

Minutes of County Laois Joint Policing Committee Meeting
held on Monday, 10th June 2013, in Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise

Present: Cllr. Mary Sweeney (In the Chair), Mr. Peter Carey County Manager, Chief Supt. John Scanlan, Supt. Yvonne Lundon, Mr. Brian Stanley, T.D., Cllr. Catherine Fitzgerald, Mr. Michael Cobbe, Cllr. Michael Lalor, Cllr. Paul Mitchell, Cllr. Ray Cribbin, Cllr. Seamus McDonald, Cllr. Tom Mulhall, Cllr. Paddy Bracken.

In Attendance: Ms. Anna Marie Delaney, Director of Services, Mr. Ian Mc Cormack, SEO Community & Enterprise, Ms. Georgina Ireland, Administrative Officer, Ms. Theresa Bergin, Clerical Officer.

Apologies: Cllr. David Goodwin, Senator John Whelan, Cllr. James Daly, Mr. Charles Flanagan T.D., Cllr. Ben Brennan, Cllr. John King, Mary White, Kathleen Gorman, Mr. Sean Fleming, T.D.

Cllr. Mary Sweeney, who chaired the meeting, opened the meeting and welcomed all members.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

On the proposal of Cllr. Catherine Fitzgerald and seconded by Cllr. Paul Mitchell, the minutes of the County Laois Joint Policing Committee Meeting held on 18th February 2013 were confirmed and agreed.

PRESENTATION BY COMMUNITY MEDIATION SERVICE

A presentation was made to the members by Mr. Joe McDermott, Ms. Patricia Hayes and Ms. Rebecca Bowell on the Community Mediation Service recently established in Co. Laois.

The presentation demonstrated the Mediation Service, free of charge to the entire community, which the committee hopes to introduce to the widest forum possible.

Features of the service include:

- The voluntary nature of the service
- Independence and confidentiality
- Impartiality of the practitioners
- Empowerment of people to resolve their own disputes
- Desire to see harmony and peacekeeping in the local community

Benefits of the service were described as:

- Resolution of community, boundary and other issues
- Family, peer, schools mediation
- Bullying intervention
- Education in conflict management
- Learning to manage one's own conflict

- A possible alternative to the courts system and cost prevention measure

On behalf of the members, Cllr. Mary Sweeney thanked the Community Mediation Service for their comprehensive presentation. She added that she saw a link with Community Alert initiatives taking place all over the county and encouraged people to get involved.

Other members also commented positively on the introduction of this service, praising the committee members for their desire to see such a service established and the courage to do so.

Ms. Anna Marie Delaney pledged the Council's future support for this very important service and wished the committee the best of luck in their endeavours.

AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA REPORT

Chief Superintendent John Scanlan made a presentation in respect of crime statistics for the first quarter of 2013 (*presentation attached*).

Cllr. Mary Sweeney thanked the Chief Superintendent for his comprehensive report, which was noted by the Members.

The following issues / queries were raised by Members at the meeting:

- Disappointment at the increase in statistics relating to theft from property, including theft of rural/farm equipment. Community Alert and Rapid Texting System – Text Alert on a National basis.
- Highlighting the value of the establishing Community Alerts rurally and Neighbourhood Watch Groups in towns/urban areas.
- Issues raised concerning certain housing estates in Portlaoise.
- Transportation of illegal substances through Laois to other parts of the country
- Locations of speed camera vans – should these locations be periodically changed

Chief Superintendent Scanlan responded to some queries in relation to the above.

- He reiterated that the raising of individual incidents or issues pertaining to ongoing Garda investigations cannot be discussed in this particular forum.
- He noted comments in relation to the Go Safe Vans, stating that their visibility and deterrent nature are the key factors in their location.
- He also advised that as the midlands can be a mid-point for the transportation of drugs, An Garda Síochána monitor movements closely in the course of their operations.
- Again he highlighted the need for people to take care of their property and to increase vigilance and note personal and home security. He referred particularly to trends in theft that were not in existence heretofore, e.g., theft of scrap metal.

