



**An Garda Síochána**  
Ireland's National Police & Security Service

## **Independent Review of Roads Policing**

April 2025

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**NOTE: for the purposes of publication of this independent report, Crowe has amended the text in a small number of instances to ensure that it does not identify specific individuals or locations. These changes have no material impact on our findings.**

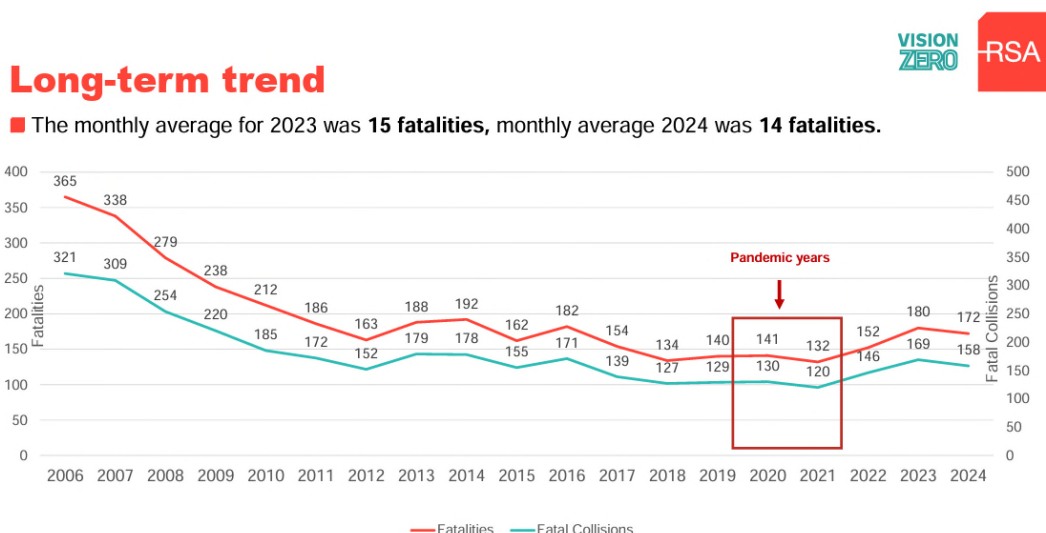
# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Preamble

Crowe was engaged by An Garda Síochána in February 2024 to undertake a review of Roads Policing activity and operations. This report presents our independent findings and recommendations to An Garda Síochána.

## 1.2 Context and Scope of the Review

The context for this review was the number of road traffic fatalities and fatal collisions in Ireland which had increased significantly from 2018 to 2023, and reduced slightly in 2024, as shown in the Road Safety Authority data below: <sup>1</sup>



At the time of our engagement in early 2024, there had been concern raised publicly by both political representatives and lobby groups regarding the number of Garda members assigned to Roads Policing Units across the country. Media concerns also focused on this issue, with one press report in September 2023 reporting a 17% reduction in the number of Roads Policing members between 2013 (when 804 members were assigned to the then Garda Traffic Corps) and July 2023 (664 Roads Policing members). <sup>2</sup>

Crowe had previously undertaken an extensive body of work for the Policing Authority in 2017, to review the issues associated with discrepancies in Mandatory Intoxicant Testing checkpoints and the issue of summonses by An Garda Síochána. <sup>3</sup> As that work had centred on Garda Roads Policing activity, we were engaged directly by An Garda Síochána to undertake a review of Roads Policing, with a view to determining whether current operational practices were effective, and whether any changes are necessary to enhance the contribution of An Garda Síochána to national road safety policies and strategies.

Our engagement on that basis was signed off by the then Deputy Commissioner, Policing &

<sup>1</sup> RSA, Provisional Review of Fatalities 1 Jan to 31 Dec 2024 (note: 2024 figures are, at the time of writing, provisional).  
<sup>2</sup> Irish Examiner, 4 Sept 2023, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41219350.html>  
<sup>3</sup> <https://www.policingauthority.ie/assets/uploads/documents/Crowe-Horwath-Report-to-Policing-Authority.pdf>

Security, on 20 December 2023. We agreed our approach with An Garda Síochána in February 2024 and commenced our work thereafter.

### 1.3 Approach and Reporting

Based upon our early discussions with An Garda Síochána, we understood that there was a need to examine the current work practices and culture across Roads Policing Units within An Garda Síochána.

In order to progress this examination, we agreed with An Garda Síochána that we would undertake the following activities:

- **Examination of relevant data pertaining to Roads Policing activity across An Garda Síochána.** We engaged in the first instance with the Garda Síochána Analysis Service and with the Garda National Roads Policing Bureau, in order to examine relevant data. Our key interest at this point was to assess whether there were any anomalies across An Garda Síochána in terms of activity and productivity, pro rata to the number of Garda members attached to RPUs in those locations.
- **Examination of activity in a sample of Garda Divisions.** Based upon the findings emerging from the data analysis in Task 1, we visited a sample of Garda Divisions in order to gain a clear understanding of how Roads Policing activity operates in those locations. We agreed with An Garda Síochána that our visits would be broadly representative of the organisation as a whole, including urban and rural divisions in different parts of the country, with at least one division being on the border (given the particular features of Roads Policing in such locations). For the purposes of this report, Crowe is not identifying the six divisions involved.

The divisional visits included the following activities:

- Further examination of data / statistics for Roads Policing in the division / RPU;
- Meeting RPU Members in their work location to understand how work is assigned, supervised, delivered and reported;
- Discussing with RPU Members the current issues and challenges in their work (this was broad ranging, including issues such as equipment, vehicles, systems, work practices etc);
- Listening to any suggestions as to how Roads Policing might be improved within An Garda Síochána.

Visits to these divisions took place between July and November 2024.

- **Analysis and reporting.** This task involved drawing together our findings from the previous tasks and finalising our analysis of the issues under examination. The Crowe team involved in this assignment all had considerable experience in previous policing and criminal justice assignments, including the independent review we conducted for the Policing Authority in 2017 regarding Review of Matters Related to Mandatory Intoxicant Testing and the Issue of Summonses by An Garda Síochána. Our team included individuals with experience of operational policing, data analysis and programme evaluation.

