

# POLICING AUTHORITY ASSESSMENT OF POLICING PERFORMANCE

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AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA  
POLICING AUTHORITY

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## Chairperson's Foreword

It marks something of a milestone in itself that a Policing Authority document assessing Garda performance does not begin with a reference to COVID-19 as a defining part of its context. The virus is still very much with us, of course, but it is no longer the primary determinant of what is possible in public life.

The experience of policing during the pandemic still has a great deal to tell us, and in particular to tell the Garda Síochána, about what can be learned from the very special character of the relationship that existed between Gardaí and people. This, in the perception of very many and in the Authority's outreach work, was qualitatively different from other times. To acknowledge this is not to say that good relations did not previously exist. But to fail to recognise it would be to miss a golden opportunity to learn from it.

These periodic assessments of policing performance, as well as being an important part of the Authority's statutory oversight role, are valuable as detached evaluations of where matters stand relative to the objectives that the Commissioner has outlined to the organisation and to the public. They present an opportunity for the Authority to outline the outcomes of its engagements with the Garda Síochána and with a wide range of statutory and non-statutory organisations. They offer the Commissioner an external perspective and, critically, they give the public the assurance of knowing where matters stand.

It is clear that there was much by way of policing success with which to be satisfied in the first half of 2022. The collaboration between the Garda Síochána and a number of international and multi-national law enforcement agencies designed to counter and break the influence of an organised crime gang was a major achievement by any standards. The result of much careful and detailed police work, it represented a clear statement of intent to tackle crime gangs and to reduce their potential to bring misery to so many innocent people. It was also a statement of international acknowledgement of the professionalism and commitment of the Garda Síochána.

In this context also, the fact that there were no threat to life incidents in the first half of this year was a significant development, again a reflection of sustained policing effort. Gardaí had to contend with a number of particularly awful murders and succeeded in identifying and arresting suspects who have been charged. The speedy apprehension of suspects assisted and reassured the communities involved.

It is not in the least a suggestion that there is a conflict between the work against organised crime gangs and the more localised focus on disrupting the distribution of drugs, but the apparently seamless continuity of supply of drugs in affected communities across the country, and the associated culture of intimidation and violence, can be something of a conundrum to many. It highlights the vital importance of ensuring that the focus and objectives of every unit in the Garda Síochána are as closely integrated as possible. It also reflects the importance of presenting tangible evidence of improvements of how safe people feel in their own communities. And it emphasises the need to communicate more clearly the impact that the disablement of organised crime gangs has for the lives of individuals and communities.

Another area for satisfaction, and one that highlights the close understanding between the needs of victims and the actions of the Garda Síochána, has been the further development in the area of protective services throughout the country and the sustained positive response they have received.

Following on from the success of Operation Faoiseamh, this represents an important commitment to an issue of real interest and concern to everybody. All this side by side with the day-to-day work of Garda members and Garda staff in every corner of the state, sometimes at no little risk to themselves, giving vivid expression to the mission of keeping people safe.

This assessment, like other such assessments and reviews, draws attention once again to the continuing urgency of making and sustaining progress in the development of the organisational capacity of the Garda Síochána in areas that are vital to the quality of the policing service given to the public. These areas such as human resources, workforce planning, training and development, financial management, information and technology have seen uneven measures of progress. All advances are to be welcomed but much more still requires to be done.

Much of this lies within the competence and responsibility of the organisation itself but much is beyond its control. The Authority engages frequently and consistently with the Commissioner and his colleagues on the steps that need to be taken and will continue to do so. There are also issues for government to consider which the Authority will again bring to the attention of the Minister and the Department.

These issues have been consistent subjects of attention since the establishment of the Authority. They will continue to be highlighted as they are foundational in any attempt to improve the quality of the service given to the people.

Managing in a time of change or living through a time of change is never easy. But in an organisation such as the Garda Síochána, change is and always will be a constant. It is important to acknowledge that the organisation had embarked on a programme of change before the establishment of the Commission on the Future of Policing. The Modernisation and Renewal Programme was too broad and, as a result, was insufficiently deep. But it did begin the process of thinking about how the organisation might present itself to the public in the future – at least for some at a senior level.

There is no standing still for a national policing service in a contemporary democracy. The country is rapidly changing in a world which is dramatically changing. Life will always be dynamic. There is no settled or fixed state. An organisation as large and as widely distributed as the Garda Síochána with such a broad range of responsibilities will always be in a state of becoming. And therein lie possibility and challenge.

**Bob Collins**  
**Chairperson**

## 1. Introduction

This *Assessment of Policing Performance 2022* (the report) is the Policing Authority’s evaluation of the Garda Síochána’s performance over the first half of 2022. Performance is assessed primarily but not exclusively against the performance framework (as described in Section 2).

It is the latest in a series of bi-annual reports assessing Garda Síochána performance. These reports are provided to the Minister for Justice, the Garda Commissioner, and other stakeholders, and made publicly available through the Authority’s website. The reports are important in providing transparency about policing performance, the oversight of policing, and the outcomes of that work.

### 1.1 Report Structure

Following this introductory section, Section 2 provides information on the purpose of the performance framework that applies to the Garda Síochána, namely: how it is developed, the constituent parts, and the Authority’s assessing of and reporting on performance within it.

Sections 3 and 4 provide the Authority’s assessment of performance over the first half of 2022. The former gives an overview of performance against each of the 5 Policing Priorities, while the latter takes a look at a thematic issue of performance, namely the necessity for the Garda Síochána to ensure that it effectively utilises avenues for reflection and learning to enable critical service improvements.

Section 5 presents the main conclusions.

### 1.2 The Policing Authority

The Policing Authority was established as an independent statutory body on 1 January 2016 to oversee the performance of the Garda Síochána in relation to policing services in Ireland.

The [Garda Síochána Act 2005](#), as amended (the Act), provides for an extensive range of functions for the Authority, some of which were previously the responsibility of Government or the Minister, including:



Further details about the remit and full functions of the Authority are [available here](#).

## 2. Performance Framework

This section provides an overview of: the way in which performance of the Garda Síochána is strategically planned and operationalised; how the Authority assesses this performance; and, the relevant performance targets established for 2022 that form the basis of the assessment within the following sections of this report.

### 2.1 The Policing Priorities

The Policing Authority has a statutory function under the Act to determine or revise, following consultation with the Commissioner, the priorities for the Garda Síochána in performing its functions relating to policing services.

