There was other expenditure involved, beyond overtime. There were all sorts of issues around feeding people, travel costs as well as operational costs in terms of equipment, including additional equipment. Those were very considerable operations and we are still having a conversation with the Government in respect of them, primarily because the visit of Vice President Pence is not even fully costed yet. We are still working through the costs in respect of that. The visits were very considerable, if not extraordinary, operations and were unknown on 1 January when we set out on the year. They involved quite considerable expenditure, but overall, in respect of the Garda Vote, we are determined this year to remain within the confines of our budget and, in effect, to cut our cloth accordingly.

Deputy Jack Chambers: The Garda is over budget up to now and that has been reported. Will there be an attempt to reduce-----

Mr. Drew Harris: We have to get back on track. In July we set down some measures by which we will be able to retrieve some of that overspend. There is also strict control on overtime at the moment as well. The overtime that we can control, we do control. We want to make sure that we are only spending what is essential for an operational purpose.

Deputy Jack Chambers: Overtime, particularly in the Dublin regions, plays a very important role. Gardaí have been excellent in trying to prevent a lot of serious gangland incidents from occurring and providing better visibility. It is important that this is maintained at the very least and that any restriction in overtime does not affect the front-line policing that is occurring across the region.

Mr. Drew Harris: Could I just add something in respect of overtime? Overtime is not a shorthand for operational activity. Overtime is on top of a 40-hour week for our members. What I want to focus on is making sure those 40 hours are used effectively and efficiently in the first place. Overtime is extra work in what is already demanding work. I have obligations around the well-being and welfare of staff as well and must try to manage it tightly.

Deputy Jack Chambers: In the document submitted, mention is made of unoccupied outlets in towns. What is that about?

Mr. Drew Harris: We get a lot of requests about stations, presence and visibility. We have

thought about this, and while it may not work in rural areas, certainly in larger residential and suburban areas and in cities, we may be able to use empty shop units as Garda posts. My colleagues have been very innovative in many respects, creating a presence in An Post offices when elderly people are collecting their pensions, for example. They have also been using local halls and other spaces to create a clinic-type facility. There is a lot of that going on. People take a lot of comfort from the presence of a Garda station, but to get real comfort from a station, we need to staff it and patrol out of it. If we want to create a greater presence, there are other things we might want to consider doing to make sure that we are available to talk to people.

Deputy Jack Chambers: I seek an update on Stepside Garda station. What is the position there, about which we have heard mixed reports?

Mr. Drew Harris: Stepside is to open in the next quarter. It will be staffed, so there will be Stepside personnel. Stepside is to run as an operational station 24-7. It is also proposed, but not finalised, to include some element of roads policing in Stepside as well. It is a local decision but I do not believe it will be open 24-7. The front desk will not be open 24-7 but there will be a front desk available during office hours. We are looking forward to getting it open and having, in effect, another base to patrol from.

Deputy Jack Chambers: The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Ross, has stated that it will be open and operational 24-7, but information received from An Garda Síochána is that it will be open from 7 a.m. until 9 p.m. daily. There is confusion, if not a local turf war going on, about operational hours. This is a good opportunity to clarify the situation. There has been a lot of controversy about the station, with the aforementioned Minister trying to dictate operational hours. I would welcome some clarity on the current position.

Mr. Drew Harris: I have only provided one direction, namely, that it should be staffed 24-7 and therefore operational 24-7. Its opening hours are a matter for the local management. I do not envisage that it will be a 24-7 station, but it will be operational 24-7, with effective roads policing and vehicles going backwards and forwards to it.

Deputy Jack Chambers: That is fair enough.

Mr. Drew Harris: That makes good sense. That is the only direction that I have given.

Deputy Jack Chambers: My final question relates to the attack on Mr. Kevin Lunney from Fermanagh, who was abducted and dumped on this side of the Border in a shocking and deplorable attack in the past 24 hours. This seems to be a trend of attacks against Quinn Industrial Holdings. There is concern in the local community that there have been no arrests and there has been no follow-through, from a public perspective, about the serious number of incidents that have occurred. What is being done from a cross-Border perspective with the PSNI in ensuring that these thugs, who are intimidating employees and workers, are brought to justice? To see anyone attacked, abducted and assaulted in that way is truly shocking and deplorable. We need follow-through and a commitment that this will receive absolute priority. It is shocking for that man to be left in that way.

Chairman: Before the Commissioner responds, I had intended raising this matter when it came to my own turn at the end. I join Deputy Jack Chambers in addressing this matter briefly. I happen to know Mr. Lunney personally and I am shocked to learn of what has happened. I understand that Mr. Lunney, who is both a director and chief operations officer of Quinn Industrial Holdings, was abducted near his home last evening and was subjected to what only can be

described as a most horrific brutal assault. He was taken from his home in Derrylin in County Fermanagh and later dumped in Cornafean in County Cavan.

This is an outrage deserving of wholehearted condemnation. Many of our colleagues are no longer here, having already participated in the direct engagement with the Commissioner, but as Chair of this committee I have every confidence that I speak on behalf of all of us. I believe that the people responsible need to be quickly identified and brought before the courts in either jurisdiction where the full rigours of the law should apply. As Chair of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice and Equality, joining my colleague, Deputy Jack Chambers, and all others in attendance, I take this opportunity to urge anyone with any information regarding this horrific attack to come forward and co-operate with either the PSNI or An Garda Síochána, as he or she decides most appropriate in his or her circumstances. I am shocked by this. I join Deputy Jack Chambers in urging An Garda Síochána to do everything within its power to bring the people responsible swiftly to justice.