## 2 Information-Gathering and Analysis

### 2.1 Overview

In undertaking this review, the Crowe team has drawn on the information gathered during the fact-finding visits to six sample Garda Divisions. This includes documentary information, information provided by Garda members during one-to-one meetings and group discussions, and direct observations by members of the Crowe team whilst accompanying Garda RPU members on duty.

Consideration of all of this information has enabled the Crowe team, where possible, to form an opinion regarding the overall operational effectiveness of Roads Policing within An Garda Síochána.

In that context, we have not conducted a highly detailed review, nor have we engaged with all RPU members in each of the six Divisions. The views we have formed will inevitably reflect the engagements we have had in each Division, and – as with all observational studies – there is some risk that bias may be reflected within our findings. As a related issue, we have also sought to identify or illuminate issues relating to work ethic and any countervailing substandard performance patterns that are impacting organisational effectiveness.

### 2.2 PALF and Numeric Targets

In the Garda “Performance, Accountability and Learning Framework [PALF] Policy Document” dated March 2017, it states that in respect of the maintenance of a Performance and Learning portfolio by each Garda member, and the associated annual review process:

*Numeric targets focused at individual level will not be part of this process. However quantitative targets will continue to be set at district level as outlined in the Policing Plan.*<sup>4</sup>

During our engagement with Garda members during the site visits, the PALF policy was frequently cited to us as the reason why the performance of individual RPU members was not routinely monitored or evaluated. For that reason, figures are collated only in respect of Roads Policing activities per division as a whole and are not broken down to show individual performance. Whilst it was often acknowledged by local supervisors (Sergeants and Inspectors) that some RPU members are much more productive than others, for example in terms of numbers of Lifesaver offences detected, there are no official statistics used to support any performance review process, or to encourage RPU members to reach certain targets.

As will be discussed later in this report, frontline Garda supervisors and managers are shying away from proactive management and from confronting poor performance due to the interpretation that is being placed on this policy document. A frequent observation from supervisors and managers was that any attempt to adopt a more proactive approach to performance management would create difficulties with the Garda Representative Association.

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<sup>4</sup> Section 5.2.6., “Performance, Accountability and Learning Framework Policy Document, An Garda Síochána, March 2017

This interpretation of the PALF policy, and the relationship with internal industrial relations within An Garda Síochána, was seen to be a major inhibiting factor preventing supervisors from managing staff performance, and generally frustrating the effective management of RPUs.

## 2.3 Analysis of Roads Policing Data

In order to support this review, we requested statistical information from An Garda Síochána for the RPUs within the six Divisions we visited.

The data which was provided to us covered a variety of items, broken down by type and showing activity performed by RPU members and activity performed by other Garda units, including:

- Roads Policing Strength by Division, by rank and by location, as at 13 Jan 2025;
- Traffic collision summary;
- Lifesaver activity summary, broken down by type – speeding, use of mobile phone, failure to wear a seat belt, and driving whilst intoxicated (DWI);
- Dangerous driving / S41 seizures;
- Checkpoint activity (MIT and other checkpoints);
- Other FCN activity;
- Private property collisions;
- CT68 completeness tests;
- FCN offences;
- Miscellaneous information alerts.

The data was provided in two sets: one for the full calendar year 2023, and the other for the 10-month period January to October 2024.

## 2.4 Basis for Analysis of the Data

We firstly considered the number of Roads Policing members assigned to each of the six Garda Divisions which we visited between July and November 2024. An Garda Síochána provided us with the following data (we have not included figures for ranks not represented in RPUs, and the data for the purposes of this report is aggregated and not presented by Division):

Strength at 13 Jan 2025	Supervisors	Garda	Total
Total	17	128	145

Whilst the RPU resource figures provided by An Garda Síochána are for 13 January 2025 rather than for the specific days when we visited the RPUs, the numbers for Supervisors are not materially different from the RPU strength in place during our visits. We understand that a small number of supervisory vacancies at 13 January 2025 have since been filled.

In considering the activity data provided by An Garda Síochána, we focused on the Lifesaver data, given the strategic importance of the detection of these four offences (speeding, use of mobile phone, failure to wear a seat belt, and DWI) as part of An Garda Síochána's approach to



road safety and Roads Policing, and also because the large number of these detections across Garda Divisions.

We calculated the average number of Lifesaver detections made by RPU members in the six divisions. We included only RPU members at Garda and Sergeant rank in this analysis, on the basis that the vast majority of detections are likely to be made by these ranks (although we accept that some Sergeants may undertake a limited amount of patrol duties and that their role is mostly supervisory).

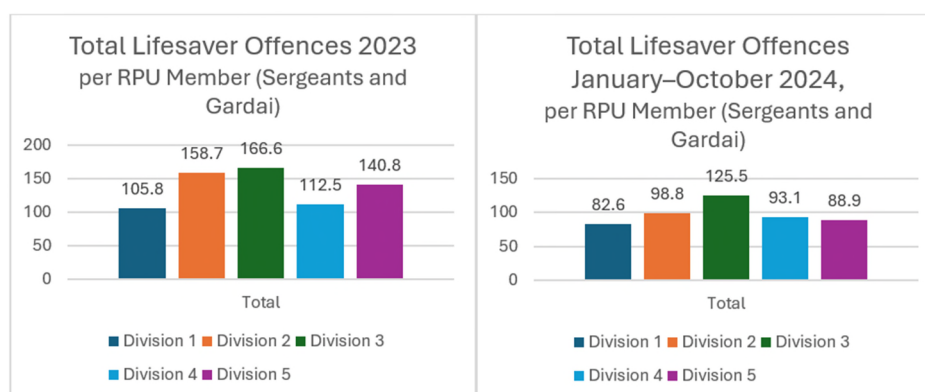
For reasons of statistical reliability, we have analysed the data from five of the RPUs we visited, and this is presented in the information appearing below.

As a caveat, we would ask the reader to note that the calculations are based on activity data for 2023 and the first ten months of 2024, whereas the RPU strength figures are for 13 January 2025. Some caution must therefore be taken with regard to analysing the averages we have calculated; however, the RPU strength figures are not likely to have altered significantly over the period in question. The averages shown must therefore be understood to be an **indicative guide to relative performance**, rather than definitive findings.

