

Kildare Joint Policing Committee Minutes of Meeting

7.00 p.m. Monday 6th December 2021
Online via Microsoft Teams

Members in attendance:

Name:	Representing
Cllr. Fintan Brett (Chair)	Elected Member
Cllr. Aoife Breslin (Vice Chair)	Elected Member
Cllr. Pádraig McEvoy	Elected Member
Cllr. Ivan Keatley	Elected Member
Cllr. Tim Durkan	Elected Member
Cllr. Brian Dooley	Elected Member
Cllr. Ciara Galvin	Elected Member
Cllr. Nuala Killeen	Elected Member
Cllr. Bernard Caldwell	Elected Member
Cllr. Naoise Ó'Ceairúil	Elected Member
Cllr. Chris Pender	Elected Member
Cllr. Fiona McLoughlin-Healy	Elected Member
Cllr. Anne Connolly	Elected Member
Cllr. Bill Clear	Elected Member
Cllr. Colm Kenny	Elected Member
Dep. Catherine Murphy	Oireachtas Member
Dep. Réada Cronin	Oireachtas Member
Dep. Bernard Durkan	Oireachtas Member
Sen. Mark Wall	Oireachtas Member
Sen. Fiona O'Loughlin	Oireachtas Member
Sen. Vincent Martin	Oireachtas Member
Sonya Kavanagh	KCC
Marian Higgins	KCC
Chief Supt. John Scanlan	An Garda Síochána
Supt. Oliver Henry	An Garda Síochána
Maura Littlewood	Comhairle na nÓg
Conor O'Leary	Muintir na Tíre
Steven Joyce	SWRDATAF
Emma Berney	CYPSC
Monica Cox	Kildare OPC
Michael Corcoran	PPN

KCC staff in attendance: Denis McDermott, A/Senior Executive Officer, John Shannon, Administrative Officer and Ciara Gallagher, Clerical Officer – all from Economic, Community & Cultural Development.

Also in attendance: Senior personnel from An Garda Síochána, Kildare, members of the public and members of the press.

JH Brett . 8/3/2022

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1. Minutes / Matters Arising:

The minutes of the quarterly meeting held on Monday 6th September 2021 were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. Naoise O’Cearúil, seconded by Cllr. Pádraig McEvoy.

2. Chairperson’s business:

- Councillor Brett thanked the members of An Garda Síochána and all frontline services for their ongoing dedication in the continuing restricted environment. He expressed a hope that 2022 would bring better times for everyone.
- Councillor Brett welcomed Garda Commissioner Drew Harris to the County Kildare JPC annual public meeting and noted that he was first invited in early 2020. The planned meeting in the Glenroyal Hotel could not proceed due to current public health guidelines and the online meeting was the best option in the circumstances.

3. Garda Commissioner Drew Harris:

Commissioner Harris thanked the chairman for his invitation and stated he was pleased to be finally addressing the meeting, albeit not as planned. He advised he would be giving a brief presentation on the new policing model being rolled out and would answer questions later.

The commissioner explained that the new model was required to meet the changing demands of modern policing. The model had been designed after significant internal and external inputs, including consultations with the Garda Inspectorate, members of the public and elected representatives. The new model would enhance Garda capabilities in dealing with increasingly diversifying communities. It would also assist the Gardaí to deal with the changing nature of criminal activity, which now included growth areas such as online fraud and sexual abuse contrasting with a reduction in typical crimes such as theft and burglary.

Overall, the priority was to keep people safe. There would be reorganisation of An Garda Síochána at national, regional, and local level. The aim was to produce a standardised response by having larger divisions, more specialists and releasing Gardaí from administrative roles to frontline service. There would be 19 divisions on completion (reduced from 28) and each division would have more capability.

For Kildare, there was a new Divisional Protective Services Unit working in the area of domestic abuse to assist the various agencies and support victims. There would be an inspector available 24/7 and a specific crime superintendent in the division. There would also be dedicated community engagement teams for community policing roles. The commissioner noted there had been an increase of over 100 Gardaí in Kildare in recent years.

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Commissioner Harris went on to answer some of the questions that had been submitted to his office earlier.

1. Naloxone Project: The Gardaí would support the Naloxone Project as far as possible, but he noted that law enforcement was the Gardaí's priority. All such initiatives were welcome.
2. Garda resources: Garda numbers were currently at 14,300 and would reach 15,000 in 2022. Allocation of resources was an ongoing process which is monitored closely.
3. Maynooth Garda Station: The commissioner acknowledged that Kildare is a fast-growing area with demands due to its proximity to Dublin. He considered that additional opening hours at Maynooth was a sensible and feasible suggestion and would be considered.
4. 999 calls: The commissioner emphasised that all 999 calls had been answered and logged, but he conceded some had not been followed up in accordance with established procedures. He stated the new Computer Aided Dispatch system would assist in the future. He noted over 11,000 prosecutions for domestic violence/abuse crimes in 2020 and the 80% call-back rates to victims. He hoped the Gardaí would rebuild trust in this area.
5. Domestic violence: Commissioner Harris noted that specific online training had been provided to 94% of Gardaí working in this area in 2021. The comprehensive training covered all areas to include recording of offences, victim engagement and prosecution. He proposed that all Gardaí working in this area would attend a two-week detective course eventually.
6. Community resources: The commissioner noted the support provided to vulnerable persons during Covid lockdown and stated he was committed to community policing. He noted changing demands on Garda resources due to population growth and indicated he was working with the OPW to try to ensure facilities were available to reallocate Gardaí as needed.