Mr. Drew Harris: This was a very serious incident and it was treated as such right from the initial report last night. Initially, we met the PSNI and it was in touch with us quickly in terms of a joint response to this. The situation developed as Deputy Jack Chambers has described. A very vicious assault has happened and we are now conducting a full investigation into this matter. We are working closely with our colleagues in the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

In recent times, there has been a number of incidents of intimidation and attacks on property. Some of those have been very dangerous in themselves, involving dangerous attacks of arson, setting fire to vehicles, and damage to buildings. We are conscious of this ongoing threat to the directors, specifically in this case Mr. Lunney. The committee can be assured of a full and active response on our part in terms of the investigation, and the same is the case in the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

This is the subject of ongoing discussion because we have, in effect, a joint operation in response to these types of incidents, and to provide assurance and protection to Mr. Lunney and his colleagues in the management positions that they hold. It is entirely unacceptable and incredible that people carrying on lawful business, offering secure employment for local people, are treated in this way. We are determined, as are, I am sure, our colleagues in the Police Service of Northern Ireland, to bring the perpetrators to justice on this.

Chairman: I thank the Commissioner.

Deputy Jack Chambers: Has anyone been brought to justice? That is a concern of some of my party's local representatives. There is a perception, whether it is an information vacuum or whether it is the cross-Border issue. Why has no one who has already attacked, assaulted or brought violence to that company been brought to justice? This is a trend on which there is a need for serious co-operation between the Garda and the PSNI, as I accept the Commissioner has committed to.

Mr. Drew Harris: We have conducted investigations. In fact, these are joint cross-Border investigations as well. Some of the individuals engaged in this are careful to make sure that their identities are concealed. Indeed, the characteristic of burning the vehicles and the destruction of evidence is evident in this and has made this particularly difficult.

I do not want to depend upon recollection. I want to be sure of the facts. I felt that individuals had been brought to justice. I ask the committee to allow me to research that matter, because

I believe matters were before the courts, although I may be mistaken so I want to be sure. I can then give a written response in respect of that.

These are pretty difficult investigations. The individuals who have engaged in this go out of their way to make sure that they are not easy to catch through, as I stated, the destruction of evidence, concealing identities etc.

This has certainly been a considerable step-up in what has happened, this direct abduction and subsequent very serious assault on Mr. Lunney. We will pursue that with all vigour. We were very concerned last night as this situation developed.

Chairman: I thank the Commissioner for addressing it. As I indicated, I was going to raise this at the end. It was good that the Deputy and I could address it together.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I thank the Commissioner and his colleagues. A number of committee colleagues have raised the concerns about the emergence of a hard border. Certainly from my own perspective at previous meetings and my party's perspective, I would have been very clear in that regard.

I want to raise with the Commissioner something that he will be familiar with, that is, the concern that there is an emergence of a hard border of sorts for people who are travelling by bus across the Border at present. The Commissioner will have received correspondence from the Committee for the Administration of Justice, CAJ, in the North and the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, ICCL, here in the South about their concerns about the racial profiling of people who are travelling across the Border on public transport.

I have three questions, which I will ask in bulk to save time. I have asked this first question of Mr. Harris's predecessors. Has there been a strategic policy decision by Garda leadership to increase checks of passports on public transportation along the Border? Under what legislation are these checks taking place? If the Commissioner has not seen the correspondence from the ICCL or CAJ, they question the legality of some of these checks. Has there been such a strategic policy decision taken because no doubt the checks are happening? Travelling down to this institution, I myself witnessed it. Have gardaí been directed that they should tell the difference between Irish and EU citizens who do not have to produce passports or papers and non-EU citizens who may have to produce papers?

Mr. Drew Harris: There has been no policy change but we, as an organisation, are conscious of organised crime and the movement of individuals under coercion as human trafficking or as part of facilitating organised crime in terms of paid movement of individuals. We have been concentrating on the movement of individuals as part of our responsibilities in respect of immigration. We have a unit based in Dundalk that performs occasional mobile patrols on the M1 and has made detections of immigration-type offences there. To August of this year, I am told, 128 detections have been made. That is part of our ongoing responsibilities and is far overshadowed by the detections that have been made at Dublin Port and Dublin Airport, as well as the Port of Cork and Cork Airport. There is not a concentration of enforcement activity in respect of the common travel area and the Border. This is just part of our ongoing efforts in respect of immigration crime.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I do not doubt that the Garda has to monitor that, nor am I questioning that responsibility on the Commissioner's part or on the part of the Garda Síochána. What I am questioning is how individual officers define whose papers they will check when

they board these vehicles. I do not question the professionalism or the friendliness of individual gardaí whom I have witnessed get on board vehicles, but they do not ask me or people who look like me for passports or papers, and people who do not look like the Commissioner or me are asked for papers. This leaves the Garda on very shaky ground not just ethically and morally but also legally. My understanding is there is no legislation on checks at the land Border in respect of the common travel area, which we are all assured will be maintained and sustained whatever happens around Brexit. There are deep reservations about these searches and I think they stack up and firm up. As a cross-Border worker who uses public transport to get to work and who witnesses these searches, I believe there has been an increase in the number of searches, even from an anecdotal perspective. I would therefore be interested to hear about the legislation in this regard and the way in which members of the Garda are directed. To be fair, if they have not been directed or if there has been perhaps a clumsy or haphazard approach to this thus far, consideration might be given to engagement with the Garda officers responsible in order that they have a clear understanding of not only their legal responsibilities but also their societal responsibilities not to fall into the realm of potentially racial profiling people travelling north and south.