The Chief Supt also praised the hosting of recent events by Laois Community Forum, in conjunction with An Garda Síochána, which allowed Community Alert groups countywide to network and also Residents' Groups in Portlaoise Town. He stated that the information shared at such events is invaluable to the Gardaí and the local community, helping to foster good relationships between both.

LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

Ms. Anna Marie Delaney presented her report giving an update on the local authority's response to community and other issues. (*Copy attached*)

Cllr. Mary Sweeney thanked Ms. Delaney for her report which was noted by the Members.

Mr. Peter Carey, County Manager recorded, on behalf of Laois County Council, his gratitude for the assistance of An Garda Síochána at recent major public events in Co. Laois. He also suggested that the Joint Policing Committee examine an initiative around highlighting crime prevention awareness in our community.

Deputy Brian Stanley raised the issue of illegal dumping and the cost borne by the local authority in having to clean up sites. He enquired about the possibility of these costs being sought and reclaimed from the offenders in question. It was agreed that this issue would be investigated and raised by Deputy Stanley at national level.

Cllr. Paddy Bracken raised the issue of the vandalism of ring buoys on river banks and also the alleged intimidation of local people by youths loitering in those areas.

He also raised the issue of the removal by Laois County Council of their providing public liability insurance for housing estates. He stated that the cost to local communities would be detrimental.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____
Cllr Mary Sweeney
A/Chairperson

Date: _____

Minutes of Joint Policing Committee Meeting

held on Monday, 18th February 2013, in Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise

Present: Cllr. Paul Mitchell (In the Chair), Cllr. Ben Brennan, Cllr. Brendan Phelan, Mr. Brian Stanley, T.D., Cllr. Catherine Fitzgerald, Mr., Chief Superintendent John Scanlan, Inspector Martin Harrington, Cllr. John King, Ms. Mary Sweeney, Mr. Michael Cobbe, Ms. Kathleen Gorman, Cllr. Michael Lalor, Cllr. Paddy Bracken, Mr. Peter Carey County Manager, Cllr. Ray Cribbin, Mr. Seamus Mc Donald, Mr. Sean Fleming, T.D., Cllr. Tom Mulhall.

In Attendance: Ms. Anna Marie Delaney, Director of Services, Mr. Ian Mc Cormack, SEO Community & Enterprise, Ms. Honor Deevy, Senior Staff Officer, Ms. Theresa Bergin, Clerical Officer.

Apologies: Cllr. David Goodwin, Senator John Whelan, Cllr. James Daly, Mr. Charles Flanagan T.D.

Cllr. Paul Mitchell, who chaired the meeting, opened the meeting and welcomed all members.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

On the proposal of Cllr. Ray Cribbin and seconded by Cllr. Ben Brennan, the minutes of the County Laois Joint Policing Committee Meeting held on 8th October 2012 were confirmed and agreed.

MATTERS ARISING

Mr. Ian Mc Cormack presented the discussion document distributed by the Department of Justice and Equality which was circulated to the members. He requested that comments and submissions be sent to Mr. Mc Cormack by end of week (Friday 22nd February).

AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA REPORT

Chief Superintendent John Scanlan made a presentation in respect of crime statistics for the 4th quarter ended 31st December 2012 (*presentation attached*). In his presentation he highlighted a number of points:

- Although Burglary figures have reduced in numbers, they are still a significant point of concern. There is a need for the entire community to become involved in helping to reduce / prevent crime and to support victims of crime. There is concern about domestic burglaries.

- The message needs to be conveyed to the public to ensure that their properties are properly secured and burglar alarms used, to engage in behaviour of checking on neighbours and not to be afraid to contact An Garda Síochána if necessary.
- He stated that he is concerned about representation of crimes in Mountmellick. He spoke to the JPC in Mountmellick.
- Two Garda Stations have been closed and the Chief Superintendent visited the communities in question and has assured them that they will continue to be policed. He took the opportunity to thank the communities involved.