For the purposes of this analysis, we have anonymised the five Garda Divisions for which information is presented: whilst there are likely to be some valid reasons as to why one Lifesaver offence might need to be prioritised in one or other of the divisions, it is more important to look at the overall figures for the period in question, and to consider the disparities between divisions.

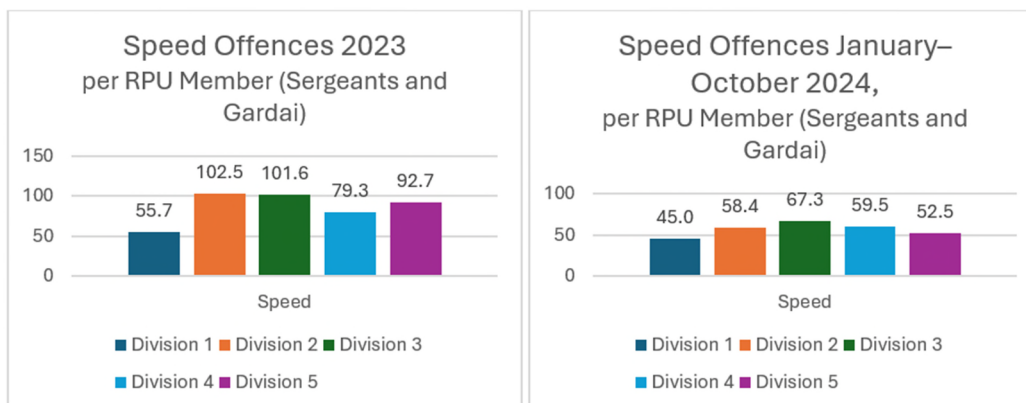
## 2.5 Findings from the Data Analysis

The figures below show the average total Lifesaver offences for the five divisions per RPU member, in 2023 and the first ten months of 2024:



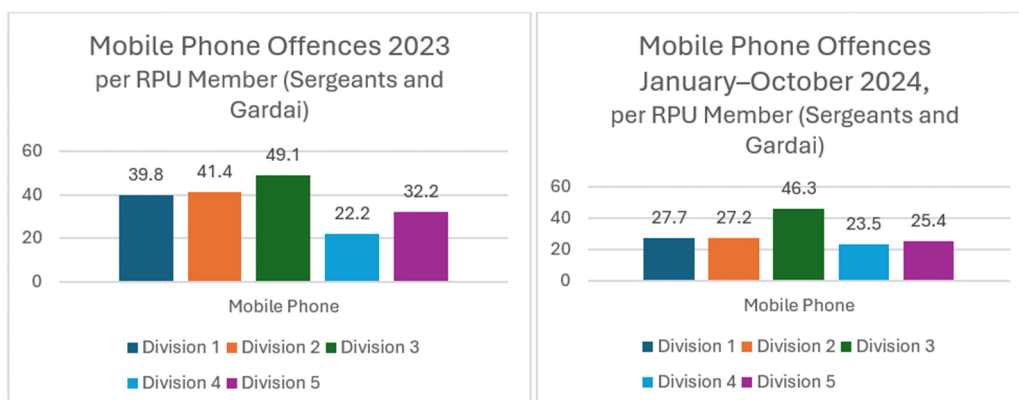
With regard to all Lifesaver detections, it is noteworthy that that one Garda division (Division 3) appears to have been 57% more productive than the lowest-rated division (Division 1) in detections per RPU member in 2023, and 52% more productive in the first ten months of 2024.

Looking at speeding offences, the average figures for the two periods are as follows:

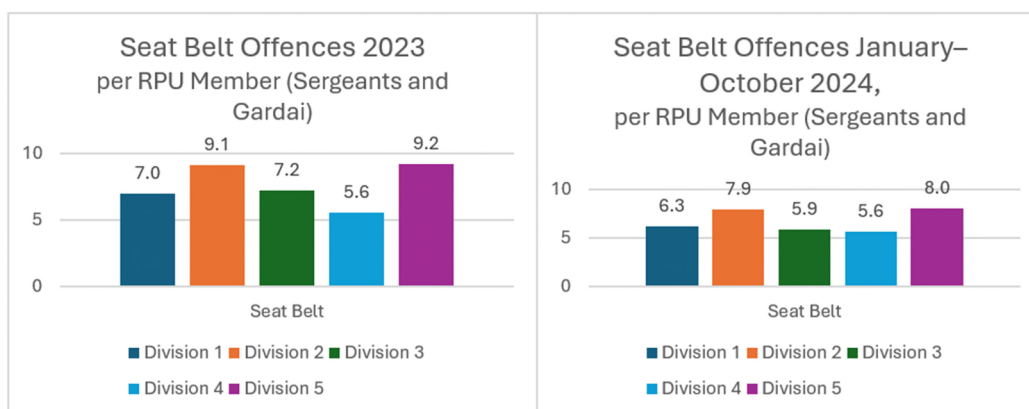


Again, two RPU (Divisions 2 and 3) have achieved almost double the number of speed detections per member in 2023 when compared with the lowest-rated division (again Division 1), with the disparity reducing in the first ten months of 2024.

Greater disparities can be observed with regard to detections for the use of mobile phones, with Division 3 showing more than double the number of detections of Division 4 in both periods, and considerably outperforming all other divisions.