Mr. Drew Harris: From my understanding and what I have seen of the matter, these are operations directed towards organised crime involvement in immigration-type crime. As I said, that is human trafficking or the illegal movement of individuals for considerable sums of money. That is what we are addressing. I ask the Deputy to allow me to come back to him on the specific points he raises. He raises a very serious point about to whom the checks are being applied and I would want to have a full answer to that. I have not seen the correspondence from the CAJ. I had information on our efforts on immigration, as opposed to the specific answer to the CAJ issue. To put this in context, it would be useful to provide the information which shows the detections of the Dundalk unit, as opposed to what is happening at either Dublin Airport or Dublin Port, where there is very considerable enforcement activity. The common travel area, for all its strengths, also creates an opportunity for organised crime and we are therefore obliged to police that and to do our utmost to ensure we are not subject to criminal gangs moving people illegally through this jurisdiction and, in effect, into Northern Ireland to get access then into the UK, or the reverse. There are important policing issues in this.

Senator Niall Ó Donnghaile: I appreciate that fully. Where there is illegal movement or trafficking of people, I want that policed very effectively. I think the concerns are, as I have said, the nature of the checks as currently implemented and the legislation, if any, under which they are taking place. The Commissioner has committed to meet the organisations, at least once the correspondence reaches him. I hope he does so. They are far better equipped to deal with this than am I. Certainly, we could explore this at future meetings.

Chairman: The next member on my list would have been Deputy Naughten but as he is not with us any more, I will proceed to Deputy Cullinane. He will be followed by Senator Colm Burke. I wish to explain to other colleagues who were probably seated before they saw Senator Burke take his seat that he had been in earlier in the meeting's deliberations and indicated but had other business to attend to. He will be followed by Deputies Cahill, Breathnach and Ó Laoghaire. That is the remaining order, and I apologise that people have had to wait so long.

Deputy David Cullinane: It is always worth the wait to come into this committee. I welcome the Garda Commissioner and his team. I join in the strong condemnations made by the Chairman and Deputy Jack Chambers in respect of last night's incident. I hope people will come forward if they have information and that the perpetrators of the crime will be brought to

justice very quickly.

I thank the Garda Commissioner for his work over the past year. It is his first anniversary, and on that anniversary we have an opportunity to talk about the changes he hopes to make to the structures of An Garda Síochána and then operationally how they will play out across the State. I genuinely wish him well in that work. Like any strategy, when one breaks eggs to make an omelette, some people will be upset about the eggs broken. There will be local reaction to some of the changes. In that context - and I am in favour of reform to bring about better and more effective policing - have the changes that have been made been underpinned in any way by the national planning framework?

Mr. Michael Finn: We certainly take some of its factors into account. I am aware of some of the issues the Deputy is raising locally.

Deputy David Cullinane: I will get to that in a minute but my question to Mr. Finn is whether the changes were underpinned by the national planning framework.

Mr. Michael Finn: Yes, it was taken into consideration.

Deputy David Cullinane: The national planning framework identifies a number of regional cities in which population growth of about 50% to 60% is envisaged. I refer to the map of the regional cities, including Galway city, Limerick city, Cork city and Waterford city. Looking at the divisional boundaries proposed, Galway and Limerick retain their divisions, city and county, and Cork city retains its division but Waterford, which is a regional city and identified as such in the national planning framework, amalgamates with Kilkenny and Carlow. Why was that decision made? Why does Waterford not retain its stand-alone division like other regional cities? Why are Limerick, which is of a comparable size, and even Kerry, which is not a regional city identified in the national framework, retaining stand-alone divisions and Waterford not? Was there a particular reason for that?

Mr. Michael Finn: In our criteria for deciding the number of divisions we have, the number of personnel is a factor. Each division should have the capability to deliver the wide range of necessary services across their command. That was a factor we took into consideration. Waterford does not have those numbers right now, but if Waterford and Carlow-Kilkenny are brought together, the result is a division in which there are the numbers to be able to provide the range of services one would want to provide consistently across the-----

Deputy David Cullinane: Is Mr. Finn talking about Garda numbers or criminal numbers?

Mr. Michael Finn: Garda numbers.

Deputy David Cullinane: Is he talking about overall numbers of gardaí or superintendents and chief superintendents?

Mr. Michael Finn: Overall numbers, including Garda staff - our entire workforce.

Deputy David Cullinane: Does that include the number of Garda stations as well or is it just the number of personnel?

Mr. Michael Finn: Garda stations were also taken into consideration. That is a factor because it obviously impacts on our resources and our capability to spread them across the division.

Deputy David Cullinane: That might be a sore point in some counties in which Garda stations have been closed over recent years, particularly in rural areas. Thirty-two councillors on Waterford City and County Council and all of the county's Oireachtas Members bar one wrote to Mr. Harris outlining concerns about the headquarters of the new Waterford-Kilkenny-Carlow division potentially being outside Waterford. Mr. Harris has told the committee that some of the relevant decisions might not have been made. The Garda must pursue the process independently. That said, people will look at this situation and compare it with what happened at Stepside Garda station, where a Minister was presented with a plaque on the basis of what was perceived to have been a political decision rather than an operational one. Leaving that matter aside, decisions should be made through the proper processes and subject to proper criteria - I accept that that is the case with these particular reforms - but due regard must also be given to national policy in terms of spatial planning and population growth. There must be joined-up government and policy. Given that Waterford is the regional city, there is a concern. I met a number of senior Garda members in Waterford. They are supportive of the overall changes. At our request, they met Oireachtas Members and members of the joint policing committee and they expressed a number of concerns to us. Has a decision been made on where the headquarters of the new Waterford-Carlow-Kilkenny division will be?

