

County Laois Joint Policing Committee Public Meeting
Minutes of Meeting held on Monday 11th March 2024 at 3.30 pm in County Hall



Present: Cllr Aisling Moran, Chairperson
Deputy Brian Stanley, TD
Deputy Sean Fleming, TD
Cllr Pdraig Fleming, Laois County Council
Cllr Paddy Bracken, Laois County Council
Cllr Catherine Fitzgerald, Laois County Council
Cllr James Kelly, Laois County Council
Cllr John King, Laois County Council
Cllr Ben Brennan, Laois County Council
Cllr Conor Bergin, Laois County Council
Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley, Laois County Council
Cllr Thomasina Connell, Laois County Council
Cllr P J Kelly, Laois County Council
Mr. John Mulholland, Chief Executive, Laois County Council
Chief Superintendent Anthony Lonergan, AGS
Ms Antoinette Kinsella, Midlands Drug & Alcohol Taskforce
Mr. Conor O'Leary, Muintir na Tíre
Mr. Bobby Delaney, PPN Representative
Mr. Thomas Jones, PPN Representative

In attendance: Sergeant Graham Kavanagh, AGS
Inspector Joe Culliton, AGS
Mr Donal Brennan Director of Services, Laois County Council
Ms Pamela Tynan, A/Senior Executive Officer, Laois County Council
Ms Anne Marie Kirrane, A/Administrative Officer, Laois County Council
Ms Rose Doolin, Assistant Staff Officer, Laois County Council

Apologies: Cllr Paschal McEvoy, Laois County Council

Cllr Aisling Moran welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Adoption of Minutes

On the proposal of Cllr Paddy Bracken and seconded by Cllr Pdraig Fleming, the minutes of the meeting held on the 20th November 2023 were adopted.

Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Correspondence

A number of items of correspondence were received.

Deputy Brian Stanley, TD, raised the following with the Minister for Transport:

To ask the Minister for Transport to provide an update regarding the number of driving testers recruited in the past 12 months and for those testers on short-term contracts to be retained:

To ask the Minister for Transport what actions are being taken to address the long waiting times in many driving test centres.

The response from the minister was as follows:

As the Deputy may be aware, under the Road Safety Authority Act 2006, the RSA has statutory responsibility for the National Driving Test service. As the employer of driver testers, contractual terms are a matter for the RSA. However, I am informed that at the end of 2023 there were 177 testers employed by the Authority.

The service has been under significant pressure to meet unprecedented demand. Anticipating ongoing demand pressures and following a request for additional resources last year, my Department gave approval for the recruitment of up to 75 additional driver testers. This brings the current total number of sanctioned driver tester posts to 205, which is more than double the 100 sanctioned testing posts in June 2022.

The first tranche of new recruits were deployed last September and the national average waiting time for invitation to test has been decreasing since then. By the end of 2023 there was an increase of 41 driver testers across the driver testing service, with additional testing capacity deployed to the geographical areas with the longest waiting times and highest demand for tests.

Sanction remains in place for the Authority to increase the number of testers to further alleviate current pressures on the service. My Department is working closely with the Authority to monitor demand and capacity requirements of the driver testing service to ensure it meets the agreed service level of average wait times of 10 weeks, which the Authority expects to achieve by mid-2024.

The following comments were made by JPC members:

While the increase in the number of driving testers is welcome there is still a six month wait to apply for a test. The response does not state how this waiting time is to be addressed.

It was agreed that the JPC write to the Ministers for Transport and Education requesting that TY students be given the opportunity to complete the driver theory test during transition year.

Deputy Brian Stanley also raised the following question with the Minister for Transport:

To ask the Minister for Transport when the legislation will be enacted to regulate the use of electric scooters; and to outline what is causing the delay.

The response from the minister was as follows:

The Road Traffic and Roads Act 2023 creates a new vehicle category, called powered personal transporters (PPTs), which includes e-scooters. My Department had expected to commence the parts of the Act relating to PPTs, and to introduce regulations for e-scooters, following the EU TRIS process under the Single Market Transparency Directive (EU) 2015/1535. However, some technical and legal issues were identified during drafting, in part taking account of comments received from the EU Commission during the TRIS process, which have delayed their introduction. Regulations for e-scooters are now expected to be in place in Q1 2024. E-scooters will not be legal to use in public places until that time.

The Regulations will specify the technical requirements for e-scooters and conditions for their safe use. Among other requirements, e-scooters may not be used on footpaths or in pedestrianised areas. The use of helmets and personal protective equipment (PPE) will not be mandatory, although strongly recommended by my Department and the Road Safety Authority.

