

Chair, Committee Members,

Thank you for the invite to meet with you today.

An Garda Síochána's mission for the next three years as outlined in our Strategy Statement, which was published earlier this year, is Keeping People Safe.

This is the guiding principle upon which we now base strategic and operational decisions. As Guardians of the Peace, Keeping People Safe and safeguarding human rights is central to what we do.

Progress against our Strategy Statement is measured against delivery of our annual Policing Plans.

So far this year, we have met the majority of our Policing Plan targets. Many of these have had a direct impact on the community such as the introduction of local protective service units to investigate crimes against the vulnerable, the re-deployment of nearly 500 Garda members from administrative roles to front-line duties, and an increase in roads policing detections of life saver offences.

In addition, we have introduced a number of strategies in areas such as a human resources and ICT that will deliver better support for our people resulting in improved service provision.

A key element of our Strategy Statement is a new Operating Model for An Garda Síochána.

The Operating Model will introduce major changes to our structures, but more importantly for the public, it will provide more front-line Gardaí, increased Garda visibility, and a wider range of policing services in their local area.

Ireland is changing. Crime is changing.

However, the reality is that despite the great efforts of our people our own burdensome structures with their roots in the 1920s are holding them back from providing the best possible police service.

This is supported by the Garda Inspectorate which said in its 2015 Changing Policing in Ireland report: "...fundamental structural change will enable the Garda Síochána to respond with increased visibility and effectiveness to the needs of Irish society today and in the future."

In addition, the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland said: "Divisions should be large enough to be self-sufficient for all routine administrative and operational purposes."

The Policing Authority has welcomed the new model saying; "When implemented, the model should result in an increase in Garda resources and greater autonomy at divisional level, which will make it possible to better respond to the specific needs of the local community."

The new Operating Model will see larger Divisions with more resources.

A key focus of those Divisions will be on community policing with around 50-60% of all resources in each Division devoted to this area.

As we have already done in the four Divisions where we piloted this model, community policing teams will be introduced who are dedicated to working with communities and other stakeholders to identify and tackle problem crimes in their area.

This should result in different agencies and NGOs working with us to break cycles of anti-social behaviour, drug dealing, and violence that can blight communities and the lives of individuals.

I believe this approach meets key recommendations from this Committee's report on Community Policing and Rural Crime from earlier this year.

It will mean a local policing service based on local needs.

The public wants to see more Gardaí on the streets. So do I. Our new Operating Model will achieve this.

The model, along with long-needed investment in ICT such as our mobility app, will reduce the amount of time Gardaí have to spend in stations. Time that they will spend instead out on the beat.

There is a net increase of 800 Garda members under our recruitment programme between now and 2020. This combined with a further 1000 Gardaí released to front line duties will make a very positive impact on the policing service we deliver.

Increased visibility in local communities will help provide re-assurance that there is a strong policing presence.

Again, this is in line with a key recommendation of this Committee.

Chief Superintendents and Superintendents will be empowered to make decisions on how policing is best delivered within their Divisions.

This has been something that they have been wanting for quite some time.

This has been portrayed in some quarters as creating 19 mini-police services, but that is not the intention.

Yes, local commanders will have the ability to make a lot more decisions of their own on how to police their area, but, in doing so, they will be subject to oversight at a regional and national level, and must operate within a corporate framework. That way we will have consistency of delivery across the country, something which has been lacking up to now.

I also note some of the commentary that Garda members, particularly Superintendents, will inevitably be pulled into wherever the Divisional Headquarter is based.

That will not be the case.

There may be some centralisation, largely of administrative resources, at the Divisional Headquarters, but I am resolute that as many as possible Superintendents will be in key locations throughout a Division.

This has already been achieved in the Divisions that piloted the model.

For instance, in Galway all the Community Engagement Superintendents are based outside of the Divisional HQ. In Mayo, there are Community Engagement Superintendents based in Claremorris and Ballina with the Divisional HQ being in Castlebar.

In addition, centralising administration and the introduction of the Superintendent for Performance Assurance will remove a major bureaucracy burden from the Community Engagement Superintendents, which they have been wanting for a long time.

As a result, the Superintendents for Community Engagement will be freed-up to get out from behind their desks and interact with the communities they serve.

In addition, communities have already seen an increase in Sergeants and Inspectors and this will continue.

This will not only be of benefit to communities, but also to Gardaí.

A key request from Gardaí from our Cultural Audit was for more supervision. Additional Sergeants and Inspectors will provide that much-needed supervision, mentoring and guidance, which in turn will improve the service we provide.

Not only will these Divisions have more Gardaí to deploy in communities, particularly in community policing, but they will be able to provide a wider range of policing services locally.

At a time when the reporting of sexual and domestic violence is rising, when many crimes have a digital element, and when financial frauds are increasingly complex, it is not sustainable to rely solely on our national units to investigate all such crimes.

Our new Operating Model will enhance the investigation of crime through the delivery of a greater range of specialised services in local areas such as the investigation of sexual crime, domestic violence, cyber crime, and economic crime.

Each Division will be provided with a Detective Superintendent who along with trained investigators in specialist areas will be responsible for local crime

investigation. Complex or highly technical crimes will generally be dealt with at national level.

This widening of specialist services at a local level will be supported by the introduction of an Investigation Management System, which will make it easier for those supervising investigations to oversee their progress.

This will have a number of benefits for victims.

In general, it should see their crime investigated quicker and, particularly in the case of specialist crimes, by investigators well trained in that area.

More investigations being conducted locally coupled with the Investigation Management System should also mean information about the progress of the investigation is more readily available.

Our new Operating Model is in line with best international practice, is based on extensive consultation with our own people, has been recommended by both the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland and the Garda Inspectorate, and is supported by Government and the Policing Authority.

As I said, it will deliver a community-focused police service, which was a central recommendation of this Committee.

An example of this commitment to community-focused policing is the recent permanent allocation of Garda members to one/two member stations in areas such as Emly and Toomevara in County Tipperary, and Ballyhale and Stoneyford in Kilkenny that haven't had a Garda member attached to them for a number of years. This in addition to the six Garda stations to be re-opened under the Programme for Government.

We are also examining other options such as setting-up clinics in vacant stores in certain towns and villages to make policing more visible and accessible.

What won't change though is our strong connection with the communities we serve. It is one of the key reasons why we have a trust level among the public of around 90%.

There are many police services around the world that would love to have this level of connection and trust.

The new operating model is being introduced under the Government's A Policing Service for the Future plan.

Already this year, a number of improvements have been introduced as part of A Policing Service for the Future including regional control rooms, the start of the roll-out of the Investigation Management System, more Gardaí re-deployed from administrative posts to front-line duties, and a range of measures to enhance our ability to deliver a human rights focused policing and security service including a new Decision Making Model with human rights and the Code of Ethics at its centre.

And further benefits are to come before the end of the year include beginning with the roll-out of mobile phones for front-line officers, particularly those working in roads policing; starting the procurement for a new Garda uniform; more eLearning programmes, and further roll-out of new systems such as the Investigation and Management System, and the Roster and Duty Management System.

I recognise that change is never easy, but our operating model is necessary if An Garda Síochána is to meet the needs of the public for a community-focused police service that focuses its resources and energy on keeping the people of Ireland safe.