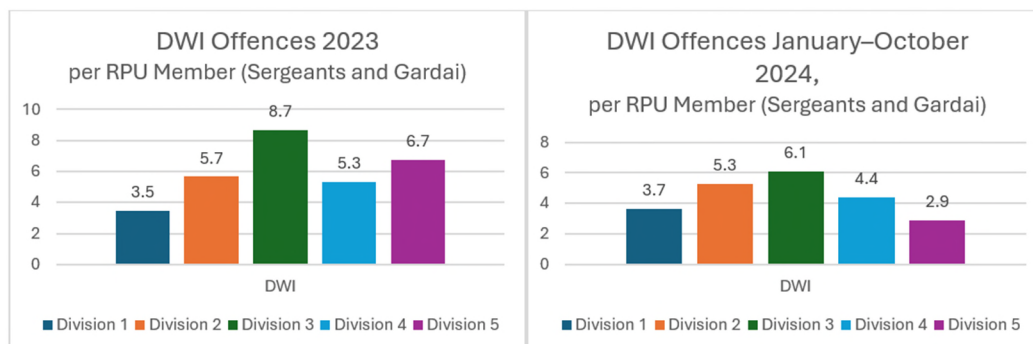


For seat belt offences, Division 5 is the most productive across the two periods, showing 64% more detections than the lowest-rated division in 2023, and 43% in the first ten months of 2024 (the lowest productivity being found in Division 4). These figures are presented overleaf:





Finally, for DWI offences in the two periods, Division 3 again outperforms all other divisions, and in 2023 recorded two-and-a-half times the number of DWI detections per RPU member than Division 1, and in the first ten months of 2024 recorded more than double the average number than Division 5, as shown in the charts below:



## 2.6 Commentary on the Data Analysis

Whilst we stress that the averages shown above must be understood to be an indicative guide to relative performance, rather than definitive findings, they demonstrate that there is significant variation in productivity between RPUs within these five Garda divisions. We would not have expected the figures to be identical, or necessarily even close to one another, as allowances can be made for such factors as geography, the kilometres of motorway or fast dual carriageway roads within the Division, and the urban / rural split, all of which might have an effect on Roads Policing.

But the figures do prompt us to ask why, for example, one division has recorded two-and-a-half times the number of DWI detections per RPU member than another division; why two Garda divisions achieved almost double the number of speed detections in 2023 per RPU member when compared with the lowest-rated division of the five; and why one division appears to have been 57% more productive than the lowest-rated division **across all Lifesaver detections** per RPU member in 2023, and 52% more productive in the first ten months of 2024.

In the context of our site visit findings as detailed in Section 3 of this report, we believe that these productivity figures further illustrate a core problem within An Garda Síochána – the lack of effective supervision of RPUs and the inability (or unwillingness) of supervisors and more senior ranks to proactively supervise and manage the performance and productivity of RPU members.

## 3 Site Visit Findings

### 3.1 Overview

As noted earlier, the Crowe team visited six Garda Divisions, and we engaged with between 100 and 120 Garda members (typically Gardai, Sergeants and Inspectors) as part of interaction with RPU members. In addition, we met with relevant Superintendents and Chief Superintendents as part of this process, in order to help identify strategic priorities and senior management perspectives within the six Divisions.

In the following paragraphs, we set out our observations and findings for the sample of the six Divisions. In line with the guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity we provided to Garda members as part of the site visits, we are deliberately not identifying locations or RPUs.

### 3.2 Productivity within Roads Policing Units

We directly observed significant differences in policing practice and productivity within the RPUs. Our principal findings were as follows:

- Productivity amongst RPU Members appears to depend on the personal work ethic, disposition and level of interest of individual members. We encountered some Gardai who appear to be strongly motivated to be highly productive, and to have a high rate of work return (e.g. detections, arrests, vehicle seizures, etc.). Typically, these members will focus on the broader road safety perspective and on “Life Saver” offences, issuing FCNs as necessary, but also using discretion and providing advice to motorists where that may have a more positive impact. By contrast, we also encountered RPU members who appeared to show little interest in detecting road traffic offences; a small number who volunteered that they disliked their job and were eagerly looking forward to retirement; and a small number who seemed disinterested in the fact that their ANPR equipment was switched off or not functioning properly (including one patrol car in which the driver appeared deliberately to switch the direction of the forward-facing ANPR camera so that its field of vision was obscured by the rear-view mirror). Our team was quite shocked that in this admittedly small number of instances, the RPU members concerned were quite open about their lack of interest in being seen to fulfil their duty. We also found it disturbing that those members who told us how much they disliked their job had no difficulty in raising these issues in front of external consultants engaged specifically by An Garda Síochána to review how Roads Policing operates; it was a clear sign of how little they cared or how little expectation they had that such behaviour would come back to reflect badly on them as individuals or the professionalism of the organisation.
- The reliability of ANPR equipment appears to have been a contributing factor to the productivity issue: in perhaps 30% of the vehicles in which we accompanied RPU members on patrol, the ANPR system either was not working at all, or took a long time to activate properly. Some RPU members appeared to have given up on trying to get ANPR to work in some vehicles.
- RPU supervisors across all six Divisions expressed the view that within any RPU, there would be a small number of highly committed, productive members passionately interested in road safety; a majority of members who would fulfil their duty and whose productivity (in terms of detections, FCNs issued, arrests etc.) would be average; and a handful of members who would do the bare minimum (or less) to fulfil their duty. These

supervisors – and other RPU members we met – referred to individuals (in the six Divisions and other locations where they had worked previously) leaving the station at the start of the shift and returning at the end without a single detection made or FCN issued. Some RPU members working solo were alleged to routinely park the patrol car out of sight and deliberately avoid doing any productive work for part or all of their shift.

- There was considerable frustration expressed by RPU supervisors, on the grounds that whilst they are aware that certain RPU members are deliberately avoiding doing productive work on a routine basis, there is little or nothing that they feel they can do to address this situation. They cited the PALF policy referred to in Section 2.2 above as the reason why the performance of individual RPU members could not be monitored or evaluated. Some supervisors to whom we spoke appeared to have simply acquiesced to a stance where they did not monitor performance, stating that there was no point, nothing would be done, and they wouldn't be backed up by their superiors. In effect, no supervising was taking place.
- We encountered several instances where a supervisor told us that specific RPU members only ever went out on patrol as a pair: they did not work alone, and they rarely worked alongside another partner. These supervisors did not feel empowered or inclined to break those partnerships up.
- A number of RPU members expressed the view that whilst they would generally prefer to be out on patrol or engaging in other proactive policing activities, the administrative burden upon all Garda members means that time is sometimes limited for frontline operational policing. Related to this is the requirement for RPU members to attend court, which often involves lengthy periods waiting for a case to be called; a commonly expressed desire amongst RPU members was that the business of the district courts should be better managed, to minimise unproductive downtime not just for Gardai but for other witnesses and professionals attending court.
- A view expressed in several Garda divisions was that differences in subsistence payments means that some RPU members are reluctant to travel far from their stations as they incur greater cost for lunches, coffee/tea etc if they have to take their breaks away from the station. (Four of the six Garda Divisions visited by the Crowe team were largely rural, and it did appear that there was less tendency to patrol areas far from the RPU stations, and more of an expectation that Roads Policing in those areas would be undertaken by “regular” Garda units.)