The following comments were made by JPC members on this response:

The members welcomed the fact that the legislation will be in place in Q1 and the fact that e-scooters will not be legal to use in public until that time. The Chief Superintendent stated that Gardai are dealing with the issue of e-scooters as they arise and are trying to inform people about the use of e-scooters but would welcome clarity on the legislation. Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley stated that Gardai are caught in a difficult situation as there is currently no law being broken.

Correspondence was received from Minister of State with special responsibility for Communications and Circular Economy Ossian Smyth, TD with respect to the enactment of the CCTV section of the Circular Economy:

The response from the Minister was as follows:

The Codes of Practice relating to the use of CCTV as required under the legislation were submitted to the Department by the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) and formally approved by Ossian Smyth TD, Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Climate & Communications on 14 December 2023.

The Commencement Order was then drafted and the relevant sections of the Circular Economy and Miscellaneous Provisions Act allowing for the use of CCTV and other Mobile Recording Devices under the Waste Management Act and CCTV under the Litter Pollution Act were commenced on 15 February 2024.

It is therefore now open to all local authorities to begin the process of putting the required procedures in place to allow for the use of these technologies to combat litter and illegal dumping, subject to adherence with the relevant provisions.

The installation/operation of such technology is a matter for each local authority, who when proposing to install/operate CCTV schemes are required to prepare and submit to the relevant Chief Executive, a site management plan in respect of each individual scheme. This plan should set out the proposed arrangements for the monitoring, recording and disclosing of the images produced and for the preservation of the related recordings within the meanings assigned under

the Data Protection Act. Data Protection Impact Assessments must also be completed in accordance with section 84 of the Data Protection Act.

The availability of such technology will support local authority enforcement personnel in their ongoing efforts to both deter littering and illegal dumping and to detect and prosecute those who continue to negatively impact their local environment through such anti-social behaviour.

The following comments were made by JPC members on this response:

Cllr James Kelly asked if we are waiting on the Minister for guidance or is the matter now with the Local Authority. Mr John Mulholland explained that the Council will prepare a Business case for the County along with a DPIA and overall site plan. It will be 3 or 4 months before cameras can be erected. This matter will come before the local authority members in due course. The Council will expedite this matter as soon as possible. Cllr Conor Bergin requested that the members of the Council be consulted prior to the commencement of the Business Plan.

Correspondence was received in the form of a Notice of Motion from Louth County Council:

I write to inform you that the Elected Members Of Louth County Council at their January Meeting adopted the following resolutions:

Notice of Motion: Cllr Conor Keelan

Seconded by: Cllr Maeve Yore

“Recognising the significance of the fact that the Joint Policing Committee represents one of the few useful reforms of the Local Government in 2014 this Council opposes the proposed legislation to abolish the JPC’s and replace them with repackaged Local Community Safety Partnership.

Addendum: This this Motion be sent to all local authorities in the state, all JPC’s in County Louth and that a copy be sent to the Minister for Justice for Comment’’. It was agreed to circulate this Motion to all other Local Authorities.

The following comments were made by JPC members:

Cllr Pdraig Fleming agreed with this Motion. It was noted however that the legislation has been enacted to replace the Joint Policing Committee with the Local Community Safety Partnership.

Cllr Aisling Moran asked if the membership of the JPC could be extended to include people with disabilities, teenagers and people from different age groups as well as people from other groups in society.

Mr Conor O’Leary stated that some adjustments to the current Joint Policing Committee would be welcome. He added that the new Local Community Safety Partnership could be positive as they will have a dedicated person assigned to the role.

Ms Antoinette Kinsella stated that she is on the Longford Joint Policing Committee as well and that Longford is one of the pilot areas for the new Local Community Safety Partnership and that it has been a very positive result in Longford with a number of sub-committee structures now in place.

Following proposal by Cllr Aisling Moran and seconded by Cllr Pádraig Fleming, the JPC agreed that the resolution be considered by Laois County Council members at their next meeting.

In addition, following proposal by Cllr Aisling Moran, seconded by Cllr Pádraig Fleming, the JPC agreed to ask Laois County Council to consider broadening the membership of the Joint Policing Committee to include people with disabilities and young people.

Vote of Sympathy

Cllr Catherine Fitzgerald asked if a letter of condolence could be issued to the family of former Garda Ben Thornton who was seriously injured while on duty in 1976 to acknowledge his service. This was seconded by Deputy Brian Stanley, TD.

