**Minutes of Meeting of County Cavan Joint Policing Committee held in the Council Chamber, Cavan on 5th June 2020 at 3pm.**

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**Present:**

**Councillors:** Cllr Sarah O’ Reilly, Cllr John Paul Feeley, Cllr Clifford Kelly, Cllr Peter Mc Vitty, Cllr Paddy Mc Donald, Cllr Carmel Brady, Cllr Madeleine Argue, Cllr. Aiden Fitzpatrick, Cllr. Brendan Fay, Cllr. Trevor Smith, Cllr. Patricia Walsh, Cllr. Philip Brady, Cllr. T.P. O’Reilly, Cllr Shane P. O’Reilly

**Community Representatives:** Vanessa Clarke, John Magee, Leanne Coyle, Stanley Nwaneri, Tony Mc Govern, Elizabeth Ormiston

**Executive**: Brendan Jennings, (Director of Services)

**Garda Officers**: Chief Superintendent John O’Reilly, Inspector Valerie Gahan, Superintendent James Coen,

**Oireachtas Members:** Senator Joe O’Reilly, Deputy Brendan Smith, Senator Robbie Gallagher, Deputy Pauline Tully

**Apologies:** Deputy Niamh Smyth, Margaret Matthews

**In Attendance:** Inspector Nial Mc Kiernan, Gráinne Boyle, Jim Copeland (Retailers Against Smuggling) , Conor Brennan (Retailers Against Smuggling)

Chair Cllr. J.P. Feeley welcomed everyone to the first virtual meeting of the JPC which was necessary due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

He commenced the meeting by congratulating the Oireachtas members on their recent appointments and wished them all the best in their roles.

He thanked members for their responses for the consultations carried out by the Policing Authority to examine the response of An Garda Síochána during the COVID-19 pandemic. The feedback received by the Policing Authority was overall very positive and recognised the hard and valuable work the gardaí were doing over this period often putting themselves in difficult situations.

For the purpose of informing the new Community Representatives Cllr. J.P. Feeley went through the procedures for running an effective JPC meeting and went through the items which the JPC is unable to discuss at meetings specifically if it relates to:

* A Criminal investigation or prosecution
* To the security of the State
* Endanger the security of individuals or an individual
* Involves information received in confidence
* Would prejudice crime prevention/detection

Cllr Feeley advised that it would not be practical to go ‘into committee’ during the meeting due to the nature of this its format.

**Minutes from meeting 6th December 2019**

Brendan Fay proposed the minutes and Patricia Walsh seconded them.

**Matters Arising**

As requested at the previous meeting the Garda Commissioner was invited to attend a meeting of the Cavan JPC. He has replied to confirm he will attend the next scheduled meeting of the JPC due to take place in September.

**Welcome & Introduction of the new Community Representatives**

Chair Cllr Feeley welcomed the new Community Representatives appointed to the JPC. One position (Youth Interests) will have shared representation and two people will share the one seat (as allowed for in the JPC Standing Orders). He named all the new representatives and confirmed the sector they were representing:

**Youth Interests:** Leanne Coyle (Smile for Me) & John Magee (Laragh Community Alert)

**Community Alert:** Vanessa Clarke (Muntir na Tire)

**New Communities:** Stanley Nwaneri (Cavan Cross Cultural Communities)

**Farming / Rural Communities:** Tony Mc Govern (Swanlinbar Development Association)

**Farming / Rural Communities:** Elizabeth Ormiston (Irish Farmers Association)

**Drugs:** Margaret Matthews (Virginia Development Association)

**Retailers Against Struggling: Conor Brennan & Jim Copeland**

Cllr Feeley welcomed both Conor and Jim to the meeting. Conor thanked the JPC members for accepting their invitation to present to them. He explained that their presentation will specifically focus on the illicit trading of solid fuels. He explained that they are reaching out to JPC’s to start a collaborative conversation on how the problem can be feasibly and quickly tackled. His presentation covered the following areas:

* Who are Retailers Against Smuggling (RAS)
* An overview on the Black Market in Ireland
* Current Policy Landscape
* The future of Solid Fuel Black Market in Ireland
* Feedback received from retailers
* Potential Solutions & What can be done
* Educating the end user
* Visible enforcement
* Registration of Coal Merchants
* Benefits

Jim added that a lot of their work will depend on the next Government and what stance they take around this issue. Brexit will also have a huge impact.