**Conclusion:** The level of productivity within RPUs appears to vary widely, and to depend on the attitude and work ethic of individual RPU members. Local supervisors and managers appeared rather accepting of this situation, and to view their opportunities to manage performance as being limited.

### 3.3 Supervision and Management

In the six Garda Divisions we visited, we found that whilst the majority of supervisors were diligent, proactive and committed to road safety and to the principles of good traffic policing, the supervision and management of RPU activities is ineffective, for a variety of reasons:

- There is limited capacity in some areas, due to staff vacancies, with existing members at supervisory levels having to take on extra responsibilities. Not all of the Divisions we visited had a dedicated Roads Policing Inspector in post at the time of the visit, although an Inspector was assigned to Roads Policing alongside other responsibilities. In our

view, not having a dedicated Roads Policing Inspector means that focus on road safety is diluted and leaves a significant gap in the management of Roads Policing resources.

- In some locations, units were operating without Sergeants, so that a shift would be unsupervised – Inspectors and other Sergeants were trying to provide cover, though this was limited and ad hoc.
- In some locations, supervisors had been appointed to RPU upon promotion (coming from other branches or departments) but lacked the qualifications to drive official Roads Policing vehicles, effectively meaning that they were desk-bound.
- Inspectors typically hold other responsibilities aside from Roads Policing (such as events, or acting as Duty Inspector for the Division), thereby diluting their time and focus on Roads Policing.
- A complicating factor in the management of RPUs is that Inspectors have dual reporting lines – they typically form part of the operational management team for that Garda Division (headed by a Superintendent); they report directly to the Chief Superintendent in respect of Roads Policing, and other assigned duties; they have a regional reporting line for Roads Policing; and they also liaise regularly with the Assistant Commissioner, Roads Policing & Community Engagement, and Garda National Roads Policing Bureau at Headquarters. This arrangement appears to function moderately well, but is burdensome for the Inspectors in having to manage multiple reporting relationships and to balance what can sometimes be competing demands. In Section 6 below, we discuss further whether a more effective and focused reporting and governance structure for Roads Policing may be preferable.
- The general culture in parts of Roads Policing appears to be that allowing RPU members discretion on how / where they patrol is more important than managing their performance, aligned with the widespread acceptance that the PALF policy (referred to in Section 2.2 above) means that the performance of individual RPU members cannot be monitored or evaluated. Consequently, the normal pattern in many of the divisions we visited is that RPU members decide how they will spend their time during each shift, with the only significant requirement being that they must operate MIT or multi-agency checkpoints at specified locations and times – this appears to be adhered to with reasonable diligence, although the value of some of these checkpoints seems unclear (we comment on this later, in Section 5). It would appear that as long as the checkpoint returns are completed, it is up to each RPU member to determine how best their duty time is spent – whether working solo or as a dual crew, whether in a car or on a motorbike, where they patrol, and so forth. We did not see much evidence of supervisors giving specific duty instructions to RPU members, aside from the operation of checkpoints or other significant events (e.g. motorcycle escort duties, policing major events, etc). Supervisors are not for the most part assigning areas of focus or creating an intelligence-led approach to Roads Policing – rather, they are abdicating responsibility for directing their staff, possibly for fear of causing confrontation, as with the PALF issue discussed earlier).

**Conclusion:** Supervision and management of RPUs is less than fully effective in the six Divisions we visited, partly due to inadequate numbers of supervisors being in post, partly due to the complicated nature of the reporting and governance structure across Roads Policing nationally, and partly due to the perceived inability of supervisors to manage the performance of RPU members.

### 3.4 Productivity

From our visits to the six Garda Divisions, there is significant anecdotal evidence that the level of productivity varies between RPU members – it appears to be an accepted fact that whilst some RPU members are highly productive and will have multiple Lifesaver detections per shift, others will be much less productive and may have little return of work in a typical shift (i.e. no FCNs issued, no arrests, no vehicles seized, no incidents recorded on PULSE).

There may be valid reasons for variations in productivity. All Gardai have discretion regarding how they deal with certain types of incident - for example, a motorist caught driving at 56 km/h in a 50 km/h zone might be given advice by the Garda member, rather than have an FCN issued, which may be an appropriate means of disposing with the issue for a first-time offender and may be more impactful in terms of changing driver behaviour.

(It is also worth noting that when we accompanied RPU members on patrol, it was common practice only to stop vehicles which had been travelling in excess of 20 km/h above the designated speed limit – for example, in a 50 km/h zone, only those travelling at 70 km/h or more were stopped. By contrast, we accompanied Gardai in one division to a District Court session where cases were dealt with for non-payment of fixed penalty fines, where motorists had been stopped by “regular” Garda patrols for speeding at a much lower threshold – several were in the 55-59 km/h range. It was unclear to us why some RPU members appear to enforce speeding laws with a much higher level of tolerance than their “regular” colleagues.)

Furthermore, RPU members may spend an entire shift performing designated tasks, such as operating checkpoints, some of which may have a low return and therefore influence productivity figures.

Our engagement with some RPU members and observation of their activities on patrol would suggest that their productivity is at the lower end of the spectrum, as a matter of personal preference.

**Conclusion:** It is clear that productivity varies widely between RPU members, and between Garda Divisions. The variations in productivity which we have observed, and which are shown in the data presented in Section 2 above, are a matter of concern.

### 3.5 RPR Members Ignoring Offences

From our direct engagement with RPU members, it is clear that RPUs cannot respond to every single possible offence – for example, the ANPR unit in a patrol car will show alerts for less serious offences such as expired tax in passing vehicles, when it may be unsafe for the Garda patrol car to turn around, or when the patrol is engaged in other important activity. Similarly, the volume of ANPR alerts means that not every possible offence can be followed up – often, RPU members will prioritise more serious offences or alerts (e.g. unauthorised taking of a vehicle, ANPR alerts linking a vehicle to occupants with convictions for serious offences, or alerts for multiple issues such as no tax, no NCT and no insurance).