Mr. Drew Harris: The final decision has not been made, but a proposal has been put to me. If I may, I will reserve that, as we want to look in the round at the question of where our divisional headquarters will be. The Deputy made salient points about what we should consider. We are putting in a divisional headquarters. In part, that is symbolic. On the other hand, we are trying to minimise the effects as much as possible by ensuring that we have a good representation of command and rank throughout the divisions. The Deputy's points in respect of Waterford's position are received and understood. We will bear them in mind when we come to making a final decision.

Deputy David Cullinane: I normally have a good ability to read between the lines. With Mr. Harris wishing to reserve judgment, and given his comments about Waterford being the regional city and a recommendation having been made to him, should I be comforted that the good people of Waterford and Garda members on the ground do not need to be as concerned as they are?

Mr. Drew Harris: I do not want to give any more comfort, if I may. I would be inundated with requests for comfort. I wish to emphasise that we are making balanced decisions. In part, these are based on our current estate and what is possible within that framework. I will not get the money for ten new divisional headquarters and neither am I asking for it. I am determined that the leadership of a division be visible to everyone, not just to my staff and their staff, but to the communities they police. In working on this, we are doing our best to reach good compromises that meet local concerns as well as our operational demands. Beyond that, we are keeping this very much at policing senior command, in consultation with divisional command-----

Deputy David Cullinane: To be fair, I understand the independence of the process. In healthcare, for example, there can sometimes be direct political interference in changes, but experts and people who work in the area need to be the main decision makers. I have no difficulty or quarrel with the process being independent. I have made my point, as have 32 councillors and most Oireachtas Members in Waterford, including a Minister of State.

I wish to ask about district superintendents. There are three in Waterford - one in the city, one in Dungarvan servicing west Waterford and one in Tramore. They are geographically based superintendents. They know their communities. I know all three of them. They work well and

are effective superintendents. Is it the case that geographically based superintendent roles will cease and we will move to issue-based ones? Is that what is being proposed? I would like clarity on the matter.

Mr. Drew Harris: It will be a hybrid, in that every division will have two community engagement superintendents. They will effectively split the area geographically. Some critical areas may have a third, but that will not be uniform across the divisions. There will also be superintendents with specific functions for crime and governance and quality assurance roles.

Deputy David Cullinane: That brings me to the amalgamation of Waterford, Kilkenny and Carlow. Currently, Waterford has three district superintendents in Waterford city and county. If the new amalgamated division covers Waterford, Kilkenny and Carlow, will there be just two geographical superintendents to service that district or is Mr. Harris saying that there will be two for Waterford and-----

Mr. Drew Harris: Service the division. May I just say-----

Deputy David Cullinane: Sorry. I should have said “division”. There will be just two for the entire division, which covers three counties.

Mr. Drew Harris: There will be three community engagement superintendents for the division plus two others - they will be superintendents - who will be based in an office somewhere. It will be made clear that those two will also have a responsibility, as all members of the Garda do, around engagement and community confidence. Where we remove a superintendent, we will replace that individual with an inspector, who will lead the local policing team in what was the old district. That inspector will not have the weight of administration, including complaints and human resources issues, that is currently on superintendents. In effect, that member will be a community policing inspector. He or she may be the resource that someone would approach in some places.

Deputy David Cullinane: I thank the Commissioner for his responses. I understand his logic in terms of the districts and the changes that are being made. Sometimes, though, a one-size-fits-all policy does not work. If a county is very large geographically and is both urban and rural, for example, Waterford, perhaps what might work for Limerick or Dublin city might not work for it. I have a concern about there being just two district superintendents for three counties when Waterford currently has three geographically based district superintendents. That concern is shared by individual senior gardaí in Waterford. I do not believe that they are making these arguments for their own positions, given that those positions are safe. Rather, their concerns seem genuine and I hope that they are taken on board. When we see the final outcome, I hope that we will not be as nervous as we are now.

Mr. Drew Harris: We are effectively creating a model division, and we must then apply that and extra factors to the actual reality of what a division will be. The “straw man” expression is used. We take the model, apply it to a division and see how it will work or, if it does not work, what else we must do. We have discussed autonomy and local involvement, a good part of which entails implementation and having a say in what that is. I am trying to keep this within a corporate framework. With the best will in the world, costs can sometimes spiral. I must maintain a control on costs. Every superintendent is one fewer garda on the ground. There is a bit of give and take in terms of resourcing the organisation.

Senator Colm Burke: I welcome the Garda Commissioner to the meeting. I join the

Chairman in condemning yesterday's attack and wishing gardaí and their colleagues in Northern Ireland every success in bringing the people who carried it out to justice within a short time.