Cllr. Paul Mitchell thanked the Chief Superintendent for a very comprehensive report, which was noted by the Members. On behalf of all Members of the JPC, Cllr. Mitchell passed on sincere condolences to the family of Garda Adrian O' Donoghue, and said that the public felt great sadness at his death. The contribution of the Gardaí in public life is so important. This was echoed by a number of the members at the meeting and it was noted that a Book of Condolences was available at Portlaoise Garda Station. Chief Supt. Scanlan took the opportunity to thank the Council and the public in general for the widespread sentiments towards the Gardaí and the public support for their work.

The following issues / queries were raised by Members at the meeting:

- Community Alert and Rapid Texting System – Text Alert on a National basis.
- Highlighting the value of the Community Alert Rapid Texting System.
- Concern over amount of burglaries and in particular domestic burglaries.
- Crimes against people's property are a real concern.
- Closure of Ballacolla and Ballinakill Garda Stations – can dedicated guards be put in place to look after rural areas and can this be spread out to other rural areas?
- General lack of Garda presence in rural areas is a concern.
- The manufacturing of drugs is a concern. Statistics show a decrease in possession of Drugs and this is welcome.
- Issue of Garda Resources in the county and resources in the Laois / Offaly Garda Division; pulling of those resources for duty to Portlaoise Prisons.
- Break-ins to Derelict Houses are a concern.
- Flow of Information between Community and Gardaí is so important.
- Queries on the availability of now vacant Garda Stations for use by Community groups.
- Issues were raised in relation to locations surrounding the Old Squash Club on Ballyfin Road, Portlaoise and reports of illegal dumping.

Chief Superintendent Scanlan responded to some queries in relation to the above but stated that he would find it helpful to have questions given to him beforehand so that he could prepare the responses more thoroughly.

Garda Resources / Closure of Stations

Chief Superintendent Scanlan advised that the situation in relation to Garda resources is a national one and that An Garda Síochána will be giving the best service possible despite the current circumstances. In relation to the closure of the two Garda Stations in Co. Laois, he advised that Gardaí continue to be assigned to rural areas. He also advised that he had spoken to the communities in Ballinakill and

Ballacolla and was very impressed with the interest in protecting their local areas. He advised of a commitment made by An Garda Síochána that each Community Alert area will be assigned a Garda in this regard, who would take responsibility for that location.

He highlighted the need for support from communities, and particularly thanked Community Alert and Neighbourhood Watch groups for their assistance in crime prevention measures. He reiterated the importance of all communities supporting An Garda Síochána in solving, but more importantly preventing, burglaries. He stated that An Garda Síochána need Community feedback more than ever should anything suspicious be notice in local areas.

Chief Supt Scanlan advised that Garda Station buildings are not owned by An Garda Síochána, but are the property of the Office of Public Works, who can be contacted with that query.

Community Alert and Rapid Texting Systems

Chief Supt Scanlan stressed the value of Community Alert groups in the county. He also stated that the Rapid Texting Systems generally worked extremely well but would need to be controlled and properly stewarded.

He concluded by passing his sympathy to the families of the young people who died in the recent fatal road traffic accident in County Offaly.

LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

Ms. Anna Marie Delaney presented her report giving an update on the local authority's response to community and other issues. *(Copy attached)*

Cllr. Paul Mitchell thanked Ms. Delaney for her report which was noted by the Members.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Cllr. Paul Mitchell advised the meeting that the Youth Cafe in Portlaoise had recently officially opened. He stated that it was a fantastic initiative and gave young people a safe space to hang out with their friends, also providing alternative activities / interests for young people. He stated his hope to see more these facilities in other towns and localities and he wished everyone involved the best of luck.

Mr. Brian Stanley, T.D. recommended that the JPC write to An Garda Commissioner and to the Minister regarding the lack of Garda Resources in Laois and to make increased Garda Resources to the Laois / Offaly area due to the fact that the numbers are well below the National average.

It was also recommended that a meeting take place to discuss Community Alert groups and to progress the good work being carried out in this area.