These Policing Priorities establish what the Authority want the Garda Síochána to give the most attention to in any given period. They assist the Commissioner in identifying areas that require extra focus and/or investment of resources to improve the service delivered to the public and the enhancement of the Garda organisation. They are required to be considered in the design of the Garda Síochána Strategy Statement and the annual Policing Plan.

For the period 2022-2024, the Policing Priorities are as follows:

- Protecting and Supporting Victims and the Vulnerable
- Supporting and Ensuring Community Safety
- Tackling Organised and Serious Crime
- Rights Based and Ethical Service Delivery
- Development of the Capacity to Strategically Manage Garda Resources

Further information on the Priorities, including key areas of focus and outputs or outcomes by which the Authority will measure success against them, is [available here](#).

### 2.2 Garda Síochána Strategy Statement

The Garda Síochána's Strategy Statement (the Strategy) is a statutory document that establishes the Commissioner's vision for the organisation over a three-year period. The Strategy is drawn up by the Commissioner, in accordance with the Garda Síochána Act 2005, and approved by the Authority with the consent of the Minister for Justice. The mission and objectives within the Strategy set out the range of public commitments made by the Garda Síochána to both the community and the members of its organisation.

The [Garda Síochána Strategy Statement 2022-2024](#) retains the mission statement to 'Keep People Safe' and is set across five strategic pillars: Community, Tackling Crime & Preventative Policing, Victims & the Vulnerable, Protecting the Security of the Irish State, and Sustainable Change & Innovation. These pillars are supported by five enablers, which demonstrates the intrinsic role of the key enabling functions: People & Purpose, Partnerships, Engagement, Empowerment & Trust, and Information-Led Policing.

### 2.3 Policing Plan

The [annual Policing Plan](#) (the Plan) sets out the specific actions, with accompanying targets and milestones, by which the Strategy's objectives will be realised and performance is to be measured. These actions represent the areas of primary focus for the organisation, its management, and workforce for the year ahead. As with the Strategy, the Plan is drawn up by the Commissioner in accordance with the Act, and approved by the Authority with the consent of the Minister for Justice.

Since 2019 the annual Policing Plans have also addressed the actions assigned to the Garda Síochána under 'A Policing Service for the Future' (APSFF): an implementation plan for the recommendations arising from the Government's [Policing Reform programme](#).

The Policing Plan 2022 is the first iteration of the plan that will give effect to the Strategy 2022-2024. Accordingly, it is structured around the 5 pillars and 5 enablers of the Strategy. In his foreword the Commissioner notes that *"the focus of the Policing Plan 2022 is on community policing and on preventing and detecting crime"* including engagement with vulnerable and minority communities and the support of victims. It is outlined that this focus and the delivery of service is enabled and further advanced by the ongoing development of the internal ICT, finance and human resources capacities.

These three elements – the Policing Priorities, Garda Síochána Statement of Strategy and the Annual Policing Plan – together form the performance framework against which Garda performance is measured.

### 2.4 Authority Oversight and Assessment of Performance

The primary mechanism for monitoring and assessing policing performance is through monthly Authority meetings with the Garda Commissioner, a minimum of four of which are held in public each year. The Authority's Policing Strategy and Performance Committee and its Organisation Development Committee also review performance across the breadth and depth of the functions of the Garda Síochána as they relate to policing services and the management and development of the organisation. In doing this, the Committees meet with the Deputy Garda Commissioners, the Chief Administrative Officer and senior Garda Members and Staff. Throughout the year, the Authority and the Committees review and analyse internal and external reporting from, and about, the Garda Síochána.

The Authority also assesses performance through a programme of stakeholder engagements. As well as engaging with the Garda Síochána, the Authority interacts with Joint Policing Committees and meets with a wide range of groups and organisations at national and local level. This programme of engagement or outreach seeks to listen to and understand the lived experience of policing and the perceptions in the community as to its effectiveness. The information gathered through these different types of engagements is drawn together, along with research where relevant, to inform discussion between Authority members and the senior leadership of the Garda Síochána.

While the Plan may form the foundation for the oversight activities in any given year, and the Strategy in any given period, the Authority's engagement with and oversight of the Garda Síochána's performance is not restricted to the items contained within these documents. Through its regular contacts, and at meetings of the Authority and its Committees, wider matters of performance are also assessed. Thus, issues such as crime trends, third party reports, significant developments, the

progress of other key areas, and performance against wider, multi-agency strategies are carefully monitored and reviewed periodically, as required.

The Authority then publishes these bi-annual reports on performance at the mid-year and end of year points. These reports have primarily been concerned with performance against the relevant Policing Plan or Strategy Statement – an assessment of policing performance in the period 2019-2021 was published in early 2022 and is [available here](#). Dedicated reports on key policing matters, such as the response to COVID-19, are also published as appropriate. All such reports are made available to the public through the Authority's [website](#).



### 3. Policing Performance 2022

This section provides an assessment of performance for the first half of 2022 against the Performance Framework, in particular the targets within the Plan, using the lens of the Policing Priorities. Given that most, if not all, of the targets within the Plan anticipate year-end delivery of their outputs or outcomes, and as such are ongoing, the assessment focuses on areas of notable progress and/or concern. A broader and more comprehensive commentary and assessment will be provided in the full-year iteration of this report.

The above notwithstanding, at a high-level, performance against the Policing Plan at the half-year point is a cause for concern with only 15 of the 34 targets reported to the Authority<sup>1</sup> reported as on-target.