Cllr Feely thanked both Conor and Jim for their presentation. He asked what the current legal situation is on citizens from County Cavan for example buying a few bags of coal from the north for personal use. He also referred to those who are selling illicitly in the south of the border and asked are they been sold by legitimate business’s or from rogue traders from the ‘back of a van’. Conor explained that his association is not concerned with citizens buying fuel for their own personal use. They are only concerned with those who trade on a large scale. He said it’s important to educate the public so they are aware who they are buying their fuel from and if its legitimate. Jim explained that it is legitimate to import fuel so long as the tax is paid on it. Retailers Against Smuggling are concerned with those who are not paying tax and are going around selling door to door and at markets. Cllr Feely agreed that there is a serious loss of funds to the exchequer due to this activity and this is very concerning.

Cllr Mc Vitty said that it is the responsibility of Revenue and Customs to be dealing with this issue, it would not necessarily be the responsibility of the Gardaí to start spot checking business’s in relation to this activity. He believes customs should be carrying out more regular checks.

Cllr Fay said that if new legislation is introduced it will have implications for many people living along the border. New legislation will push people further into poverty as it is so much more expensive to purchase fuel in the south when compared to the north. This will impact particularly on older people who are fuel dependent to keep their homes warm. Cllr Fay suggested the focus should be more on the illicit trading of items such as cigarettes and alcohol.

Cllr Feeley agreed and said that this issue just highlights the problem of having two jurisdictions on the island and this issue will only be heightened after Brexit. An all-island approach is needed to certain issues. He added that he would be more concerned about those business’s that may be perceived as dealing fuel legitimately and are not, rather than those individuals who are purchasing coal for their own use.

**Agree Revised Standing Orders**

JPC Standing Orders were revised to include that the JPC can go ‘in committee’ during meetings as allowed for in the JPC departmental guidelines which take precedent over the Standing Orders first and foremost.

Cllr Fay proposed the Standing Orders and Patricia Walsh seconded them.

**Agree JPC Annual Report 2019**

Cllr Feeley informed members that the 2019 Annual Report for the JPC has been prepared for submission to the Policing Authority. There was limited JPC activity over 2019 due to the local elections and the process of reconstituting a new JPC following the elections. Two meetings of the JPC took place during the year.

* Property Marking Initiative - the main focus over 2019 has been rolling out the Property Marking Initiative within County Cavan which gained momentum over the year. Demand for the machine was so much that Cavan County Council purchased a second machine in September 2019. In total 23 Community Groups have borrowed the machine to date for a minimum one week period at a time, 17 of these were over 2019. Four Property Marking Training sessions were delivered over 2019 by Property Marking Ireland. Several gardaí have also received training now on how to use the machine and have been actively supporting groups to implement their local schemes. A presentation on the Property Marking Initiative was made to the LCDC in the Autumn of 2019.
* Community CCTV - Four community groups were supported to submit applications under the Dept. of Justice’s Community CCTV Funding Scheme – however due to the halt in the scheme no further progress under this could take place.

The report was proposed by Cllr Kelly and seconded by Cllr Fay.

Cllr Fay enquired if there have been any further updates in relation to the Community CCTV Scheme. Inspector Mc Kiernan replied that COVID-19 pandemic has put a halt to any activity under this area. He said in relation to Project Belturbet’s application they are waiting for garda vetting for certain members to be received.

Cllr. O’Reilly referred to a request proposed at the last JPC meeting for a letter to be send to the Department of Justice to convey Cavan’s JPC’s frustrations with the CCTV Community Grant Aid Scheme. Cllr Feely said he knows a letter has been written but was unaware if a response had been received as of yet.

Cllr O’Reilly asked if there was still an outstanding issue concerning the Local Authorities been asked to act as the data controllers for the scheme. Inspector Mc Kiernan informed her that this is an outstanding issue but Cavan County Council has agreed to be the data controller for the four applications submitted for County Cavan.

Cllr Fay said that there is still an issue at the national level and no clarification has been given to the Local Authorities to date from the LGMA. However he requested that clarification should be received before the next JPC meeting. He said the community groups who have submitted their applications need to know one way or the other after putting in the work on their applications. Cllr Feeley said that it is not a satisfactory scheme overall and there will be a lot of issues for communities in implementing the scheme. Brendan Jennings said that he will seek clarification from the LGMA ahead of the next JPC meeting as to what is the Council’s position is in relation to acting as Data Controllers. He informed members that this is a national issue and it is not just affecting County Cavan.