As noted earlier in this report, productivity between RPUs and RPU members appears to be highly variable, and the effectiveness of supervision appears to be weak, with limited means for supervisors to manage the performance of individual RPU members, and a reluctance to do so connected with the PALF policy referred to earlier in this report.

**Conclusion:** There were many occasions during our site visits when RPU members and local Garda management referred to some officers deliberately ignoring offences and spending their shift with a low level of productivity, in terms of offences detected. There was a sense of resignation across the six divisions that whilst many RPU Gardai are dedicated, professional and productive, there is a significant cohort of officers who are disinterested and whose productivity is comparatively low.

### 3.6 Culture Across Roads Policing

As stated earlier, we have observed some examples of low productivity, poor supervision and a negative work ethic amongst some RPU members in the Divisions we visited, and anecdotally we have heard from Garda supervisors and managers that there are some officers serving in RPUs whose productivity and work ethic are poor by comparison with their colleagues. By contrast, we have also met and engaged with a great many RPU members who are professional, diligent and committed to improving road safety. Our overall assessment is that the majority of the RPU members with whom we engaged in the six Garda divisions have a positive attitude towards their role and aim to be effective and productive during each shift.

We did encounter a small number of RPU members who showed indifference to their jobs, and who were open about looking forward to retirement – this was expressed in a negative way, and left us with the impression that these individuals were “coasting” towards retirement. This was typically corroborated by their supervisors, but this attitude does not represent the norm.

**Conclusion:** We have observed some examples of a poor work ethic and culture within the RPUs we visited, but they are isolated, and it would be incorrect to characterise all RPUs in this way.

### 3.7 Operation of MIT Checkpoints

We noted during the divisional visits that there was a strong determination to ensure that there is no repetition of the situation that came to light in 2017, and consequently the operation of MIT checkpoints, authorised by an Inspector or more senior officer to take place at a designated time and location, is seen as a centrepiece of Garda Roads Policing. In almost every interaction which we had during the divisional site visits, RPU members will structure their shift around the authorised checkpoints, including MIT checkpoints and those operated on an inter-agency basis with (inter alia) the Road Safety Authority, Revenue and Customs, and the Department of Social Protection. We have several observations regarding what we saw during the site visits:

- It appeared to be common that checkpoints would be set up within a reasonably short travel time from the RPU station – in those rural divisions which cover a wide geographical territory, it would be rare for checkpoints to be planned for locations more than 20-30 minutes from the station. This was described to us by RPU members as being done to facilitate not just the Gardai attending the checkpoint, but also their colleagues from other agencies who might typically be based in a main urban centre. In our view, selecting such locations tends to increase their predictability amongst the local community, and reduce the impact of the checkpoint in terms of its capacity to detect offences. Whilst we recognise that checkpoints have a generally positive impact in terms



of high-visibility policing, this is lessened if the same locations are selected regularly, and other locations are left to “regular” local Garda units rather than RPUs.

- Our team attended in the region of 15-20 checkpoints during our divisional site visits. These included MIT checkpoints in quiet locations during the period from mid-morning to mid-afternoon, when few detections were made and traffic was typically light. We would query whether better use of RPU resources might be achieved if there was less focus on operating MIT checkpoints, and more effort put in to proactive patrolling.
- Reducing the focus on MIT checkpoints might also have the benefit of enabling RPU members to patrol more widely within their divisions. We were often told by RPU members in rural divisions that the reason they do not venture too far from the RPU station was that they may only have 60 or 90 minutes between concluding one MIT or inter-agency checkpoint and setting up the next one, meaning that they were unable to travel to more geographically distant parts of the division. Given that most RPU vehicles are equipped with ANPR, but few “regular” Garda vehicles carry this technology, this situation is undoubtedly reducing the effectiveness of Roads Policing within An Garda Síochána – areas close to RPU stations will get a more effective Roads Policing service than those further away.

**Conclusion:** Whilst the problems regarding MIT checkpoint recording which we reported on in 2017 appear to have been eliminated, there is an underlying problem regarding how checkpoints are planned and operated, and the degree of benefit they may bring to road safety.

## 4 Further Considerations

### 4.1 Preamble

During the course of the site visits, we encountered a number of issues relating to the Roads Policing function which we believe will be helpful for An Garda Síochána to consider, as set out in the following paragraphs.

### 4.2 Additional Issues Arising During Divisional Site Visits

As part of our engagement with RPU members, we made it clear that we were interested in hearing their views and experiences of the operational functioning of Roads Policing within An Garda Síochána, on a confidential basis. The following represent issues which were raised with us on a reasonably frequent basis in more than one Division, giving us a sense that these are likely to be organisation-wide issues, rather than very personalised views or those only relevant to a specific location. We also include some issues which we observed ourselves during the site visits; again, what we report reflects our observations on more than one occasion in the six divisions, rather than isolated situations.

In no specific order of priority, these issues were as follows:

- a) In all six Garda divisions which we visited, a frequently expressed concern was that the current strength of the RPUs was significantly less than it had been in the past, and that there were significant numbers of vacancies within Roads Policing. In that regard, we note that as of October 31, 2024, the number of Gardaí serving in RPUs stood at 623, a 40 per cent reduction from the 1,046 in place in 2009.<sup>5</sup>
- b) There is significant frustration that the reduced strength of RPUs is being seen at a time when road traffic fatalities have been rising in recent years, giving many RPU members a sense that they are under-resourced and under-valued. The low numbers in some areas, combined with other factors such as annual leave, shift patterns, and RPU members being detailed to undertake other duties, mean that on some occasions there is no operational Roads Policing unit working at times of high demand (i.e. when traffic is busiest).
- c) Some of the vacancies in RPUs are being filled with temporary appointments, i.e. Garda members who have already been selected as suitable for appointment to Roads Policing, but the appointment is not made official. Their non-confirmed status has an impact on their ability to access training and to be able to operate necessary vehicles and equipment.
- d) Related to this, training was a frequent concern expressed across all six divisions. There appears to be an over-reliance on e-learning rather than in-person, practical training, and more general training content appears to be prioritised over topics which are specifically relevant to Roads Policing. This can mean that there is very little knowledge with the RPUs on specialist Roads Policing issues, particularly with regard to complex legislation pertaining to commercial vehicles.
- e) Driver training was frequently cited as a concern, with significant delays in having Garda members take the necessary driving courses required to perform effectively as professional Roads Policing officers. Gardaí are being appointed to RPUs but are unable

<sup>5</sup> Reported in the Irish Times, 31 December 2024

to drive official RPU vehicles or can drive them but cannot operate lights and sirens. We encountered some situations in which RPU supervisors lacked the necessary driving qualifications, reducing their operational effectiveness in their supervisory role.