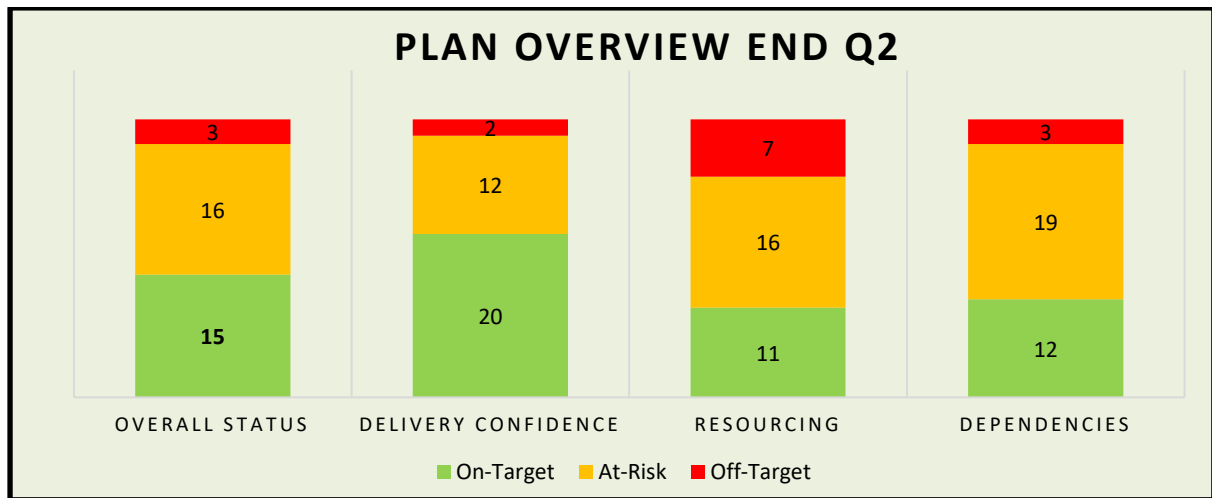


Figure 1: Garda Síochána RAG Status update against the Policing Plan at end Q2

As can be seen from the chart above, despite 19 of the targets currently being at-risk or off-target, Garda Síochána reporting suggests confidence of delivery against the stated ambition in respect of 20 targets. However, given the resourcing and external dependencies that exist, the Authority does not share this confidence. The allocation of resources themselves by the year-end is not a guarantor that the target will be delivered as envisaged given the time required for these resources to make the intended impact. It is the experience of the Authority that a high proportion of targets that are at-risk or off-target at the mid-year point tend to end the year as partly or not achieved, in particular where these relate to resourcing issues or external dependencies.

The Garda Síochána has informed the Authority that it intends to review the targets in light of the above stated position to determine where re-aligning of targets may be necessary; a move the Authority believes to be prudent and timely.

#### 3.1 Protecting and Supporting Victims and the Vulnerable

The Authority, under this priority, envisages the delivery of a policing service to victims of sexual crime, domestic abuse, and coercive control that is victim-centred, trauma-informed, effective in preventing and detecting these crimes, vindicates human rights, and trusted by victims.

<sup>1</sup> A further two targets concerning security services are reported on to the Department of Justice.

Performance under this priority, continuing the progress of recent years, has been strong in the main against the Policing Plan with the majority of targets within the Plan on-target at the half-year point. In particular there continues to be a focus on the improvement of service to victims of gender, domestic and sexual violence. For example, the continued partnership working in this space has seen the utilisation of 'Go Purple Day' to raise awareness of the supports available to victims of domestic abuse at a national and local level. The launch of the Safe Pharmacy scheme in conjunction with the Irish Pharmacy Union and other stakeholders is a welcome addition to the multi-agency support available to victims; allowing them to access support services through over 850 pharmacies nationwide.

The Garda Síochána has maintained a high rate of victim contact following reports of domestic abuse and this is an encouraging statement of the ongoing commitment to this area of policing. Similarly, the ongoing review of Divisional Protective Services Units – crucial to understanding the full impact of these units and the measures needed to build on their early success – and the continued rollout of the Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment Tool demonstrate the continued high priority that the organisation places on responding to domestic abuse. This tool equips members with the ability to assess the potential risk of domestic abuse or, where domestic abuse is occurring, the degree of risk and appropriate policing response. The tool has gone fully live in the North-Western (in 2021), Southern and Eastern Divisions (both 2022) while training is ongoing in the Dublin Metropolitan Region for a Q4 go-live. The roll out and experience of the tool is at an early stage and the Authority will continue to engage with stakeholders and the Garda Síochána at management and operational levels to understand the impact of the tool in terms of service delivery and the experience of victims in terms of its usage and outcomes.

While, over time, detection rates will be an important barometer of success, the increased rate of reporting of sexual offences and the internal Garda review of outcomes of sexual offences are important markers of progress. In terms of the latter, the Garda Síochána has undertaken a pilot to record the outcomes of sexual offences incidents where they are marked undetected to quantify the barriers to detection that present in such cases. The Authority looks forward to receiving and engaging on the results of the pilot, which it is hoped will allow the Garda Síochána to identify and respond to barriers in order to improve the service offered to, and outcomes experienced by, victims. This will supplement progress made in the last year in respect of improved recording of victim-offender relationships. This work has provided the Garda Síochána with enhanced data and information on the prevalence and manifestations of forms of domestic abuse, facilitating an enhanced Garda Síochána response.

Of enduring concern is the continuing backlog of electronic devices to be examined following seizure and the impact that this has on the timeliness of investigations, the potential identification of victims, and the journey of victims through the criminal justice system. The current three year backlog is a critical weakness for the Garda Síochána that has the potential to have considerable impact not only on investigations but on individual victims and suspects. The increasing number of devices seized is a challenge to the Garda Síochána as it is to police services worldwide. Despite reported increases in productivity in terms of the triaging and analysing of devices, the backlog remains. The demands of modern policing are such that it is unlikely that the challenges around cyber and cyber enabled crime, which includes child sexual exploitation, are likely to abate. The Authority is of the view that significant and immediate action is now required from a resources planning perspective to meet the policing demands in this area, not least given the vulnerability and

harm inherent in this type of criminal activity. Resourcing in this instance, as is the case across the organisation, may most suitably be the allocation of specialist Garda staff. As expanded on further under Priority 5 (Garda resources), this may require the wider support and cultural acceptance on the part of society and stakeholders that modern policing requires not only traditional visible, uniformed policing but also, and increasingly so, calls for invisible, specialist policing approaches that are essential to tackling modern crime.

The Authority continues to engage with the Garda Síochána on matters relating to this priority - Protecting and Supporting Victims and the Vulnerable - and will offer a fuller assessment of performance at year-end, including on: the implementations of recommendations arising from the Garda Inspectorate's report on Child Sexual Abuse; and the ongoing review of the inappropriate and/or unwarranted cancellation of CAD/999 incidents.

### **3.2 Supporting and Ensuring Community Safety**

To deliver meaningful community safety, in the context of this priority, the Garda Síochána must understand and respond to anti-social behaviour, crime, and associated quality of life issues for communities. It needs responses in conjunction with Garda Síochána partners in a way that prevents crime, reduces fear, and results in a better quality of life for communities.

The Authority notes that with the ending of COVID-19 related restrictions, levels of recorded crime have largely returned to pre-2020 levels and trends. This reversion is also observable in relation to roads policing and the shocking rise in road deaths and serious injuries following the record lows in 2021. Each such incident on Irish roads has a terrible impact on families and communities. The move to responsive and agile quarterly roads policing operational plans provides assurance that the Garda Síochána is live to the challenges it faces in responding to road safety, responding to identified trends and working to keep people safe. The introduction of the M7 average speed cameras in conjunction with partners, following successful trial, is a welcome introduction of an innovative solution to policing challenges. The Authority continues to monitor trends closely and engage the Garda Síochána on these matters but recognises also that road safety requires a strong multi-agency and community response and cannot be addressed by policing interventions alone.