Cllr. Brett thanked the commissioner for his presentation and responses and advised that responses to other questions would follow locally. He then invited additional questions from the floor via the "chat" facility. A number of questions were asked from the Teams chat function:

The following questions were answered:

- Was the commissioner in favour of a facility where cyclists could upload video evidence of dangerous driving with a view to enabling further Garda action?
- Was the commissioner satisfied at the general level of enforcement regarding illegal parking on footpaths, cycle lanes and disable driver bays?
- Would it be possible to make increased use of cameras to detect dangerous driving and speeding offences?
- When would Garda numbers in Kildare generally and south Kildare in particular be increased as they were at a very low level currently?
- Would the commissioner comment on proposals in the current speed limit review to increase limits in some cases?
- Would it be possible to increase opening hours at Celbridge Garda station?

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- Would the Gardaí be making a submission on the review of alcohol licencing laws recently announced?
- What level of resources would be made available to the National Community Engagement Unit?

The commissioner answered questions where he could on the night and undertook to revert on some of the issues raised. He indicated that Chief Superintendent John Scanlan would be best placed to respond on Garda numbers and allocations in the division generally.

4. Policing Report:

Chief Superintendent John Scanlan prefaced his report by thanking the local councillors for providing the funds for the new wheelchair-accessible community bus. He indicated it was an excellent facility to have and would be used widely.

Regarding Garda numbers in the division, he stated the following:

- Leixlip is a training station and Garda recruits assigned to north Kildare will be sent to Leixlip in the first instance.
- Where possible, transferring Gardaí are assigned to mid- and south Kildare.
- Garda numbers have increased from 48 sergeants and 259 Gardaí to 55 sergeants and 358 Gardaí in five years.
- Certain Garda are deemed divisional and their location in a particular station is not significant.
- He is currently allocating new recruits on a basis of 2:1 for Kildare versus Laois & Offaly.
- Newbridge has very limited space available and is unlikely to be able to take any increase in numbers.
- Opening hours of stations must be balanced against providing frontline services.
- Newbridge is a sub-district of Kildare and is only six miles away from where the drugs unit is located.

Chief Superintendent Scanlan presented the policing report with relevant statistics comparing Q3 2021 with Q3 2020. Statistical details were given in relation to property crime, crime against the person, criminal damage / public order offenses, drugs / weapons offences, and road traffic incidents. The chief superintendent commented that while there were improvements in some categories, the figures seemed to indicate that criminal activities were increasing generally as society moved into more normal patterns of activity.

Some questions were asked as follows and answered by the chief superintendent:

- Is there a breakdown of ages of drivers in drink-driving cases?

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- Have there been any accidents at the revised junctions at the Bundle of Sticks exit 10 and the exit 9a on the Sallins bypass?
- Why does there appear to be little enforcement of parking laws generally?

5. Domestic violence supports:

Councillor Killeen introduced this item which had been postponed from the September meeting. She outlined her desire to ensure that all victims of domestic violence and abuse could access essential services and practical assistance as easily and early as possible. Such services could be legal advice, income support or details of emergency accommodation. It was hoped to make available a document with all relevant contact details as soon as possible. She then introduced Lorraine Rowan, Chief Executive of Teach Tearmainn in Kildare and invited her to make her presentation to the meeting.

Lorraine explained the role of Teach Tearmainn since its inception in 1999 as a service for domestic abuse victims in Kildare and West Wicklow. Originally just a telephone helpline, the service has grown to include outreach services, places of refuge, group support, court accompaniment at Naas and early intervention strategies. She stressed that it typically takes seven attempts before abuse victims make the necessary break and this is usually down to not being aware or confident of how to access the services needed in those difficult situations.

Detective Sergeant Diarmuid Lalor then gave a presentation on Kildare's new Divisional Protective Services Unit. He explained its formation, training undertaken, and the resources allocated to it as well as its links with other agencies and relevant statistics for the last three years. Additionally, he outlined how the unit would typically respond in domestic abuse cases and the relevant legislation that might govern the Garda response.

There were many compliments paid to Lorraine and Diarmuid for the excellent work being undertaken and the committee pledged its support in the future.

6. Update on Text Alert Scheme:

Cllr. Brett advised that following the tender competition a preferred bidder had been selected. An objection had been received from an unsuccessful supplier and was being dealt with. The working group was confident that the tendering procedures were followed as required and the tender award would be finalised as soon as possible.

7. CCTV update:

Cllr. Pdraig McEvoy confirmed that Clane Community Council had selected a consultant for their scheme, and they hoped to be progressing an application via the JPC soon.

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8. Close:

Cllr. Brett thanked Commissioner Harris and all attendees and presenters for making it a very worthwhile meeting and wished everyone well.