- f) Supervisory resources (Sergeants) appeared to be quite stretched in most the divisions we visited, with vacancies and shift patterns meaning that there is no supervisor on duty to oversee the work of RPU Gardai. Inspectors often have other responsibilities, whether for specific areas like major events or emergency planning, or to act as operational duty Inspector for all response / community policing in the Division, further diminishing their availability to oversee and manage Roads Policing.
- g) In some instances, supervisor shifts are not aligned with their teams, and / or RPU members in some locations do not operate from the same station as their supervisor.
- h) Attitudes and priorities amongst divisional management with regards to Roads Policing seem to vary: whilst all recognise the importance of the contribution of An Garda Síochána to road safety, other operational priorities are sometimes seen as more important during periods when staff resources are stretched, resulting in RPU members being taken off Roads Policing and tasked to perform other duties.
- i) RPU members in all divisions expressed their dissatisfaction with the vehicles issued to their units at the time of our visits. These concerns included:
  - Vehicles selected for Roads Policing being unfit for purpose, typically “family saloon” cars with limited performance capabilities which are unable to keep up with some vehicles being pursued;
  - An ageing fleet with many high-mileage vehicles, whose age and condition were affecting operational availability (see below);
  - Bureaucratic systems regarding servicing repairs, leading to RPU vehicles being off the road for lengthy periods.
- j) With regard to equipment, RPU members expressed concern regarding non-functioning ANPR systems (we observed a number of instances where in-car ANPR technology either did not work or took a long time to initialise), outdated or life-expired speed detection equipment, and non-availability of Stingers (noting that not all RPU members may have been trained in their use).

### 4.3 Roads Policing Fleet

We reviewed data provided by the Garda National Roads Policing Bureau regarding the RPU fleet in each of the six divisions we visited. As can be observed from the table presented overleaf, patrol vehicles had an average age of between 3.6 and 6.5 years across the divisions, whilst motorcycles averaged between 4.3 and 8.7 years.

Of the cars and other patrol vehicles in the six divisions (excluding motorcycles), 41% had odometer readings in excess of 200,000km. For the motorcycles operated by RPUs in the six divisions, the odometer readings averaged between 23,430 and 75,417, reflecting the fact that Garda motorcycles are typically lightly used, during daylight hours when the weather is clement. For the cars and other patrol vehicles, the odometer readings averaged between 107,806km and 171,295km.

The summary of the data provided by the GNRPB is presented below:

Division	Motorcycles		Other patrol vehicles	
	Av. age	Av. km	Av. age	Av. km
[Name withheld]	6.5 yrs	75,417	6.5 yrs	170,518
[Name withheld]	4.3 yrs	23,430	5.3 yrs	107,806
[Name withheld]	7.0 yrs	62,467	3.6 yrs	133,814
[Name withheld]	7.6 yrs	68,765	4.5 yrs	146,187
[Name withheld]	8.2 yrs	57,694	5.2 yrs	156,066
[Name withheld]	8.7 yrs	83,397	4.8 yrs	171,295

From our work with other police forces, the RPU vehicles in these six divisions are what we would consider to be at or near the end of their serviceable life, which will have an impact on mechanical reliability and operational resilience. 39% of the patrol cars and other RPU vehicles (excluding motorcycles) were in excess of 6 years old, with several exceeding 10 years in service. In most other police forces, patrol vehicles will typically be retired after 5 years.

We note that An Garda Síochána has recently purchased a number of high-performance patrol vehicles for Roads Policing duties. The figures above include one such vehicle.

#### 4.4 Other Considerations

In engaging with the RPUs in the six divisions we visited, it was noticeable that the vast majority of RPU activity related to routine Roads Policing, much of it structured around the operation of checkpoints which form the heart of the operational schedule. However, we are also conscious that effective Roads Policing is not just about detecting Lifesaver and other road traffic offences; it also involves proactive policing of the road network to assist crime prevention.

This was recognised by the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland in its 2018 report, which stated that “policing the roads is an integral part of public order, crime detection and reduction, and community safety”. An Garda Síochána itself, in its 2017 document entitled “The Vision for the Future of Policing in Ireland”, also took this view, stating that “Roads Policing is also a vital source of local knowledge, garda visibility, crime prevention and national intelligence”. At that time, the name of the function was changed from “Traffic Corps” to “Roads Policing”, in line with international practice and thinking. The 2017 document also stated that RPUs “will merge road safety with crime detection and prevention on the roads, and will work with other sections of An Garda Síochána to carry out intelligence-led operations, all the while increasing visibility and community presence”.

In the UK, the National Police Chiefs Council takes a very similar view, stating that “Policing our roads plays a major part in disrupting criminals who abuse our road network for criminal gain”.<sup>6</sup> Evidence from both the UK and Ireland suggests that when vehicles are stopped by the police due to offences being detected (or when triggered by ANPR alerts), the occupants are often detailed for having committed other offences (e.g. drugs or stolen goods found in the vehicle, outstanding warrants, etc).

In our engagement with RPUs in the six divisions, it did not appear that RPU members generally saw this type of proactive policing as being a priority. The operation of checkpoints

<sup>6</sup>

NPCC, National Roads Policing Strategy 2022-2025

formed a centrepiece of their day-to-day deployment, with other time being spent on patrolling to detect Lifesaver offences and to provide a visible presence on the roads. RPU patrols did not appear to be routinely tasked to pursue, stop or otherwise interdict vehicles suspected of involvement in other types of criminal activity. We did not witness during our station visits evidence of RPU patrols receiving intelligence led briefings that focused on wider crime related issues on the roads.