Organisational performance under this priority relating to community policing and engagement to date sees the majority of these targets within the Plan being at-risk. The tentative nature of progress on the implementation of the Community Policing Framework and the broader work under the auspices of Roads Policing and Community Engagement, such as crime prevention, offender management, the Garda Reserve Strategy and the embedding of the local and national diversity forums, is noted by the Authority and will be closely monitored in the second half of the year.

From a structural point of view the rollout of the Community Policing Framework continues in 10 divisions through member training and management briefings. Initial feedback to the Authority at Divisional level has been positive, but a more comprehensive review of its impact will be necessary as rollout and divisional coverage progress. It is critical for the delivery of community policing and the delivery of the standards envisaged by the Framework that the rollout is supported by progress against related initiatives such as the Operating Model, and resourced at the front-line through the allocation and ring-fencing of resources at divisional level. The Authority has previously stated that the assessment of the Framework must be more than its ability to allocate resources. A key measure of its success will be the degree to which communities believe that it has delivered a policing

presence in communities that gives confidence and a sense of safety. Examples of community policing initiatives undertaken in 2022 include the Community Beats initiative in Tipperary. This is specifically aimed at ensuring that greater numbers of foot patrols within communities will build familiarity and relationships with the community, to provide a first engagement with Gardaí that is outside of a moment of crisis or as a witness to a crime.

The Authority has heard the importance of policing presence in the community for public confidence, perceptions of safety and quality of life. In particular, anti-social behaviour, assaults in public and drug and drug-related crime require significant and meaningful presence and engagement with effective multi-agency and partnership working. Communities have expressed their concerns about the impact of drug and drug-related crime at a local level. In engagements with the Authority, communities have raised drug-related crime as the main issue for communities and what they perceive to be one of the most significant challenges for the Garda Síochána at a national and sub-national level, given the scale and prevalence of the drug issue across all communities and strata of society. This is particularly the case with drug-related intimidation. This crime, seemingly inexorable to victims, is difficult to address but the recent successful convictions achieved by the Garda Síochána in the DMR and reports of positive experiences of victims in engagement with dedicated drugs intimidation Inspectors in each division indicates that progress can be, and is being, made. The Garda Síochána is part of the interagency DRIVE project (Drug-Related Intimidation and Violence Engagement) under the National Drug Strategy. It is hoped that this data-driven intervention model will deliver a greater sense of the prevalence and nature of drug-related intimidation allowing agencies including the Garda Síochána to respond more effectively.

Communities have emphasised the aspects of policing that matter most in these instances – an attention to the fear being experienced by families and the need for an attuned response that is timely and supportive. This can be difficult in communities where ongoing relationships with Gardaí result in little confidence or willingness to engage with the policing service. Communities have articulated the need for confidence-building measures such as regular Garda attendance at local community venues to build relationships and trust. It is clear that in many cases, there is a significant value in the Garda Síochána just talking to people. In one sense this is to better understand their concerns but, perhaps more meaningfully, it demonstrates that there is a substance to Garda visibility and policing presence and that people will be heard.

Communities have also spoken about the impact that the manner in which law enforcement activities – such as raids and arrests – are carried out has on the likelihood of those same families subsequently seeking police assistance. While not questioning the legitimacy or need for the actions, it was stated that the manner in which they are done often communicates a lack of respect or regard for drug users and their families that means that when they or those in their immediate community in turn require assistance, there is no trust that the police service will provide assistance to them.

The Policing Plan 2022 contains specific ambition to address the impact of drug and drug-related crime on local communities. Authority engagement with communities and with the Garda Síochána has highlighted that this requires significant collaboration at a strategic and resource allocation level between the parts of the organisation leading out on community policing and the policing of drugs and organised crime. The organisation needs to ensure that the targets set by both are aligned towards a shared outcome, and that the successes in tackling organised crime (as detailed under the

next Priority) are married with real impacts that are felt by communities. In tandem, the organisation must ensure that it receives the support of its statutory and non-statutory partners in the community, health, local government, and criminal justice sectors and works effectively with them as these are not issues that the Garda Síochána can tackle in isolation. Policing performance in relation to the impact of drugs on local communities remains a key focus for the Authority in 2022.

Resource issues have impacted the work of the National Diversity and Integration Unit (GNDIU), including the response to hate crime, although the launch of online hate crime training for all members in early Q2 is welcomed – the training has been given priority and it is anticipated to be rolled out by August 2022. At an operational level and similar to other agencies, support to Ukrainian refugees has put an unplanned strain on Garda Síochána resources in 2022. The organisation has played a positive and significant role in the welcoming and support of the refugees, including: the establishment of a desk at Dublin airport; the production of a victim information booklet in Ukrainian; and a push for Ukrainian drivers' licenses to be recognised in Ireland (an exchange policy went live in April). Victim Service Offices have also been supplied with key letters and information for distribution in Ukrainian.

The continued lack of availability of Public Attitude Survey results for 2020 and 2021, and the ongoing delays to the commencement of the survey in 2022 (off-target due to delays in the procurement process), limit the ability of the organisation to fully understand the perceptions and experiences of communities and creates a vacuum of vital management information.

### **3.3 Tackling Organised and Serious Crime**

Under this Priority the Garda Síochána is working to prevent and disrupt the activities of organised criminals, including those of international networks, engaged in national and transnational crime and reduce their impact on communities.

Targets under this Priority are split between on-target and at-risk. With regard to the former, there continues to be considerable success achieved in responding to and disrupting organised crime groups (OCGs). In particular, there is sustained success in tackling OCGs engaged in the drugs trade with continued, positive medium-term trends in relation to the seizures of drugs, currency and firearms, and the reduction of threat-to-life incidents – of which there were none in the first half of 2022 and which is recognised as an extraordinary marker of success arising from Garda activity over recent years that has real community impact. This is a considerable achievement for the Garda Síochána given the scale of the organised crime issues faced by the organisation in the recent past. In particular the collaboration with international partners to respond to the activities of the Kinahan OCG, as well as disrupting the activities of other OCGs in collaboration with UK, EU and other partners, represents landmark success. As outlined above, the continuing challenge for the Garda Síochána as a wider organisation is to increasingly align these successes with felt impacts at a community level and to enhance the protection of the community, in particular young people, from criminality, exploitation and intimidation.