The next meeting will take place in June 2013, a date and time to be agreed and forwarded to all members of the JPC.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____
Cllr. Paul Mitchell
A/Chairman

Date: _____

Minutes of Joint Policing Committee Meeting
held on Monday, 7th October 2013, in Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise

Present: Cllr James Daly (In the Chair), Cllr Ben Brennan, Cllr Brendan Phelan, Mr Brian Stanley TD, Cllr Catherine Fitzgerald, Mr Charles Flanagan TD Chief Superintendent John Scanlan, Superintendent Yvonne Lunden Cllr John King, Cllr Mary Sweeney, Mr Michael Cobbe, Cllr Michael Lalor, Cllr Paul Mitchell, Mr Peter Carey County Manager, Cllr Ray Cribbin, Cllr Tom Mulhall.

In Attendance: Ms Anna Marie Delaney, Director of Services, Mr Ian Mc Cormack, Senior Executive Officer, Ms Georgina Ireland, Administrative Officer, Ms Theresa Bergin, Clerical Officer, Garda Justine Reilly, Garda Wayne Farrell

Apologies: Cllr David Goodwin, Senator John Whelan, Ms Mary White, Ms Kathleen Gorman, Cllr Seamus Mc Donald, Cllr Paddy Bracken, Mr Sean Fleming TD,

Cllr James Daly opened the meeting and welcomed all members.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

On the proposal of Cllr Ray Cribbin and seconded by Cllr Ben Brennan, the minutes of the County Laois Joint Policing Committee Meeting held on 10 June 2013 were confirmed and agreed.

MATTERS ARISING

Arising from discussions at a previous meeting in relation to crime prevention and a joint campaign, Ms Georgina Ireland advised that Laois County Council was in discussions with the Community Policing Unit in relation to making arrangements for same.

Mr Charles Flanagan, T.D. commented on the unprecedented traffic experienced during the National Ploughing Championships and complimented An Garda Síochána on their tremendous work in respect of their traffic management during the event. All members asked to be associated also with these sentiments.

AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA REPORT

Chief Superintendent John Scanlan made a presentation in respect of crime statistics for the third quarter ended 30th September 2013 (*presentation attached*). In his presentation he highlighted a number of points:

- The importance of vigilance around the area of theft, with particular emphasis on the increasing trend of the theft and dismantling of vehicles.
- In respect of Traffic collisions, the Chief Supt commented upon the recent high volume of motorcycle accidents and he again asked for vigilance. He asked that drivers/pedestrians ensure that they 'light themselves up'. He also advised that a Motorcycle Safety Campaign would be launched in the coming weeks.
- Reference was made to issue of bogus callers, particularly in rural areas, and vigilance was again asked for.

The members welcomed the report from An Garda Síochána. Some issues/queries were raised by members in relation to:

- Disappointment in noting the increase in property related crimes.
- Concern raised in relation to the issue of people texting while driving, a highly dangerous activity.
- An update was sought in relation to resources in the Abbeyleix Garda District.
- Particular concerns were raised by a number of members in relation to the issue of rural crime. Some members stressed that the increases in crime in rural areas could be linked to the closure of some rural Garda Stations, citing that the distance for Gardaí to travel from Portlaoise may increase the response time to calls. Concerns were raised that this trend might continue if centralisation of An Garda Síochána resources continues.
- Praise for the increase in the number of Community Alert/Neighbourhood Watch Groups established across the county and queries in relation to Text Alert Systems and the optimum system that groups should be using.
- Concern was raised regarding speed and in relation to a number of accidents which occurred recently at Kilbride Bridge, on Portlaoise – Portarlington Road.
- Concern was raised in relation to the recent increase in the theft of bicycles in urban areas.
- Members raised the issue of older persons being targeted rurally in cases of burglary.

Chief Superintendent Scanlan responded to some queries in relation to the above.