Cllr Mc Vitty wanted An Garda Síochána and the County Council to come to some agreement amongst themselves so that the schemes can progress. He believes that the best place for the CCTV equipment to be placed would be garda stations. Inspector Mc Kiernan informed him however that this would not be possible under the current criteria and requirements applied to the scheme. Equipment must be housed in a community facility otherwise funding will be unable to be drawn down. Cllr. Feeley stated that this issue does need to be resolved at the national level and suggested that perhaps the Oireachtas members could lend their support in this.

**Crime Statistics Q1/2019 compared to Q1/2020**

Chief Superintendent O’Reilly invited comments from members in relation to the crime statistics for the county for Quarter 1 2020 compared to Quarter1 2019. He said that due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions there has been a large increase in the number of domestic violence and mental health related incidents. Cllr. O’Reilly queried the differences between the three different categories under domestic violence. Chief Superintendent O’Reilly explained that ‘No Offence Disclosed’ meant that no party in the house made a complaint, it came from a concerned neighbour for example;’ Various Orders’ this relates to a situation were an order has already been in place against a person, in this situation the gardaí would need to remove the person; ‘Assaults causing Harm’ relates to a situation were an assault has taken place and the gardaí need to remove a person from the house.

Deputy B. Smith thanked An Garda Síochána for their work over the COVID 19 pandemic. He said that it is troubling to see the large increase in domestic violence figures and referred to previous discussions which took place during JPC meetings relating to the need for a Refuge Centre within this region. He said he is aware that developments were taking place in terms of carrying out a review into this issue nationally. He proposed a letter to be send on behalf of the JPC to the Chief Executive of Tusla and the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs to highlight the need for a Refuge Centre for this region to be fast tracked based on the high statistics and lack of facilities. Deputy Smith also wanted to acknowledge and pay tribute to the voluntary community supports taking place to help the vulnerable over the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chief Superintendent O’Reilly said that they would be very supportive of this request. He informed members that they are currently participating in a competition to establish a Divisional Protection Service which will have a responsibility for sexual crimes (human trafficking, child/domestic abuse). While not dealing with Domestic Violence directly it would provide an indirect support in this area. The Divisional Protection Unit would have one sergeant and five garda within the unit in County Cavan, there will be a similar unit for County Monaghan also. A decision in relation to their bid is expected by the end of the summer.

Senator Gallagher wanted to support the issues raised by Deputy Smith. He said that it is a very stressful time for everyone but there has also been a large increase in alcohol consumption which has knock on effects. He said that Boots Chemists has recently launched a Safe Space Campaign to support victims of Domestic Violence. He suggested that the JPC should encourage all chemists within County Cavan to take on this initiative also. He believes that there is a special relationship between the pharmacist and the client.

Deputy Pauline Tully also wanted to lend her support for the need for a Refuge Centre for the region. She said Tearmann are doing a great job to do what they can but much more support is needed. She suggested that the recent increase in the number of suicides may well be drug taking. She believes a multi-agency approach is needed to tackle this issue within the county sufficiently. She queried if there was any development in relation to the region obtaining a Dog Unit. Chief Superintendent O’Reilly replied that the unit has been available in the past and will be in the future in the newly realigned and expanded Garda divisional structure. It is hoped that one local garda would be trained with a drug sniffer and possibly explosive detection canine.

Cllr Walsh wanted to thank everyone involved in the recent response to the suicides which took place within the county. In particular, she wanted to pay tribute toe Emer Mulligan the HSE’s Suicide Prevention Resource Officer. She stated that Mental Health needs to be seriously focused on over the coming months as this is an area which is only going to get worse.

Cllr. Brady queried the figures for zero detections of persons caught possessing drugs for sale and supply in the Bailieborough Garda District. She said that she is continually asked to raise the issue around drugs from constituents within this district as it is a growing problem. She stated that the figures provided were not reflective of the current situation happening on the ground. Chief Superintendent O’Reilly explained that the figures provided are just a snapshot of crime incidents recorded in Cavan between January to March 2020 and are only reflective of that period in comparison to the same period the year before.

Chief Superintendent O’Reilly wanted to respond to rumours that Garda Stations are to close, he stated that many of these stations needed to be closed to better manage cross-infection during the COVID-19 health crisis, but all will be reopened.

Cllr Feeley acknowledged the work An Garda Síochána have been carrying out over the COVID-19 pandemic. He said they have had to deal with some very difficult situations and have been responding very well.

**Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place on the 25th September 2020 at 3pm.