Beyond drug and drug-related crime, the response to organised and serious crime remains challenging for the Garda Síochána, most notably in respect of economic and cyber-crime which continue to see significant rises in prevalence. These matters predominantly relate to resourcing. As noted in relation to protective services, the Garda Síochána has failed to sufficiently address the backlog of electronic devices awaiting analysis and the demand that this places on capacity impacts

on the wider ability to respond to cyber-crime. Similarly, the scale of growth in economic crime is placing a demand on the organisation that cannot be met by the current allocated resources. These are not new issues. Both the inadequacy of resources and the crime trends are long-term issues that pre-date the recent growth in economic and cyber-crime. A medium-term resourcing plan for economic crime, as required under the implementation plan arising from the Hamilton Review on economic crime and corruption, remains outstanding and is now a year overdue.

### **3.4 Rights Based and Ethical Service Delivery**

In setting this priority, the Authority recognises the need for the Garda Síochána to deliver a policing service in a manner that ensures that all those who come into contact with the Garda Síochána are dealt with in a way that: understands and respects diversity; vindicates and protects human rights; is consistent with the Code of Ethics; and, is centred on the Garda Decision Making Model.

The proportion of personnel signed up to the Code of Ethics is currently 96.4%. Encouragingly sign-up continues with the aid of an e-learning module launched in Q2, with approximately 2,300 personnel completing the module by the end of the quarter. An effectiveness review is currently being undertaken by the Garda Ethics and Culture Bureau to measure the Code of Ethics impact on ethical behaviour. This review will include an analysis of suspensions from duty of members of the Garda Síochána, examination of organisational changes, measurements regarding Code of Ethics included in the ongoing culture audit and the consideration of key cultural indicators.

As against the other priority areas, resourcing has been highlighted as an issue for both the Human Rights Section and the Garda National Culture and Ethics Bureau, although initiatives remain reported as on-target in spite of these limitations. Indeed, in strategy and governance terms progress under this priority is on-target at the half-year mark. The publication of the new Human Rights Strategy 2022-24 is welcomed by the Authority, as is the formation of the Professional Conduct Steering Group, which includes representatives from Internal Affairs, Anti-Corruption, Risk Management, and the Garda College. This group replaces the Ethics Steering Committee and is in the process of finalising its terms of reference. The Anti-Corruption Strategy 2022-2024 has also been approved and is due for publication along with an implementation plan that will give effect to recommendations set out in the Garda Inspectorate Report 'Countering the Threat of Internal Corruption'. The Garda Executive has also approved recommendations relating to the structure and range of the in-career vetting function and a review of corruption-related policies – a year after their introduction – has commenced including: Anti-Corruption Policy; Substance Misuse Policy; and, Professional Boundaries and Abuse of Power for Sexual Gain Policy & Procedures.

This progress is encouraging and the continued establishment of the governance infrastructure, including review and updating of such as appropriate, builds on the important foundation laid in the 2019-2021 strategy period.

An ongoing challenge for the Garda Síochána is to ensure that the introduction of policy and procedure, and the rollout of training in areas such as Code of Ethics and human rights, finds purchase within the culture of the organisation and in turn is evident in the delivery of policing services as they are experienced and accessed by the community, in all its diversity. Matters that have arisen in respect of the Garda Inspectorate report on custody services, the continuing review of CAD/999, the policing service provided to the Traveller community, and the experiences of young

people as they come into contact with the Garda Síochána demonstrate that there remains a significant journey to be undertaken by the organisation and its workforce to ensure that the service that they provide is not only rights based and ethical but also that it is consistent in its delivery.

The Authority continues to employ rights-based and ethical service delivery as a key lens through which it assesses and engages on all matters with the Garda Síochána, and remains of the view that there is significant, ongoing cultural reform that must be continued, to ensure these strategies and policies serve as a foundation for the delivery of a consistent policing service.

### **3.5 Development of the Capacity to Strategically Manage Garda Resources**

Under this Priority, the Authority recognises the critical enabling role that resources have in delivering against the other Priorities. As such it identifies the need for the Garda Síochána to ensure that resources – finance, ICT, and capital assets – are appropriately and strategically managed and deployed to support Garda Members, Garda Staff, and Garda Reserves. It is imperative that the workforce is appropriately trained, skilled, managed, and supported to provide a service that responds to the crime environment and the needs of the public.

As with the assessment provided against the four other Priorities, and in keeping with previous assessments published by the Authority, there remains a critical lack of capacity to strategically manage Garda resources with particular reference to human resources and workforce planning. While there are external drivers that exacerbate internal issues, the continued lack of a strategic workforce plan for the organisation is the critical barrier to achievement against the Plan generally. Recent progress in this area is to be welcomed as an indicator of serious intent.

Beyond policing services this impacts the wider strands of activity under this Priority, including: information and technology (IT), finance, change management, training, and health and wellbeing; which in turn have knock-on implications for targets under the previous Priorities. Illustratively, the Finance Directorate are currently operating at 65% capacity, the Strategic Transformation Office at approximately 50% capacity, and there is one member working part-time on the implementation of the health and wellbeing strategy – all of which have related targets that are at-risk or off-target as a result.

Most significantly, information and technology functions – Garda IT, the Analysis Service (GSAS), and Information Services Centre (GISC) – continue to face significant resource shortages that have major impacts on their ability to ensure that the Garda Síochána possess the information and technology needed to respond to modern policing demands. The rollout of the IT roadmap is reported as off-target across all aspects (delivery confidence, resourcing, and dependencies) and will finish the year unachieved. The Authority has been consistent in its focus that the level of resources available to the Garda Síochána and its IT capacity is key for the organisation to meet both the current and foreseeable demands on it and the needs of the people it serves.

Through its engagement with the senior executive team of the Garda Síochána, including with the Chief Information Officer, the Authority is keenly aware that the primary constraints on the delivery of the IT vision of the Garda Síochána are a deficiency in both the human and financial resources required to deliver the requisite changes at a sufficient pace. As set out in the Authority's letters to the Minister under section 62H(2)(b) of the Act – advising on the adequacy of Garda resources –

the Garda Síochána has estimated a requirement of €200m capital investment to enable it to catch up with the digital capabilities available to other police services and to organised crime groups.

