

Minister McEntee welcomes tenth Policing Authority report on policing performance by An Garda Síochána during COVID-19 pandemic

From [Department of Justice](#)

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The Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee TD, has today welcomed the tenth report from the Policing Authority on the performance by An Garda Síochána of its policing role in the support of the COVID-19 public health restrictions.

Minister McEntee said:

"The latest report by the Policing Authority highlights once again the crucial role played by An Garda Síochána throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and, in particular, the community policing work undertaken in support of vulnerable people, particularly those victims of domestic violence who have been supported through the vital work of Operation Faoiseamh. I would like to thank the women and men of An Garda Síochána for their continued exemplary public service.

"We are currently in a crucial period in our fight against COVID-19 and I would urge all members of the public to follow the public health guidelines that have been put in place and to follow the directions of Gardaí in support of those guidelines over the Christmas period. With the advent of vaccination, we can all look forward to better times in 2021. However, until then, we must continue to work together, adhere to the public health recommendations and take responsibility for preventing the spread of infection."

The Authority continues to commend An Garda Síochána on the tone of the policing carried out during the pandemic, both at the level of the individual and the organisation. The Authority note that this has not only built trust, but it was also reported that the tone of policing made the necessary intrusions on the daily course of normal life somehow more acceptable.

The report recognises that An Garda Síochána understood at an early stage the unintended implications of the public health restrictions for many vulnerable people and notes that Garda actions, especially under operation Faoiseamh, have provided an extra level of security to these vulnerable groups.

This is the tenth report presented by the Authority on policing performance by An Garda Síochána during the COVID-19 health crisis. The Authority were asked to assess and report

regularly to the Minister on the use of the emergency regulations in order to provide additional public assurance on the appropriate and proportionate use of these powers.

The Minister added:

"I am very grateful to the Policing Authority for the valuable work they have undertaken over the course of their ten reports since April. Their reports have been an invaluable source of assurance that the exceptional powers which we have given to Gardaí over the course of the last nine months have been used appropriately and proportionately.

"This has been a vitally important task and the reports have provided a wealth of insight into the public experience of policing during this extraordinary time, and in particular those most vulnerable within our society."

The Authority notes that despite the increased COVID-19 policing activity throughout November and December, there was only one recorded case of the use of a spit hood despite nineteen spitting assaults on Gardaí between 9 November and 14 December.

ENDS

Notes

The latest data available from the Garda Síochána covers the period up to 5 December 2020 for all data and up to 13 and 14 December for checkpoints and anti-spit hoods respectively. From 8 April to 5 December, there have been 859 incidents where enforcement powers under COVID-19 Regulations were used; an increase of 157 since the last report to the Minister which covered up to the 31 October. In excess of 30,000 checkpoints were conducted since the start of November representing a significant increase of activity during the Level 5 restrictions. Despite the increase in Garda activity and enforcement, there has only been one incident where an anti-spit hood has been used in November and December.

From 8 April to 5 December, An Garda Síochána have exercised powers under COVID-19 regulations 859 times. The initial restrictions introduced in April resulted in 236 incidents.

With the lifting of restrictions on 8 June, the number of incidents fell dramatically. By the end of June, licensed premises were permitted to reopen provided they met certain criteria (for example serving a substantial meal) under S.I. 234 and later S.I. 326 of 2020, and enforcement of these criteria was completed through Garda Operation Navigation. This resulted in more than 50,000 visits being conducted by Garda members to licensed premises. While approximately 60% of these establishments were found to be closed, the Garda Síochána reported 326 incidents where they used their powers. The majority of these occurred between July and October, until Level 5 restrictions meant most premises were closed once again.

With the introduction of Level 5 restrictions, only retailers selling certain categories of goods or services were permitted to remain open. To enforce the closure of non-essential retail, Operation Treoraím commenced which resulted in 87 incidents, mostly occurring in November where the operation accounted for approximately 60% of all COVID-19 related incidents.

While Operation Treoraím became the main source of new incidents during Level 5 restrictions, incidents involving members of the public have been considerably lower than what was experienced in the initial restrictions of April and May.

Since 28 June, the Garda Síochána have reported the following:

- 9 incidents relating to breaches regarding face coverings
- 5 incidents relating to breaches regarding international travel
- 74 incidents relating to other breaches (for example, organising events)

From 8 April to 5 December there have been 2,914 crime incidents which were discovered as a result of COVID-19 policing activities. This is an increase of 308 incidents since the last report. The majority of these incidents relate to roads, public order and drugs offences with no new trends emerging since the initial assessments by the Authority.

The number of times powers were exercised under COVID-19 regulations and number of crime incidents represent a fraction of the number of interactions by the Garda Síochána with the public and with businesses. There were in excess of 120,000 checkpoints alone since 11 May. The majority of these were carried out in the initial lockdown, with approximately 10,000 checkpoints per week in May, and again during Level 5 restrictions, with almost 6,000 per week.