

County Laois Joint Policing Committee Public Meeting
Minutes of Meeting
Held on Tuesday, 13th April, 2021 via TEAMS

Present: Chief Superintendent John Scanlon, Superintendent John Lawless, Sergeant Garda Graham Kavanagh, Crime Prevention Officer, Inspector Joe Culliton, Mr John Mulholland, CEO, Laois County Council, Mr Donal Brennan Director of Service, Mr Brian Stanley TD, Cllr Pdraig Fleming (Vice Chairperson), Cllr Paddy Bracken, Cllr Paschal McEvoy, Cllr Catherine Fitzgerald, Cllr James Kelly, Cllr Conor Bergin, Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley, Cllr John King, Cllr Thomasina Connell, Cllr Aisling Moran, Mr Bobby Delaney, Mr Thomas Jones, Mr Brendan Birney, Mr Conor O'Leary, Ms Sara Rasool.

Apologies: Deputy Sean Fleming, Deputy Charles Flanagan, Cllr Ben Brennan.

In attendance: Ms Carmel McNicholl, Senior Executive Officer, Ms Elaine Moore, A/Administrative Officer, Ms Rose Doolin, Assistant Staff Officer Laois County Council

Cllr Pdraig Fleming, Vice Chairperson, welcomed everyone to the meeting. He noted that Cllr Tom Mulhall, Chairperson of the Joint Policing Committee had retired after 12 years on the Council due to ill health. He stated that Cllr Mulhall worked very hard for the people he represented and for the County of Laois. He wished Cllr Mulhall the very best of health and best wishes. He also wished Cllr Ben Brennan well in his recovery from ill health. The sentiments expressed were echoed by all members of the Joint Policing Committee.

Condolences were also offered to Inspector Paddy Guinan on the death of his father.

Adoption of Minutes

On the proposal of Cllr. John King, seconded by Cllr. Paddy Bracken the minutes were adopted.

Matters Arising

Cllr Pdraig Fleming raised the issue of issue of public order issues in Portlaoise and the setting up of a sub-committee structure for Portlaoise, as referenced in the Minutes of the November meeting. Members of the JPC thanked the Chief Superintendent for dealing with these matters. It was proposed to set up a sub-group of the JPC comprising the elected representatives of the Portlaoise Municipal District together with other the relevant Community reps of the JPC from the Portlaoise area. This was proposed by Cllr Catherine Fitzgerald and seconded by Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley. Cllr Paddy Bracken suggested that perhaps representation from the Laois Federation of CCTV may also be appropriate. The Chief Superintendent stated that he will appoint a Garda Inspector to liaise on this matter. The matter of other parts of the county having specific policing concerns was also raised. Discussion ensued as to what structures may be appropriate. John Mulholland CE referenced the fact that Standing Orders limit the number of sub-committees that can be established to 3.. Mr Donal Brennan, Director of Services stated that the setting up of additional structures of the JPC needed to be in line with the Standing Orders and that the Council

will offer all necessary support. Ms Carmel McNicholl, Senior Executive Officer, Laois County Council, will follow up on this matter and make the appropriate arrangements.

Approval of Community CCTV Schemes

An application was received from Portarlinton Business Association for approval of the JPC to a proposed Community CCTV Scheme in the town of Portarlinton. However, it was pointed out to the Members by Ms Carmel McNicholl that the proposed scheme may extend over 2 different Local Authority areas and that Laois JPC, by law, can only issue approval in respect of a Scheme or parts thereof, operating within its administrative area. A separate application may be required to Offaly JPC for any operations within the administrative area of Offaly County Council.

Approval of the JPC, on this basis, was proposed by Cllr Paschal McEvoy and seconded by Cllr Pdraig Fleming.

The issue of CCTV Schemes in the County was raised by Deputy Brian Stanley and an update sought on progress to date. In relation to the 3 Department of Justice grant aided schemes, Ms Carmel McNicholl advised that Mountmellick and Donaghmore Community CCTV Schemes had progressed and grant payments advanced. However, due to COVID 19 restrictions, installation of the cameras had been delayed. Woodenbridge was also well advanced and was on track to receive grant payment in the near future. The Council would then be progressing to an examination of other schemes requiring attention around the County.

Cllr Stanley stated that the information stored on some of the cameras already in situ around the county cannot be used now as it shows the number plates of cars. The groups in these areas had raised huge money and received grants to buy and install these cameras. He was informed that an assessment of the equipment must be undertaken on a case by case basis and that the cameras may have to be changed so that they do not have automatic number plate readers. Donal Brennan, Director of Services that such schemes were set up before the Local Authority assumed the responsibility of Data Controller and that Laois County Council cannot act as Data Controller on active ANPR cameras. There are also issues being discussed at National Level that may in the future allow Laois County Council to share the Data Controller role jointly with An Garda Síochána. John Mulholland, Chief Executive, stated that Laois County Council had taken on the role of Data Controller since 2018 for a number of Community Alert Groups and were working to the best of their ability within data protection regulations. He advised that a report would be circulated to the members at the next meeting on the status of the various schemes.

Annual Report 2020

The annual report was available but time constraints did not allow for circulation in advance. It was agreed that it be forwarded to the Members after the meeting. It sets out the Strategic Objectives in the Plan and provides an update on progress made during 2020.

JPC Strategic Plan 2016-2020

Ms Carmel McNicholl outlined that the JPC Strategic Plan contains the Work Plan for the JPC and expired at the end of 2020. However, due to the impact of COVID 19, both in terms of completion of the delivery of the Plan and the commencement of the update/review process, it is proposed to extend the plan to the end of 2021. This will give the JPC an opportunity to update the plan and

carry out the necessary consultations. This was proposed by Cllr James Kelly and unanimously agreed by the members.

Report from An Garda Síochána

A full report was given by the Chief Superintendent. In summary:

- Property Crime is down by 38%. This is due mainly to COVID 19 restrictions. Most properties are now occupied during the day. Theft from shops are up and this partly due to the fact that everyone is now wearing masks.
- Crimes against the person are also down. Closure of the night-time economy is aiding this as people are not out socialising.
- Criminal Damage and Public Order is also down by 24% although driving under the influence of drink and drugs was up with 12 incidences of driving under the influence of drugs.
- Traffic offence are down by 15%.
- Domestic Disputes is up by 18%. People are home more, and a lot of sensitive work has been done in this area. The Gardai are working with the Housing Section in Laois County Council to locate a site for a refuge for people from domestic abuse.

The members thanked the Chief Superintendent for all the good work being done by front line staff. Issues were raised about drugs and other incidents around the county. Anti-social behaviour on trains and in train stations was also raised. The Chief Superintendent stated that they are working with Irish Rail on this matter.

Any Other Business

The Chief Superintendent gave an update on garda stations in Laois. He stated that works on the Garda Station in Portlaoise are going to tender. The tender is in the region of €24/€25 million. Other stations have been completed or works have commenced or will be starting. When work commences on the Garda Station in Portlaoise it is intended that members of An Garda Síochána will be working from other Stations around the county as it is not envisaged that An Garda Síochána will be renting property to house staff during this period.

A number of incidents around the County were raised with the Chief Superintendent and he stated that these incidents were being dealt with.

Correspondence

The members of the Joint Policing Committee were informed that the Garda Commissioner had committed to attend the next meeting on 21st June, at 2.30pm, either in person or online, depending on Public Health Guidelines in place at that time.

It was noted that correspondence had previously been circulated to all Members, in line with the consultation process in respect of An Garda Síochána Strategic Statement, with submission due date of 7th April.

That concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____

Padraig Fleming

Dated: 21 June 2021