On an annual basis, this translates to the need for a dedicated budget of €40-45m to allow the identified IT change and modernisation projects to be delivered at sufficient pace. This is in addition to the current annual budget which is predominantly committed to maintenance and running costs of the current systems and infrastructure. By way of comparison, as undertaken by the Garda Síochána, the overall proportion of the police budget committed to IT is currently 6% in Ireland, compared to 13-15% on average in the UK. Of this IT budget, 12% is allocated to change and growth projects, compared to an average of 28% in the UK. Without the necessary multi-annual funding that is ring fenced and dedicated for IT projects, the result will be a much slower pace of the delivery of some projects and considerable delay in the initiation of others which holds significant risks for the service to the public provided by the organisation in areas such as: child sexual abuse, community policing, crime prevention, investigation management, etc.

As stated, these resource challenges are not merely financial. The continued lack of a strategic, forward-looking workforce plan is inextricably linked to the ongoing staffing issues being experienced across the organisation and contributing to the challenges faced in respect of the Policing Plan and thus, in a more urgent sense, impacting on the policing service offered to the public. It is vital that the Garda Síochána complete the ongoing work on the workforce plan as a matter of urgency to address much needed prioritisation against the demand for members and staff, but also to ensure that the investment in IT is met with the requisite skills and expertise required to maximise its value.

The above notwithstanding, there are critical external challenges from a human resource perspective that may require the joint attention of the Department, the Garda Síochána and other relevant stakeholders to address.

Of particular, and growing, concern is the increasing difficulty that the Garda Síochána is facing in recruiting and retaining staff, particularly those in IT positions – approximately 60% of IT personnel are currently external contractors – but also more generally. In addition there have been severe difficulties in recruiting and retaining forensic accountants, specialist IT staff, specialist administrative staff, etc. These difficulties are multi-causal insofar as they can arise from a range of factors such as: slow recruitment and vetting processes (including approval); a competitive employment market; matters relating to organisational culture; headhunting of skilled and experienced staff; a rapidly growing rate of public/civil service mobility; among others. Accordingly they are difficult to address and are not matters unique to the Garda Síochána. However, the confluence of factors exposes the Garda Síochána to what has thus far been an intransigent barrier to establishing the workforce that it requires to provide modern, fit for purpose policing services.

Perhaps most significantly, this inability to address specialist need is evident in relation to the analytical capacity of the organisation, a key requirement and enabler of modern policing. GSAS, as of January 2022, had approximately 30 vacancies out of its approved headcount of 74 – virtually all analyst and senior analyst positions. Garda Síochána estimates show that none of the 70+ bureaux, units, divisions, etc. possess sufficient coverage despite an established trend of increasing demand for analytical services and support. This impacts the ability of the organisation to strategically plan,



provide investigative support, prepare information for case files, and review data pertaining to organisational performance. The Authority is aware of demand that has necessitated requests to national and international partners to supply or fund analyst positions.

At a strategic HR level, the Government Decision of 2016 that provided for the planned growth of the Garda Síochána to 21,000 – consisting of 15,000 members, 4,000 staff and 2,000 reserves – may warrant revisiting given the developments in the operating environment and policing demands in the period since; not to mention the subsequent, wide-scale reform undertaken from 2018 onwards following the publication of APSFF. In particular the ceiling of 4,000 Garda staff is now considered insufficient by the Garda Síochána, with estimates suggesting that meeting the needs of the IT staffing demand (including GSAS and GISC) would exhaust the remaining new roles within this complement. There has been a significant cultural change in the Garda Síochána in recent years across the wide-range of policing functions which has seen the increased centrality of specialist staff as well as the embedding of administrative staff through the workforce modernisation process. This change was, in part, driven by the ongoing Government Policing Reform Programme and the key modernisation aspects within it. These cultural changes, in the wider context of changing and evolving crime have seen an increase in demand for specialist staff in areas such as forensic accounting, cyber device investigation, etc. to an extent that could not have been envisaged when the 4,000 staff limit was established. Arguably the understanding of the key role that Garda staff play in the delivery of policing is not as well understood amongst the general public who may envisage Garda staff playing administrative roles rather than the full breadth of analytical and support roles key to keeping people safe. This can translate into an assumption that it is always greater Garda numbers alone that will result in an improved policing service, as very often the roles played by specialist Garda staff are not as visible. However, there can be no doubt as to key role that specialist staff play in modern policing and addressing some of the issues that are identified throughout the above priorities. Consideration may need to be given to the established workforce targets, the scope for change within them based on demand, and other related matters. Consideration that, from a Garda Síochána perspective, must be evidence-based and linked to the aforementioned strategic workforce plan.

## **4. Learning Culture: Reflecting on the Past, Monitoring the Present and Preparing for the Future**

The issues outlined in the previous section on resourcing and the need for prioritisation of resources are unlikely to ever be fully alleviated, considering the central role of the Garda Síochána in society and the resultant demands placed on the organisation; even less so given the uncertain economic outlook. In such an environment of complex demand and finite resources, there is a need for organisational curiosity and a self-examining and reflective perspective on the organisation's performance.

In this context, and the context of performance thus far in 2022 and over its lifetime, the Authority recognises the need for an increased learning culture within the Garda Síochána; a need the Garda Síochána Strategy recognises also through its strategic enablers of Partnerships and Engagement. This section will expand on this theme.

### **4.1 Evolving Demand: Understanding Service Needs and Experiences of Policing**

The Garda Síochána provides a policing service to the public that has to respond to factors including: evolving demand wrought by technology; globalised crime; and population, societal and cultural change. Expectations of the outcomes of that service arguably remain constant – to keep us safe – and yet expectations regarding the manner and standards with which the service is delivered also evolve. In particular, there is an increased awareness and expectation of a rights based service that is fair, equitable and consistent in its delivery. This is further complicated by the degree to which the Garda Síochána is also reliant on a wide range of statutory and non-statutory partners to respond to these expectations and deliver safety for the community and individuals.

As with any service the Garda Síochána has to respond to these evolving demands and expectations and continually learn and adapt. At a high-level, we are in the midst of an evolving and significant change in the nature of people's expectations and understanding of the nature and role of authority. This has undoubted implications for the Garda Síochána, but is perhaps not yet adequately reflected in its own thinking. In particular there is a pressing need to reflect on and learn from the relationships between the Garda Síochána and diverse communities, and those with young people.