## 5 Conclusions / Next Steps

### 5.1 Summary of Findings

Our visits to the six Garda divisions selected as samples have highlighted a number of issues of concern in relation to Roads Policing. These may be summarised as follows:

- a) Some Gardai working in Roads Policing – a minority, but nonetheless a noticeable one – are unproductive and appear to be demotivated and unconcerned with doing an effective, professional job.
- b) The majority of RPU members we encountered are productive, professional, and focused on improving road safety.
- c) Nonetheless, it appears to be accepted across Roads Policing that there is a minority who are disinterested in being productive and effective, and who are able to get away with such behaviour, to the frustration of their colleagues, supervisors and managers.
- d) It also appears from the statistics presented in Section 2 that there are wide variations in productivity between divisional RPUs, measured in terms of the number of Lifesaver detections pro rata to the strength of the RPU. This needs to be examined in more detail to determine what measures might lead to greater consistency across divisions, and improved performance in some areas.
- e) At the heart of the problem of poor productivity / behaviour amongst some RPU members appears to be the interpretation of the PALF policy, which is widely understood to prevent Garda supervisors and managers from proactively managing and evaluating the performance of individual RPU members. In effect, this is significantly frustrating the right of management to manage.
- f) Consequently, Garda managers and supervisors may be held to be in breach of the Code of Ethics, which refer to Garda members “rigorously opposing unprofessional, unethical, illegal, or corrupt behaviour” and reporting any such behaviour when it occurs. We observed a marked reluctance amongst supervisors to proactively manage their staff resources and to hold RPU members to account.
- g) There is a lack of effective sanctions exist for poor performance, and supervisors and managers were typically apprehensive that any attempt to invoke sanctions would create industrial relations problems with the GRA.
- h) A contributory factor in respect of the problems in supervision and management of RPU personnel may be the multiple reporting lines for RPU Inspectors, which are burdensome and may lead to competing demands and priorities having to be balanced. A more effective reporting and governance structure for Roads Policing may need to be considered by An Garda Síochána.
- i) We found no evidence of a systematic, organised culture of work avoidance or deliberately poor performance within Roads Policing, and no evidence of bullying or dominance of RPU members by their colleagues. However, the absence of effective supervision and management, caused in large measure by the interpretation of the PALF policy, creates the circumstances in which such a culture has been able to take root.
- j) A contributory factor to the lack of productivity, and the prevailing culture within the RPUs we visited, is the fact that there are significant number of vacancies within Roads Policing, and that the overall strength is 40% less than the numbers in post in 2009. In particular,



vacancies at supervisor ranks mean that there is a reduced level of supervision and management of RPUs.

- k) Investment in vehicles and equipment also appears to have been lacking in recent years, with many RPUs operating older vehicles with high mileages which are unsuited to modern Roads Policing.
- l) Members in all RPUs, including supervisors and managers, reported considerable frustration at RPU members being tasked to perform other non-urgent duties unrelated to Roads Policing, meaning that at certain times a Division might have no RPU patrols operating.
- m) In addition, training for RPU members appears to be problematic, with some members unable to access driver training to enable them to drive Roads Policing vehicles, and limited opportunities for RPU members to acquire specialist knowledge and updates in technical fields such as standards and regulations for commercial vehicles.
- n) From an operational perspective, much of the work of RPUs appears to be centred around the operation of checkpoints. Whilst these are broadly helpful in establishing a visible Garda presence and detecting certain offences, we would question whether the balance between operating checkpoints and undertaking other, more proactive Roads Policing work needs to be reconsidered. One side-effect of the central focus on checkpoints is that most RPUs appear to schedule the majority of checkpoints relatively close to the RPU base; if an RPU patrol is scheduled to operate three of four checkpoints each shift, that will generally leave little time for driving to more geographically remote parts of the division. In those locations, enforcement of traffic laws is left to “regular” Garda units lacking in specialist knowledge or expertise.
- o) We also found little evidence of RPU patrols receiving intelligence led briefings that focused on wider crime-related issues on the roads. RPUs appear to be primarily focused on the detection of Lifesaver offences, the enforcement of other traffic laws, and the operation of checkpoints; other proactive crime prevention activity appears to have a low priority in most RPUs which we visited.

## 5.2 Next Steps

In order to address the concerns raised in this report, the focus of An Garda Síochána should now be on correcting the identified problems across all dimensions (resources, operational procedures, technology, training, supervision, accountability etc.) rather than conducting further examination into the scale and nature of the problems. Some matters – for example, performance statistics and operational practices – do need to be examined to determine what changes need to be made, as part of a process of change management and transformation.

Central to this process of change should be an immediate review of the PALF policy and its replacement with a more appropriate policy which enables An Garda Síochána to manage the performance of its staff, including those in Roads Policing. It should offer support to supervisors in their proactive supervision of those under their command, ensuring proper accountability for effective and efficient use of resources.

Reporting and governance structures for Roads Policing should also be considered.

An Garda Síochána should establish a Project Team to examine all of the issues contained within this report. This team should be led by an individual of senior rank (e.g. Assistant

Commissioner) and should include individuals drawn from each of the relevant areas, including Roads Policing, Governance, Training/CPD, Fleet Management, and others as appropriate.

A Project Board to oversee this work should be established, and – reflecting the seriousness of the issues reported herein – should be sponsored by the Commissioner and chaired by a Deputy Commissioner.

The Project Team should be requested to produce a detailed transformation plan for Roads Policing within eight weeks, setting out all of the sub-projects and tasks required to respond to each of the issues identified within this report, including details of timescales, milestones, resources, outputs/deliverables, and expected outcomes. The transformation plan should include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following aspects:

- Performance management arrangements (including the PALF policy);
- Supervision, management and governance arrangements and reporting structures;
- Productivity and expected performance standards;
- Roads Policing operational policies and procedures;
- RPU staffing (including required complements), locations and deployment;
- Training, education and continuing professional development;
- Culture within Roads Policing;
- Vehicles and equipment available to RPU members;
- Other such matters as may be deemed necessary and relevant.

Given the scope and extent of the issues to be resolved, we would anticipate that an implementation period of 18 to 24 months would be required to ensure that all of these issues are effectively concluded.