I came to this meeting to discuss an issue that Deputy Fitzpatrick also raised, that being, unidentified bodies or human remains. For the past 12 months, I have been pushing for a centralised database to be established. I had the person who approached me about this matter deal directly with the Department of Justice and Equality on it. That person has forensic experience. My understanding is that the matter has been progressing. As I understand it, if a body is found in Cork and the identity of the individual is not established, that information stays in Cork. In a number of cases in the past two years by putting two and two together human remains discovered many years ago were identified. In an article in *The Sunday Times* in the past few weeks it was stated an official from the Department of Justice and Equality did not see the necessity for establishing a centralised database of information on unidentified bodies. I am very concerned about this. What is the Commissioner's view on the issue? My understanding is that when a body is recovered and not identified, the information stays within the coroner's area. What I have been pushing for is for all of the information to be centralised in order that there would be joined-up thinking in trying to match information. For instance, there were two cases in the past 12 months. One involved a person who had disappeared in Limerick in 2000. The remains were washed up in County Clare nine months later, but it took 17 years for somebody to put two and two together. The other case involved a person who had gone missing in Dublin about ten or 11 years ago. Three months after they had gone missing, remains were washed up in County Louth, but nobody put two and two together until last year. These are the two cases about which I am talking. Does the Commissioner have a view on establishing a centralised database where all forensic information would be kept such that there would be a direct link for anybody who wished to do a cross-check to access information immediately?

Chairman: I thank the Senator.

Senator Colm Burke: I have a follow-up question.

Mr. Drew Harris: I would like to have an opportunity to give a written response on that matter because it touches on very sensitive issues. It impacts on people deeply.

There have been successes in identifying unidentified bodies through a process involving DNA samples taken from family members. I think that process has only emerged in the past four or five years. Although DNA samples have been used from the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the process has only been applied to such cases in recent times, with success being achieved both in the United Kingdom and Ireland. The attraction is that if a body is recovered from the sea, one can quickly go through DNA records to resolve matters quickly for the family. The vagaries of the tides and currents in the Irish Sea can mean that bodies can travel right across it. The bodies of people who have gone missing in Ireland have turned up along the Anglesey coast. It does not just involve a national response. We must look at the response across the Irish Sea also. I do not think we compartmentalise. If somebody is missing, we take notice of it nationally. Forensic Science Ireland has taken a national approach to the issue in the investigation of remains that have been recovered. We have assisted in investigations which may have directed it towards identifying a recovered body as being the remains of a certain individual. DNA testing allows this to be clarified with certainty. There is quite a piece in this and I would like to have the opportunity to consider it. It is just not about my office but also Forensic Science Ireland and the resources it allocates to the task, as well as a review of cases by our national units.

Senator Colm Burke: I am coming at the issue from the point of view that I pushed through the change in legislation on missing persons, whereby a family can now apply to the court where all of the information suggests a particular person has died. When the debate was taking place in the Seanad, a family came to see me in Dublin about the case where a family member had disappeared two years previously. There is a provision in the coroners Act, under which the Minister for Justice and Equality can request a coroner to hold an inquest, even where a body has not been recovered. I wrote to the Minister and as a result of that letter, members of An Garda Síochána came to the family's house to take DNA samples to be sent to Wales and France. My point is that there should be reciprocity. If there was to be a case involving someone in Wales writing to the Irish authorities, there would be no centralised database.

I will follow up with a tied-in question. It concerns the case in Limerick involving the late Gussie Shanahan. What I am really disappointed about - I have written to the Commissioner about the matter - is that the family had to wait 17 years before being called into the Garda station in October 2018 to be advised that the remains that had been washed up in County Clare were those of the father's late son and his daughter's late brother. Some 11 months later the relevant documentation has not been sent from Limerick to the coroner in County Clare to enable them to hold an inquest and for a death certificate to be issued. The family are really concerned and contacted me about four weeks ago. It is disappointing that, having waited 17 years, they are still waiting 11 months later for a death certificate to be issued. It has been a really difficult time for them and everyone else involved. I wonder if that issue could be dealt with also. There should not be such a time delay when there is clear evidence that the person is deceased and the appropriate correspondence has been sent to the coroner for the particular area. I ask that this be taken on board for the particular family involved.

Mr. Drew Harris: I will ensure it is dealt with expeditiously. I do not know the circumstances of the case. I regret to say I have not seen the specific letter the Senator sent to me. I will inquire into the matter.

Senator Colm Burke: I have received a reply from the chief superintendent in Limerick, but it still does not deal with the issue. The information has not been sent to the coroner in County Clare who cannot deal with the matter until such time as An Garda Síochána forwards the documentation.

Mr. Drew Harris: We will have the matter dealt with expeditiously.

Chairman: I thank the Senator and the Commissioner.

There are only 17 minutes left as we must vacate the room at 1.15 p.m. I have yet to participate as I always wait until the end. Can we try to curtail contributions to four minutes each? I apologise to Deputies Cahill and Breathnach, but Deputy Naughten has been on the list and I must bring him in at this stage.

Deputy Denis Naughten: I thank the Chairman.

I wish to raise two specific issues with the Commissioner. In his initial contribution Mr. Harris touched on the concern expressed across the country that all superintendents would be based in the divisional headquarters. I know that he stressed that that would not be the case in this instance, but I am not naïve enough to believe that will happen in reality. I have heard many heads of organisations state before an Oireachtas committee that staff would remain deployed across the country. Whether it happens by osmosis or otherwise, over time they drift to the lo-

cation of the central headquarters. I have a genuine concern about the divisional headquarters based in Roscommon. I find what Mr. Harris has said, that a new approach is being taken, very surprising because on occasion his predecessors tried to move the divisional headquarters from Roscommon to Castlebar. That concern is being raised again. They tried to move the divisional headquarters from Mullingar to Navan and, funnily enough, that is there again. I believe that over time, we will see all of the superintendents based in the divisional headquarters. If we look at the alignment being proposed, we can see the likelihood is that the superintendents will be based in Castlebar and Navan. Project Ireland 2040 talks about designating Athlone as a growth centre and how all Government policy must take that into account. It has not taken it into account on this occasion. With this reconfiguration, the likelihood is that the nearest superintendent to Athlone will be in Thurles in County Tipperary, which is not good enough. We have a structure where the divisional headquarters in Roscommon is slap bang in the middle of this proposed revision. It would make sense to service the three counties by locating it there and I hope that would be reflected in any decision and would leave a divisional headquarters within 30 km of Athlone.