In respect of the latter, the Authority is on record in its view that the Garda Síochána needs an internal strategic approach as to its engagement with young people. The government-led, multi-agency Youth Justice Strategy provides key actions for the Garda Síochána and important advances in the services offered to young people, but, by virtue of its scope and remit, it retains a focus on children and young people at risk of coming into contact with the criminal justice system. The Garda Síochána however engages with young people in all their diversity and its strategic response – which guides its response at an individual level – needs to be consistent and cognisant of children's realities and vulnerabilities irrespective of the context in which the individual child comes into contact with the Garda Síochána. All children, by virtue of their circumstance of age and societal position are vulnerable and require protection and care, whether they are engaged with as suspects, victims, witnesses or as part of a community group. They are also the members of all of our communities that will dictate the policing needs of the not-too-distant future.

Currently the Garda Síochána organisation has policy and procedure that deals with children and young people as victims of crime, as witnesses to crime and as suspects and offenders. There is no overarching agreed organisational approach to engagement with children and young people that might ensure consistency in the service delivered to all children. The Authority's engagement with communities and organisations has found that there are significant negative experiences of policing being encountered by children and young people that critically influence the degree to which they believe they can trust the police service or rely on a Garda to be a 'safe person in the community'.

To a greater extent than any generations previously, children are formed in a digital environment with access to material – legal and illegal – that helps to shape views and opinions on society and opens them up to greater risks, threats and influences. Therefore there is a need to embrace and develop an understanding of what children and young people think and how they experience and access policing services. What they think is vital to ensuring a modern, fit-for-purpose policing service that meets their needs.

It is intrinsic to the nature of policing services that that which is delivered to any minority or constituent section of a community which has a different sense of itself is likely to be experienced in differing terms to wider society, be it through tone, accessibility, quality of service or otherwise. The only way to understand this experience is to speak directly to them. Young people are only one such example, but are illustrative of the wider need to ensure that direct engagement takes place to fully understand policing needs.

The Authority, through its stakeholder engagement, has a certain insight into what these engagements reveal in terms of perceptions, experiences and wider feedback on policing and the Garda Síochána as an organisation. These will be difficult conversations. The experience of policing is not, as we know and must recognise, universally positive but nevertheless it reflects the reality of the lives of members of communities as they interact with policing. Only through active engagement and listening will the organisation be in a position to understand the outcomes of its performance and fulfil the changes that are necessary to provide the policing services required by our communities.

The Authority feels that this is recognised at a strategic level but in practice that the Garda Síochána's reflex can be in the first instance to defend against or dismiss feedback rather than embrace the potential learning on offer. In particular, the Authority is eager that issues that have arisen in respect of the Garda National Diversity Forum and the concerns of the external members are engaged with and addressed as a matter of urgency. As stated in the Authority's Assessment of Policing Performance 2019-2021, the establishment of the National Diversity Forum and similar structures represented "*...a vital openness to engagement and partnership in approaching diversity. Such ventures can lead to frank and difficult interactions. Even in the face of such engagement, it is imperative that concerns expressed are engaged with in good faith and actively listened to. The experiences of how communities experience policing, and how they experience it in different ways offers an invaluable and critical opportunity for the Garda Síochána to learn from the organisations and representatives acting in this 'critical-friend' capacity*".

This is a fact the Commissioner acknowledges in the foreword to the Policing Plan 2022, where he states the Garda Síochána "*will continue to proactively engage with vulnerable and minority communities to better understand their needs*". However, it is not at all clear to the Authority that the Garda Síochána yet engage sufficiently to develop the necessary understanding. The Authority is

of the opinion – one that it believes is to an extent shared by the Garda Síochána – that the yardsticks or indices by which performance is measured are still very internally focussed. That there is a generalised sense of internal focus, which although not universally true, does create a significant gap in developing the understanding required and can give a disturbed view of how success is measured and of what the appropriate measures are.

In terms of external measures of performance, the Public Attitudes Survey is a key tool for the Garda Síochána. The Authority recognises the place and value of the survey but notes with considerable concern the ongoing issues and delays that are impacting the finalisation and publication of 2020 and 2021 results and the commencement of the 2022 survey. Prior surveys have shown that there are reassuring levels of trust and confidence in the Garda Síochána but this cannot be taken for granted, in particular given the widespread changes in society, nationally and in the global environment. The strategy period that commenced on 01 January 2022 will be a period of change and may be yet more complicated.

Despite its undoubted value, the attitudes survey cannot be relied upon as the sole measure of external feedback. The longstanding positive nature of the general results are of course powerful reassurance of the level of satisfaction, trust, etc. that the public has in respect of the Garda Síochána. Therefore, it is all the more important to supplement the survey to ensure understanding of the experiences of the people and communities that do not share these high levels of trust and confidence. This can be achieved through further engagement to better understand the nuances, expectations, and experiences of communities in all their diversity. Views that the Garda Síochána are in a strong position to receive, if desired, given the ongoing, everyday nature of interactions between its members and local communities.

#### **4.2 Enabling Curiosity and Learning**

In one sense the opportunities for learning outlined above, if taken in isolation, only provide enhanced information. To be effective it must be married with a culture of curiosity and openness to learning, critical reflection and, ultimately, to change. As outlined in the previous section, there are some barriers to effective reflection and self-assessment on the part of the Garda Síochána. There are weaknesses in the key enabling functions with a lack of readily available management information in relation to HR and finance. The absence of these key management tools is recognised and presents a barrier, in particular, to quantitative reflection on performance. These gaps require significant improvement in the resourcing and performance of the key enablers.

Notably, there are continued issues in the embedding of individual performance management, with no system in place for Garda staff. In respect of members, the Performance and Learning Framework (PALF) is a notable example at a micro-level of a lack of critical appraisal. As of 31 May, the rate of engagement with PALF process by members was 55%. While the Authority understands that this has since increased, (the exact figure is not available at time of writing) the fact remains that just over half of members had engaged in the PALF process five months into the year. This follows a total figure for engagement in 2021 that stood at 89% – meaning that in excess of 1,500 members did not engage at all in the process. This is, for the Authority, a revealing insight into the position and standing of individual performance management and critical reflection at both individual supervisory and organisational levels. There appears to be a lack of appreciation of the opportunity that such performance management presents for supporting the workforce, providing learning, and ensuring ongoing development at a micro-level. It is important to note that in its implementation there is a

need to distinguish how it differs from discipline. The experience of CAD/999 shows the critical importance of consistent supervision and feedback, which is not to be conflated with discipline. The continued, long-standing absence of a learning and development or training strategy also affects members on an individual basis as well as the wider organisation.