- He advised in relation to recent large number of bicycle thefts, this spate of thefts was dealt with by An Garda Síochána, however there are now a large number of bicycles that cannot be restored to owners without presentation of a serial number.
- He again informed the members that the matter of Garda resources in particular districts would not be discussed in this forum, and that deployment of Garda numbers would not be made available in the public domain, other than to say that An Garda Síochána are, as always, making the best possible use of resources on hand. He also confirmed that there are members of An Garda Síochána identified in each area where stations were closed.
- He advised that a new consolidated policy for Community Alert/Neighbourhood Watch Text Alert systems was recently launched and the new policy circulated to groups. He stipulated that like with every system, this new consolidated policy must be given time to bed in. He acknowledged that every Community Alert Group is operating as best it can with the resources they have and pledged that An Garda Síochána are on hand to give every support that they can also.
- He noted concerns in relation to Kilbride Road, adding that this would be raised with Laois County Council and the Garda Traffic Unit.

LAOIS COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT

Mr. Ian McCormack presented a report giving an update on the local authority's response to community and other issues. (*Copy attached*)

Cllr. James Daly thanked Laois County Council for this report.

A number of queries were raised following this report:

- Concern that there should be more supervision in playgrounds around the county and the suggestion that CCTV would be erected to prevent crime in these areas.
- Calls for the increasing of fines for illegal dumping
- Concerns regarding the issue of stray horses.

Ms. Anna Marie Delaney responded on behalf of Laois County Council:

- The Council is liaising with the local community and An Garda Síochána in relation to a number of isolated incidents occurring in local playgrounds.
- The raising of fine levels for illegal dumping would be a matter for the Minister for Environment, Community & Local Government to consider as this is a national matter.
- The issue of stray horses is currently being examined by the appropriate Strategic Policy Committee in Laois County Council, with a view to reviewing bye laws regarding same; current bye laws are in operation and enforced. The Council works closely with a contractor with regard to the control of horses across the county.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

Cllr James Daly welcomed representatives from Stradbally Neighbourhood Watch Group, who were in attendance at this public meeting.

Questions were submitted from this Group as follows:

Questions submitted on behalf of Stradbally Neighbourhood Watch Group:

1. Could the Planning Department and the Roads Section confirm that the Zebra Crossing at the Market House on the Main street in Stradbally is complying with best practice with regard to its design? To have parking spaces both sides of the crossing and also a bus stop, must surely be outside the guidelines for the installation of such a crossing. (ref: Dept of Environment Guidelines).

Has the local Garda or the Super's office ever raised the issue with the Council, and in the event of a serious accident, will both parties confirm that they are indeed happy with the layout and the position of this traffic crossing and that our request for action was noted but no action was required. This is the third time we have raised the matter.

Response by Laois County Council:

Laois County Council has made a submission to the National Roads Authority, to change the Zebra Crossing at Market Square, Stradbally to a Signal Controlled/Push Button Crossing. This would introduce more consistency in the three pedestrian crossings in the town. The National Roads Authority are at present considering the proposal.

Comments were made at the meeting by Ms. Carmel Delaney, a member of Stradbally Neighbourhood Watch Group, in relation to the response given, stating that the problem of cars

parking on the other side of this road wouldn't be solved by installation of such a Crossing. It was suggested that a raised table be installed to slow traffic down at this location.

The above comments were noted by Laois County Council with a commitment to forward to the Area Engineer for examination.

2. Now that the public toilets are removed from the Market House in Stradbally, and will reopen at the Playground at the junction with the Athy Road and the main N80 to Carlow, what action is planned to make the entry and exit from the Playground safe for traffic stopping to use the public toilet, and what action is planned when buses stop to park on the street to allow patrons to use the new public toilets.

Response by Laois County Council:

While open to the public, the toilets installed at the location of the playground in Stradbally are primarily for the use of patrons of the playground and community allotments to the rear of the playground. The area in question is not covered by parking bye laws and accordingly, any incidences of inappropriate or illegal or dangerous parking are an enforcement issue and a matter for An Garda Síochána.

3. The introduction of the 80kph and 50kph limits some time ago needs to be reviewed, as we have still small rural roads with speed limits that are wrong and indeed a danger to road users. What if any input do you have with the location of the speed limit signs, and have you plans to make any changes to meet the needs of the local community.

