

Kildare Joint Policing Committee Minutes of Annual Public Meeting

7.00 p.m. Monday 2nd December 2019
Town Hall, Newbridge

Members in Attendance:

Name:	Representing:
Cllr. Fintan Brett (Chair)	Elected Member
Cllr. Aoife Breslin (Vice Chair)	Elected Member
Cllr. Pádraig McEvoy	Elected Member
Cllr. Nuala Killeen	Elected Member
Cllr. Chris Pender	Elected Member
Cllr. Fiona McLoughlin-Healy	Elected Member
Cllr. Anne Connolly	Elected Member
Dept. Fiona O'Loughlin	Oireachtas Member
Dept. Martin Heydon	Oireachtas Member
Peter Carey	Kildare County Council
Sonya Kavanagh	Kildare County Council
Chief Supt. John Scanlan	An Garda Síochána
Supt. Oliver Henry	An Garda Síochána
Conor O'Leary	Muintir na Tíre
Emma Berney	CYPSC
Monica Cox	Kildare Older Persons Council
Michael Corcoran	Public Participation Network
Apologies:	
Cllr. Ciara Galvin	Elected Member
Steven Joyce	Southwest Regional Drugs & Alcohol Task Force

Also in attendance: Philly McMahon, Lisa Baggott

Meeting Coordinator: John Shannon / Meeting Administrator: Ciara Gallagher

Meeting Opening:

Cllr. Brett welcomed the attendees and particularly guest speakers Philly McMahon and Lisa Baggott, coordinator of the South West Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force. He introduced Ciara Gallagher from Kildare County Council who advised all in attendance in relation to photographs being taken on the night and their future use and that they would be used and stored in accordance with GDPR guidelines.

Minutes / matters arising:

The minutes of the last meeting held on Monday 2nd September were adopted on the proposal of Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin, seconded by Michael Corcoran, with no amendments.

Committee Matters:

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Cllr. Brett advised the committee on two matters:

1. The result of the email vote regarding the time of future quarterly meetings was 14 members for retaining the 3.00 p.m. start time and 8 members against.
2. A nomination was required to the Alcohol Oversight Committee of the South West Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force. On the proposal of Monica Cox and seconded by Michael Corcoran, Cllr. Chris Pender was nominated to the position; no other nominations being received.

Correspondence:

The Chief Executive and JPC chair were invited to a Policing Authority briefing event held on 24th October in Dublin. Cllr. Brett made a brief report to the committee regarding his and Sonya Kavanagh's attendance on the day. He mentioned the reorganisation plans for AGS and emphasised the Policing Authority's view that JPCs are an important part of community liaison with An Garda Síochána and will become more so in the future.

Meeting Dates:

Proposed dates for meetings in 2020 were agreed by the committee as presented. Dates are: Monday March 2nd; Monday June 8th; Monday September 7th; Monday December 7th (annual public meeting).

Policing Report:

Cllr. Brett indicated before the Policing Report was presented that any questions would be taken after the guest speakers had finished.

Chief Superintendent John Scanlan presented the final policing report for 2019. His presentation included comparative data on burglaries and thefts, crimes against persons, criminal damage and public order offenses, drugs and weapons offenses and road traffic incidents.

The Chief Superintendent expanded on his report to advise that some additional new Gardaí had been allocated to the Kildare district and that the assistance of national drugs units and other resources could and would be requested as required. He acknowledged the changing profile of drug use in terms of prevalence and general acceptance across all socio-economic groups. He noted the additional problems faced by families forced to deal with the drug debts of their children and noted the significant number of serious drug-trafficking incidents linked to criminal gangs. He also made brief reference to the new divisional model of policing incorporating four Garda regions/hubs, new divisions including the Laois/Offaly/Kildare division and evolving roles for some senior Garda personnel.

Note: Policing report available upon request.

Guest Speaker: Philly McMahon

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Philly McMahon gave a very personal speech about his own experiences growing up in Ballymun. He spoke about the physical social divide in local communities which seemed to confirm to certain young persons that their life chances would not be as good as those of others living in what were perceived to be more affluent neighbourhoods. He mentioned the lack of effective supports faced by those in poorer communities which often led to initial petty criminality and substance experimentation before later developing into serious drug addiction and related criminal behaviours. Philly spoke at length about his brother John who succumbed to drug-related health issues at only 31 years of age and suggested his life might have been very different had he been given the same opportunities as others. He emphasised the need to target and educate children from a very young age so that they would be equipped with the tools to reject drug use and/or drug dealing as a legitimate choice or lifestyle in the face of the many challenges they are likely to encounter.

Guest Speaker: Lisa Baggott

Lisa explained her background and her current role as coordinator of the SWRDATAF. She outlined the origin of the Task Force, its membership and explained its stated aim of "reducing harm, supporting recovery". Lisa expanded on some of the activities and supports being provided by the agency. She advised on how the Task Force delivers initiatives and services in a tight budgetary situation but emphasised that a lot of high-quality work is being done to assist and support persons struggling with addiction issues.

Community CCTV:

Superintendent Oliver Henry briefed the meeting on the latest position. Due to an interpretation of current data protection law by the Information Commissioner, it appears that there is no legal basis for the sharing of data between local authorities' CCTV systems and other agencies, including An Garda Síochána. It is hoped that amending legislation will be enacted soon to bring clarity to the situation for all parties concerned.

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Questions & Answers:

There were several questions from the floor regarding the Policing Report. Among the points raised were:

- Garda numbers should be indicated over a period of years to take account of retirements and promotions etc. so that the actual resources were clearer
- The Newbridge area required a dedicated community Garda and a drugs unit
- The increase in visible community policing was welcomed
- It was possible to purchase drugs online without difficulty
- Cyber-bullying was an increasing problem
- There was a 20% increase in drug crime statistics
- Drug debt was an increasing burden for families
- Additional funding was needed for drugs task forces and rehabilitation services
- The impact of the new policing structures on community alert groups
- The comparison of prosecutions for supply as opposed to simple possession

Chief Superintendent Scanlan responded to the issues raised and emphasised that the Gardaí had to work within existing legislation, structures and resources but they had access to additional regional and national expertise as needed. Superintendent Henry outlined plans to consolidate the 57 text alerts systems currently operating in Kildare into one streamlined system.

Philly McMahon answered some questions from the floor on how the drugs problem is being managed and what changes he thought might be useful. He suggested that:

- Education rather than criminal prosecution was the way forward and funding saved from prosecutions should be diverted into education
- Decriminalisation should be considered for personal use
- "Tough love" was not a suitable approach to young people in difficult situations

Any Other Business

Cllr. Brett noted that the next JPC meeting takes place on Monday 2nd March 2020 at 3 p.m. in Council Chambers, Áras Chill Dara.

Conclusion:

Cllr. Brett concluded the meeting by thanking An Garda Síochána, Kildare County Council, Philly McMahon, Lisa Baggott and the public and press who attended.