Organisationally, the approach to the review of organisational performance is inconsistent and primarily output based. The lack of outcome focus – specifically the impact on the day-to-day life of communities – and the uncertain nature of the centrality of performance reporting to management appraisal is a matter on which the Authority continues to engage the Garda Síochána. Policing must constantly evolve to meet community needs and respond to the changing nature of crime, therefore the routine delivery of services by way of habit or tradition cannot adequately allow the organisation to meet the needs of modern policing. There is a pressing need to constantly review and refine service delivery in order to ensure meaningful outcomes. Notwithstanding all of this, there is recognition from the Authority as to the improvement seen in the reporting provided against the Policing Plan thus far in 2022. There has been a significant commitment made and certain progress achieved in moving towards an outcome-based method of internal review and reporting.

As part of its oversight, the Authority endeavours, where possible, to engage at a local or front-line level with members and units that are providing services directly to better understand the intricacies of their work and the issues or challenges that may arise. It is the experience of the Authority that often there exists a real or perceived experience of members on the front-line that the organisation lacks a sufficient ability to communicate and coordinate between the centre and those directly providing the service. This limits the ability of the organisation to learn. These communication gaps appear to be of increased applicability to specialist roles and units within divisions that are connected to national bureaux not through strict line management but through coordination, advice and strategic tasking – including community policing, drugs policing, and crime prevention. There are notable examples throughout the country of good practice and high levels of service being provided on a constant basis, on both an individual and collective basis, in these functions and others. However, a shared understanding of strategic intent, ongoing review, and the wider applicability of and learning from such action is often missed through the lack of effective communication internally. Similarly, this hampers the ability of the organisation to understand and respond effectively to the challenges faced by the front-line in delivering services.

The lack of a formal review of practice during COVID-19 to learn from the significant improvements in service at a community policing level stands out to the Authority as a lost opportunity. While an exercise to identify specific examples of good practice, then shared by way of online resource through the Community Policing Toolkit, was a worthwhile and meaningful exercise, the lack of a holistic review of the approach and tone of policing as experienced by communities and efforts to maintain the positive aspects of performance ignored wider organisational learning opportunities. Similarly, reviews of other successful projects and/or operations, such as the rollout of the mobility devices or Operation Thor, for wider applicability and learning are further lost opportunities.

Finally, it must be noted that the process of reflection and learning is not something that must be undertaken by the Garda Síochána in isolation. Policing, due to the central role it plays in individual and collective feelings of safety and the nature of the extraordinary powers it is bestowed with to undertake this role, is understandably a constant source of critical reflection by society. There is a collective need to ensure that policing is openly and transparently governed and scrutinised.

This concept is at the very heart of independent oversight of policing but also drives the consistent public, media and academic interest it invites.

It follows that there are considerable volumes of review, inspection, comment and critique of policing services and those who deliver them and in many cases this is followed with recommendations for improvement. There is ongoing work within the Plan to establish a centralised process to track the implementation of independent recommendations that pertain to the Garda Síochána. Having collated all independent recommendations made from 2005 onwards, 2,280 recommendations are being reviewed to determine their status and priority level. Currently it is estimated that of these approximately: 900 are closed/completed; 200 are externally managed; and 1,100 are open – of which approximately 450 will be addressed by the implementation of APSFF. The scale of this scrutiny and the demand that it can place on an organisation can culturally manifest as a closed and guarded reaction to feedback but the privilege of the powers and roles given to enable an organisation to police society demand an openness, transparency and a willingness to engage to facilitate learning.

It is the Authority's experience that the Garda Síochána is increasingly open to and recognises the value of this external, expert scrutiny. There has been increased engagement and openness across many parts of the organisation to facilitate access to information to both statutory and non-statutory stakeholders. The challenge remains to ensure that this continues to develop and more pressing that the response to the findings of such work is constructive and undertaken in good faith. The external objective or subjective analysis of performance, be it through formal reviews of process, examinations of personal experience, or otherwise, provides the Garda Síochána with ready access to information from which it can learn and develop.

## 5. Conclusions

As outlined, performance against the Plan at the mid-year point is a cause for concern. As in previous years this arises in the main from issues pertaining the key enabling function of HR.

The Authority has long maintained that the Plan must be considered by the Garda Síochána as a live and agile document that can be responded to if the circumstances of operational need or key enabling function capacity demanded. Therefore, the stated intent of the Garda Síochána to review and potentially realign the milestones and year-end deliverables in respect of the targets is welcomed and will be engaged on at the soonest opportunity. However, the Authority while supportive also recognises the potential for the sustained impact of any delays and persistent barriers on the longer-term Strategy. In this vein the urgent need for the prioritisation of resources, in the first instance through the strategic workforce plan, must be restated. The Garda Síochána cannot continue to operate in the absence of this key strategic document and in the knowledge of the impact that this has on the service offered to the public. As previously stated, any inattention to the key enablers impacts on service and serves to undermine the dedication and effort of those working to provide that service on the front line.

This prioritisation of resources and future planning will increasingly rely on an ability to self-reflect on past and present performance. An increased learning culture both from an internal and external facing perspective will be necessary to facilitate this. This is, in the last analysis, about providing a service to the public and the increasingly joint nature of working to improve this service can only be augmented by and will rely on the enhanced collaborative nature of reflection.

The scale of the internal and external consultation processes undertaken in designing the Strategy is testament to the ability and openness to engaging with stakeholders in setting performance targets. The same openness must also be extended to the ongoing monitoring of performance against the Strategy and beyond. As an organisation, without this culture of reflection it is hard to know whether you currently are or have previously done well, or indeed not so well, and therefore is difficult to know how to improve your service. This adds weight to the value of externally-driven learning. The added under-utilisation of this in tandem leads to an organisational inability to set realistic and meaningful targets, undermines the ability to prioritise, and results in a lack of clarity on the intended outcomes of activity.

### 5.1 Ongoing Monitoring

The Authority will continue to monitor progress and engage with the Garda Síochána on the matters raised in this report – in particular, on any necessary realignment of the Plan.

Related to the above themes, the Authority is currently undertaking work to assess the operation and efficacy of systems and processes for managing expressions of dissatisfaction about the Garda Síochána and its members and has ongoing engagement with the Garda Síochána and other stakeholders. This relates to the internal and external raising of complaints and a range of matters including: the interlinking strands of performance, performance management, behaviours and corruption; the extent of the co-ordination, aggregation and systemic assessment of available information and related risks to the organisation; and, the manner in which information is presented to the Commissioner and the senior leadership team and the capacity to identify patterns and trends. It will continue as part of the Authority's business in 2022 and will form part of a later assessment of performance.