Response by Laois County Council:

Laois County Council is planning to carry out a County wide, speed limit review in the near future. The speed limit for any road, urban or rural, can be reviewed, as part of that process. The Department of Transport has set down Guidelines for the default speed limit on various classes of roads. These also have to be taken into consideration in any review.

4. What is the structure of the community policing in rural Laois?
Can you advise after over 12 months of the new rota system, how is the community policing working outside of the town of Portlaoise?

Response by An Garda Síochána

All Gardaí stationed outside of urban centres are considered to be Community Gardaí.

5. Do you think with the new rotas now well bedded in and the way they are run, that you are creating an information gap and that people in the community are losing respect and confidence in the centralised approach to policing in the county? Is it also true that you have no rural rotas in Laois?

Response by An Garda Síochána

This is not an appropriate forum; It would be more appropriate to meet with the group in question separately to discuss issues pertaining to their own area and An Garda Síochána are willing to do so.

6. How do you explain that the closing of small rural stations has not affected the gathering of local intelligence? This has distanced the locals from the Gardaí, and has created a information gap that has benefited those who are on the wrong side of the law. What is now in place as a result of the closing down of these stations?

Response by An Garda Síochána

This is an issue that is pertinent to Stradbally Neighbourhood Watch and therefore not an

appropriate forum to discuss same. An Garda Síochána remain open to meeting this group in relation to issues they wish to raise pertaining to their own particular area.

7. The low or non attendance of Gardaí at meetings of the Watch since the introduction of the new rotas, has left groups with the feeling that they are now on their own, and that what matters most is that you control your cost and maximise the staffing levels and recourses in Portlaoise town. Can you arrange to make sure that the local Garda or indeed staff from Portlaoise attend at least one local meeting every two months of Community Alerts or Neighbourhood Watches.

Response by An Garda Síochána

The Group can be assured that, should the local Garda not be in a position to attend a Neighbourhood Watch Meeting in their area, an alternative Garda will be made available to be present.

8. The operation of the 3 prisons in Portlaoise has meant that, from time to time, Gardaí outside of Portlaoise have been called in off their own local rota to supplement the Portlaoise rota. Can this practice be stopped and can the Prison Service not look to their own resources, before taking them from the small towns around Portlaoise.

Response by An Garda Síochána

This question is not appropriate for raising in this forum and cannot be answered for that reason.

9. Text Alerts and Local CCTV are now in use by many local communities. Can you confirm what is your policy and support for these local actions are and will you encourage the local Gardaí and Sergeants to be more supportive of groups in rural areas who want to use both systems to protect there areas.

Response by An Garda Síochána

As previously stated, a national Garda policy has recently been issued in respect of Community Text Alert and its operation. With regard to CCTV, An Garda Síochána remain open to discussing this with each group separately.

10. Do you have the man power and the resources to police the county of Laois? How many cars have you and do you need more. Do you know if your Minister will look at closing any other stations in the county?

Response by An Garda Síochána

This question is not appropriate for raising in this forum and cannot be answered for that reason.

11. Are you still using a manual recording system in the remaining few Garda station around the county, and in fact, unless the manuals are reviewed in the Portlaoise station, there is no cross reference to information supplied. Can you at the least set up a local database IT SYSTEM so the information can "go live" around the stations in the county and that the sharing of information can move quickly rather than the present data collection system in place. We think a number of local IT companies would be happy to help to set up something that would make the county safer and catch more offenders.

We are still recording on a spreadsheet the number of "happenings" in and around the town of Stradbally and we would like to meet to review that information before we bring it to the local public attention. Thank you for the time and we await your considered reply.

Response by An Garda Síochána

Information helpful to An Garda Síochána in crime prevention or detection, will be accepted in any format which the public wish to give.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

This concluded the business of the meeting. Cllr. James Daly thanked all who participated in the meeting and discussions.

Signed: _____

**Cllr. James Daly
Chairman**

Date: _____