With regard to the pilots in Galway and Mayo, two rural districts, is there a superintendent in every one of those district headquarters because that is the concern we all have? I welcome the increased footprint and more resources going to local Garda stations but the decisions will be made by superintendents and chief superintendents, these are very large geographic areas and it is important that these headquarters are located as centrally as possible within the various divisions.

Can the Commissioner give a commitment that there will be no barrier to staff transferring between the divisions? We were provided with those assurances when the HSE was divided up across the country and yet staff could not move from one geographic area to another. I want a commitment from the Commissioner that if someone in Meath or Louth wants to transfer to Roscommon, Mayo or Galway, the fact that this person is in a different division will be not be a barrier to that transfer.

Mr. Drew Harris: I will address the second point first. I will give that commitment. We are a national organisation that provides a national service. If people apply for a transfer, obviously, they need a vacant post to transfer to but that is often the only impediment to individuals moving between divisions. There is no bar to that. It requires an organisational need as well.

In respect of the superintendents, I reiterate that we are not building new super-headquarters. Our infrastructure will not permit all the superintendents to be in one building so no matter what I say, unless they are all going to sit out in the backyard, they will not all be in the one building. We do not have the space or the estate to do that. I am also fearful because things happen through osmosis despite grand plans but I have no intention of seeing superintendents gradually drift into divisional headquarters. Superintendents will be out and visible, not only to their staff but to their local communities. I can give the Deputy an absolute assurance about that.

We are taking a long look at where we situate divisional headquarters. We have consulted with the regional assistant commissioners and chief superintendents and we are taking a range of factors into account. We have to have divisional headquarters where chief superintendents will be based but all of these things are entirely consistent with superintendents being diffused throughout the division. If I may use the example of Mayo, which is a pilot, superintendents have remained spread throughout that county so we have had a community engagement superintendent based in Claremorris and Ballina, while the divisional headquarters have been in Castlebar. That is the model we applied in Galway as well and is the model we will apply in

these rural divisions. We want the superintendents to be out and about, not all situated in one divisional headquarters. I can give the Deputy an absolute assurance of that.

Deputy Jackie Cahill: I welcome the opportunity to speak at this committee and welcome the Commissioner and his colleagues. I listened to the presentations in my office. I am a Tipperary Deputy with significant concerns about what is happening. Over the past couple of years, I have asked a number of parliamentary questions about resources provided to County Tipperary. It is clear that we have not received our fair share of resources be they personnel on the ground or the car fleet. The drugs unit in our county is completely under-resourced. We feel that this reorganisation will put us at further disadvantage. We have serious black spots as regards personnel in the county in places like Clonmel, Carrick-on-Suir and Roscrea. Templemore Garda station, which is a 24-hour Garda station, cannot be kept open because of lack of personnel. They are all issues about which people in the county have serious concerns.

With this reorganisation, we see Tipperary being amalgamated with Clare. Tipperary is a county with an area of 4,305 sq. km with a population of 160,000. It is 150 km in length from top to bottom. I heard my colleague from Clare talk earlier about the bridge in Killaloe. It is the only land connection between Tipperary and Clare. Last Saturday, there was a 6 km tailback on that bridge. Thankfully, it is a tourist destination and is extremely busy during the summer but it is the only land connection between the two counties. When I was in my office, I heard it said that there was extensive consultation about these divisional boundaries. As a Deputy, I can say that there was no consultation with Deputies in the county and my colleagues have said the same to me. I spoke to members of the Garda Representative Association, GRA, who told me that there was no consultation with them and I spoke with senior members of the force who feel there was very little consultation.

Like Deputy Naughten, I am concerned. Thurles is the divisional headquarters for Tipperary at the moment. I heard the case being made this morning for Ennis to be made the site of headquarters of this new area. Geographically, that makes no sense. It would be a completely lopsided decision. Thurles is in the centre of Tipperary. This proposed division is a monstrosity in terms of size. It is 200 km from the west coast of Clare to Carrick-on-Suir. I have met nobody operating in An Garda Síochána in my county who thinks it logical to have this territory in the one division.

We also have the most kilometres of motorways of any county in Ireland. We have two motorways going through our county. For whatever reason, one of them seems to have a serious number of crashes. There seems to be a serious number of crashes on the stretch of motorway in the Moneygall area. As a Tipperary Deputy and a Thurles man, I am extremely concerned about this merger. We have been getting the short straw as regards resources. This reorganisation will make Tipperary's position worse. I stress that if this proposed merger of Tipperary and Clare, which is illogical, goes ahead, Thurles must be retained as the headquarters in that division due to its location. While we would still not be happy, it would give us some confidence that Tipperary would be adequately policed. The lack of resources in our county is of significant concern to us. Clonmel Garda station is another issue. We have been promised a new station there for a long time. The conditions in which gardaí in that station have to work are unacceptable and are not up to modern standards. Due to pressure on time, I will conclude.