An Garda Síochána Report

- Property Crime – Burglary is up while theft from shop is down. This reduction is due in part to the launch of the Business Watch 2023 programme. While the reduction in property crime has reduced slightly this is welcome.
- Crime against the person is down overall by 23% which helps to make the community feel safer.
- Criminal Damage and Public Order is down overall.
- Drugs & Weapons offences is down due in part due to proactive policing in the county.
- Traffic – Driving a vehicle while intoxicated is up. This can relate to both alcohol and drugs driving. The increase in numbers is due in part to the increase in checkpoints.
- Domestic – Domestic disputes -no offence and breach of Orders are both up. Some of this is due to victims feeling more confident about coming forward. The Gardaí continue to monitor this on a daily basis.

The members thanked the Chief Superintendent for his report and raised the following:

- An update on the Courthouse was requested as there are serious incidents occurring outside the courthouse.
- Downtown Portlaoise are concerned about the location of parking outside the Courthouse. They have asked if the Garda cars and prison vans could be moved to another location and if a Garda could be assigned outside the courthouse on court days. The Chief Superintendent stated that he would look at these issues.
- Cllr Conor Bergin raised the issue of speeding at Ballybrophy. Gardaí continue to monitor the situation.
- Cllr Aisling Moran enquired about knife crime which seems to be increasing. The Chief Superintendent informed the meeting that it is an offence to carry a knife when there is no legitimate reason to have it.
- Cllr Aisling Moran enquired if a victim did not press charges for domestic abuse could the Gardaí press charges. The Chief Superintendent stated that if they need to press charges

based on what they see when they arrive, they will do so. The gardaí review all domestic abuse calls everyday and engage with the victim and offer support to victims in any way they can.

Sectoral Policing and Business Watch Q1 2024

Superintendent Eamon Curley gave a presentation on Sectoral Policing Portlaoise, Business Watch Portlaoise 2024

- Sectoral Policing launched on 22 January 2024 which maps the town of Portlaoise into District Community Policing Team Areas.
- The new operation aims to increase visibility to ensure the safety and security of the Community.
- Portlaoise town is split into eight zones with Gardaí covering all areas of the town.
- The public will have access to an interactive map to see their Local Community Policing Team.
- Community Policing Team members will be assigned to each area and are backed by regular members of Portlaoise Gardaí.

Business Watch Portlaoise 2024

- Business Watch is a crime Prevention programme designed by An Garda Síochána.
- Exchange of information on crime related matters between the Business Community and An Garda Síochána.
- The role is to;
 - Address crime related issues as they arise.
 - Provide Crime Prevention information and advise.
- In total there are over 427 business within the 5 sectors
- The five sectors are as follows: Red sector (**Lois Shopping Centre District**) Green Sector (**Main Street Business District**). Blue Sector (**Lismard Business District**) Orange Sector (**Clonminham industrial estate District**) and Yellow sector (**Portlaoise suburb businesses Targeting Fairgreen and Kilminchy**)
- Quarterly meetings take place with the Business watch committee to discuss crime related issues as they arise in each sector.

Christmas Beats 2023

- Took Place from the 08/12/2023 to the 06/01/2024.
- Community Policing Members patrolled and responded to over 36 Incidents of Public Order and Thefts in the town with over 22 arrests made all of which are before the courts.

The members stated that this was a great idea and enquired if it would be rolled out to other towns around the county. Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley welcomed the initiative and added that it is great to see more visibility in the area. She stated that Gardaí went to the opening of the new Women's Shed in Portlaoise and she thanked them for their attendance. A query was raised about rolling this out to the rural areas and the meeting was advised that the Community Alert is a better fit for the rural areas.

A query was raised about the opening times of Portarlinton Garda Station. The meeting was informed that it is opened during certain hours. The public can make an appointment to meet with a garda in either Portarlinton or Portlaoise by ringing Portlaoise Garda Station.

New Courthouse in Portlaoise

Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley proposed that the JPC write to the Minister for Justice for an update on when work will commence on the new Courthouse for Portlaoise This was seconded by Cllr Aisling Moran.

CCTV

The matter of the newly enacted Digital Recording Devises Bill was raised. Mr Donal Brennan advised that Mountmellick CCTV scheme will need to be reviewed after a period of 4 years as a result of the bill. At that stage it will become a Garda system or a local authority system.

Annual Report

Ms Pamela Tynan advised members that the JPC Annual Report was circulated to members in advance of the meeting for their attention. The update was noted.

JPC Strategy – Implementation Plan – Update on Actions

Ms Pamela Tynan advised members that the JPC Strategy Implementation Plan was circulated to members in advance of the meeting for their attention. The update was noted.

AOB

A query was raised with respect to the upgrade of the Garda Station in Stradbally. It was agreed that a letter be sent to the OPW asking them to advise why the windows are not being replaced at this time and when are the windows proposed to be replaced.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place in My prior to the local elections, date to be agreed.

That concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed:

Chairperson