Chairman: I appreciate that. In line with earlier representations, would the Commissioner like to respond?

Mr. Drew Harris: Yes. I noted what the Deputy said carefully. The organisation is still

growing. In Tipperary the resource figure is 447. There are resources that we have to grow. Taking out some of the administrative centres will free up personnel. Therefore, there will be a growth in the number of personnel.

The geographical size of some of the divisions is an issue, but at the same time I am not expecting the chief superintendent to answer calls. Our resources will be dispersed geographically throughout the divisions. Therefore, gardaí and sergeants will be available to answer calls for assistance and community policing. What we are gaining is the ability to enhance community policing and our response to crime, including domestic abuse and serious sexual assaults. Also, we will be able to create efficiencies. Therefore, there will be more policing, not less. Perhaps there might be a lot less access to the chief superintendent, but there will be superintendents available. There will also be inspectors with community policing responsibilities and additional inspectors and sergeants. There will be an additional 75 inspectors and an additional 150 sergeants. It is good to be able to apply the additional supervision and support to this model. People in Tipperary will see an enhanced, not a diminished, policing service.

Deputy Jackie Cahill: What about the headquarters for the division?

Mr. Drew Harris: We are in the final stages. I have received proposals, but we have not signed off on them as a senior team. However, I have noted carefully the comments made by the Deputy.

Chairman: I must conclude the meeting in four minutes. I have sat here for four and a quarter hours and not yet had an opportunity to contribute. Deputy Ó Laoghaire indicated that he wished to speak, but he has not yet been called. I will accommodate all members if they can contribute in one minute. Repetition is pointless.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: I am glad to hear the Chair say that. As a non-member of the joint committee, I thank him for giving me the opportunity to make a contribution.

The schoolteacher in me was seeking some words of wisdom and I looked at what former US President John F. Kennedy had said about change. He said, "Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future." In saying that, it is important for me, as a Deputy from County Louth, to pay tribute to the current staff, not only in our region but also across the country, who are grappling not only with the changes proposed but also with ever-changing crime demographics. Equally, it is important to pay tribute to the 88 gardaí who were lost in the force, including three in my constituency, namely, Garda Tony Golden, Detective Garda Adrian Donohoe and Sergeant Patrick Morrissey. I am sure they would have been prepared to embrace the changes required.

I welcome the Commissioner's decision this morning not to make decisions on the Border region until we know what the fallout from Brexit is. Obviously, the Border, Brexit and budgeting are the order of the day in the Dáil. I want to ask a few specific questions about Brexit. There is serious concern along the Border about co-operation, particularly in the context of the sharing of information, extradition and trafficking, in the event that a deal is not struck. Policing will be the worse for it, not just in the Border region but also across the rest of the country.

Deputy Fitzpatrick asked from where the model of the divisional policing policy had come. Where will the headquarters be located in the region? What is the position on remoteness from the command centre in Galway?

Last but not least, many regions such as mine suffer more when it comes to crime investiga-

tion, particularly the investigation of murders. Where areas are suffering from greater stress, will there be SWAT teams to go in without having an impact on budgets? Like Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick, I am a Deputy from County Louth. I have already written to the Commissioner to come to the county to discuss crime there and meet the policing committees.

Chairman: I ask for a succinct response.

Mr. John Twomey: The points made about restructuring were addressed earlier.

On the investigation of crime, we have national and regional units. At all times they are deployed to support local, district and divisional units, where required. In the cases referred to, national resources have been allocated to support local units. Additional resources were provided on a permanent basis in the area in question to deal with the problem. It is an ongoing issue that is dealt with daily.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: What about European co-operation?

Mr. Drew Harris: There is a law enforcement directive we can deploy, but it will have to wait until Brexit happens. We are still operating within the EU regulations. Regardless of what type of Brexit takes place, we will need new arrangements. The law enforcement directive assists in that regard because the United Kingdom will, in effect, become a third country for the purpose of GDPR regulations, but it still allows police-police co-operation and the exchange of information which is essential on a North-South and an east-west basis, particularly to the National Crime Agency.

Chairman: I am the last member who would want to curtail the meeting, but we will have to share the remaining minutes. Can we focus on one issue to see if we can extract the relevant information? The team to replace us, the anchors of the next committee meeting, are already in the room. I call Deputy Butler who is to be followed by Deputy Ó Laoghaire and me.

Deputy Mary Butler: I thank the Chairman for his indulgence. I welcome Commissioner Harris and the other staff members. I am sure the delegates have heard a lot today about the new reform plan. I wish to raise a couple of issues.

I have grave concern about the merging of Waterford Garda division with the Carlow and Kilkenny division. My main concerns are about Waterford being the only city in the country to be left without a divisional headquarters under the planned reforms. From what I can see, Galway, Limerick, Cork and Dublin are receiving different treatment. Waterford Garda station is among the five busiest in the country. Under Project 2040, the population of Waterford is expected to grow by 30,000 in the next 20 years. Why was there no meaningful consultation with the various bodies before the plan was announced? Why was there no meaningful consultation with the joint policing committees, the front-line staff and the Garda associations across the country before the reforms were announced? With the amalgamation of the Waterford and Carlow and Kilkenny divisions, it is proposed to reduce the number of divisions from six to four.

There was a large spate of burglaries in rural Waterford last week. Seven houses were affected. I dealt with a case in which the home of an 86 year old man had been broken into. I highlight the absolute respect and empathy shown to the gentleman by An Garda Síochána, including the garda who visited the crime scene. The individual in question was there for hours and so respectful and helpful. I fear that, with the dilution of services, rural parts of Waterford will be affected. We have three great divisions - Dungarvan, Tramore and Waterford - under the auspices of the chief superintendent. When the Commissioner is considering where the

headquarters should be located, I would like him to really consider the fact that Waterford has the fifth busiest divisional headquarters in the country.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: I thank the Chairman for his patience. I thank all of the gardaí and staff who are present.

When I was in my office, I was listening to Assistant Commissioner Finn alluding to the proposed community garda complement of four in 40 in Cork. I understand the current complement is three in 25. I have raised this issue twice before with the Commissioner. I wrote to him and, in fairness, received a response. As I previously put on the record, my view is that Cork has not got a fair shake. Since 2014, 2,800 gardaí have graduated from Templemore, of whom 69, or 2.4%, have been assigned to Cork which accounts for almost 10% of the national population. That is not good enough. I acknowledge that it was intended for gardaí from the most recent complement of graduates to be assigned to Cork, but the Commissioner decided to redirect them to Dublin and Drogheda for reasons that I understand.

I am conscious that there are significant challenges in Cork. There was a big public meeting last night at which significant anger was expressed about a rise in crimes, including assaults. There were two very serious assaults last weekend in Cork city. It is high time for Cork to be afforded an adequate complement of gardaí. I ask the Commissioner to prioritise Cork in the allocation of gardaí in November. I know that four in 40 is the plan, but what is important is that many of them will be promoted from the ranks of ordinary gardaí and those positions need to be backfilled. I ask the Commissioner to take that on board for the November allocation.

Chairman: I wish to state again that I am filled with disgust at what happened yesterday evening on the Border between Cavan and Fermanagh. As Chair of the committee, I extend my very best wishes to Kevin Lunney, his wife and family and his work colleagues at Quinn Industrial Holdings. It was a horrific experience for Mr. Lunney and all associated with him, especially his loved ones. I hope he makes a full and speedy recovery.

I wish to record my thanks for the note received since our last engagement with the Commissioner on a matter I raised regarding a gentleman who was seriously injured following a Garda operation on Dublin Street in my home town. The only critical point I will reflect is that I am advised that the injured man was not a target of the Garda operation. I welcome that clarification, which is important for my community and the man in question.

I intended to raise several matters but I will confine myself to a brief selection. On the reform process, I am my party's spokesperson on disability rights. I have been made aware that the Templemore training programme for new recruits does not incorporate what I would regard as disability awareness training. Such training should not be confined to new recruits. It is more widely needed. As national disability spokesperson and vice chair of the Oireachtas all-party disability group, I am aware of instances when people with specific disabilities that are not immediately apparent had less than satisfactory experiences with members of the Garda. An incident recently referred to me involved a person who has an acquired brain injury, although that is not immediately apparent in his demeanour. He is unaware that it sounds like he is shouting when he is responding and conversing. He was threatened with pepper spray and a baton. That is a real case, not constructed or contrived. I reference it only to encourage that disability awareness training in all its dimensions be incorporated into the Templemore programme and, indeed, for serving members in whatever way it can be rolled out.

Mr. Drew Harris: On disability awareness training, I know that certain training is under-

gone in Templemore, but I will ascertain the full picture and then report back to the committee, at which stage we will see what more needs to be done in that regard.

I received member's representations on the proposed division of Waterford, Kilkenny and Carlow, but I was not able to give much comfort other than to say that a final decision has not yet been made. It will be made shortly in consultation with my senior team. We have carefully noted the comments made today on the issue. On consultation, the simplest part of the change is putting lines on the map. The next step, which will be difficult, involves local implementation. That will be an extensive process that will require the full engagement of the organisation. The changes were flagged long in advance by the design principles that were applied to the divisional structure and the resultant decision on the number of divisions in An Garda Síochána. Now that we have reached this point, we must begin implementation, which will ensure that we provide a locally bespoke policing service that meets the requirements of local policing plans and communities. That will be the focus going forward. We hope that people in all areas will see an uplift in the quality of the policing service.

I visited Cork two weeks ago and many of the points made by Deputy Ó Laoghaire on distribution, particularly that of probationary gardaí in June, were made during my visit. Some rebalancing needs to be done following the distribution in June. At the time, there were specific and very critical issues to which we had to respond. Together with my colleagues, I took a decision on distribution. In some ways we will have to rebalance that in the coming period. In spite of our financial position, we will be able to recruit a further 200 gardaí in December. We plan to allocate approximately 700 gardaí in the new year, depending on our financial situation. There are plenty of individuals joining An Garda Síochána, which, along with the recruitment of Garda staff, will make a difference to community policing teams and our overall visibility. Roster reform is a very important part of ensuring that we have gardaí available at the right times in the right places. The importance of the night-time economy was reinforced several times during the meeting.

Chairman: I thank the Commissioner and members. I extend my apologies to Tony Dodd and Anthony Larkin who are waiting to set the room up to be used by another committee. I apologise for any inconvenience. I thank the Garda Commissioner for his attendance and the fulsome nature of his engagement with members. I thank Mr. Joseph Nugent, Deputy Commissioner John Twomey, Assistant Commissioner Michael Finn, and their colleagues, Mr. Andrew McLindon and Mr. John Keegan.

The joint committee adjourned at 1.30 p.m. until 9 a.m. on Wednesday, 25 September 2019.