



Keeping Our People Supported

**A POLICING
SERVICE
FOR OUR
FUTURE**

Health & Wellbeing
Strategy Statement
and Action Plan 2021-2023

“

Our people
really are
our greatest
resource

”





Commissioner's Foreword

I am delighted to introduce An Garda Síochána Health and Wellbeing Strategy Statement and Action Plan 2021-2023.

As an organisation, An Garda Síochána understands now more than ever the importance of supporting the health and wellbeing of our personnel. Policing places great demands on our members and staff, particularly while dealing with the difficult challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic with professionalism and compassion.

In recent years, An Garda Síochána has taken steps to place the health and wellbeing of our colleagues at the forefront of everything we do, however, the 2019 Health Needs Assessment Survey highlighted the need for the organisation to be more proactive in our approach. We have listened to the ideas and concerns of our members and staff and it is now important that we demonstrate our commitment to health and wellbeing by responding to these concerns quickly and effectively.

This Health and Wellbeing Strategy sets out our initiatives and goals for the next three years and will enable An Garda Síochána to deliver on our vision to 'support and promote health, wellbeing and work ability' amongst our Garda members and Garda staff. The survey results sent a clear message about what our priorities should be for the next three years, notably mental health and post incident support pathways.

It is important that we challenge the stigmas associated with mental health and instill confidence in our personnel that they will be treated with dignity and respect, whatever their situation may be. I am personally committed to this Health and Wellbeing Strategy and its implementation, and I know that this commitment is shared by An Garda Síochána senior leadership and staff associations and unions.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the many stakeholders who have shown dedication in the development of this strategy; their expertise and guidance has supported An Garda Síochána in shaping a people focused approach to health and wellbeing for the next three years. Our organisation is ever evolving, and while we are only beginning our health and wellbeing journey, the individual and collective input of these stakeholders into the future is essential.

Our workforce really are our greatest resource and I have no doubt that through continued collaboration across all levels of the organisation, we can deliver on the strategic objectives set out in the strategy and create a workplace that places value on the health and wellbeing of all of its members and staff.

Drew Harris
Commissioner,
An Garda Síochána



Keeping People Safe
while
Keeping our People Supported

Introduction

The need for a Health and Wellbeing Strategy for An Garda Síochána has been acknowledged for many years. Numerous reports and submissions, including the 2018 report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland (CoFPI), rightly identify policing as a rewarding, challenging and sometimes dangerous career. To support our colleagues as they manage these challenges, An Garda Síochána is committed to proactively delivering on the CoFPI recommendations to create a workplace that places the health and wellbeing of employees at the forefront of what we do.

There are obvious dangers for Gardaí on the frontline, and for the Garda Staff who support them, as they strive to deliver on An Garda Síochána's vision – 'Keeping People Safe'. Aligned to this, it is important that An Garda Síochána is proactive in 'Keeping Our People Supported' (KOPS) as they deal with ongoing issues such as cyber-crime, gathering evidence and witness statements which can be traumatic and distressing.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, has presented Garda personnel with significant additional challenges; it is therefore important that this Health and Wellbeing Strategy reflects the fact that we are all operating in a new 'normal'.

This Strategy sets out the steps An Garda Síochána will take to ensure that our vision for the health and wellbeing of all AGS personnel is embedded across the organisation and reflected not only in policies and procedures, but also in our interactions with one another.

Our engagement with individuals and groups across the organisation has been very positive and encouraging during the development stage of the Strategy. I would particularly like to thank all those who participated in the Wellbeing Stakeholder Forum for your contributions. I look forward to our ongoing collaboration as we move from development to delivery. Implementing the Action Plan set out in this Strategy will take time and commitment from our senior leadership, our staff and our key stakeholders. Our success depends on our collective effort and we are all in this together.

Dr Oghenovo Oghuvbu,
Chief Medical Officer,
An Garda Síochána



TIME



COMMITMENT



SUCCESS



Background

The report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland (CoFPI), published in September 2018 and approved by Government in December 2018, asserted the need for a shift in An Garda Síochána's approach to addressing the health and wellbeing of its personnel:

“An Garda Síochána needs to take better care of its employees. Policing presents both physical and mental challenges to wellbeing”

“Support for wellbeing of employees is fundamental. Health and safety, mental and physical health, stress, working conditions, money problems (to be) taken seriously”

Recommendation 34 of the CoFPI report identified the following for consideration:

- “Dedicated funding is made available to resource a wellness programme and a proactive approach to the wellness of all Garda personnel, sworn and non-sworn”. (Ch.23 para.4)
- “An Garda Síochána should require mandatory counselling where police deal with traumatic incidents or cases”. (Ch.23 para. 5)
- “The welfare service should be adequately resourced to ensure timely debriefing is available on a systematic basis to those who request it”. (Ch.23 para.5)

‘A Policing Service For Our Future’ is the ambitious implementation plan that was developed to deliver on the recommendations set out within the CoFPI report.

In 2019, a Health Needs Assessment Survey was undertaken and 5,280 people responded providing crucial data including honest and valuable feedback on their health and wellbeing and their experiences in AGS. The results of the survey were published in 2020 (the “Crowe Report” – available on the Garda portal) and the findings have underpinned this Health and Wellbeing Strategy.



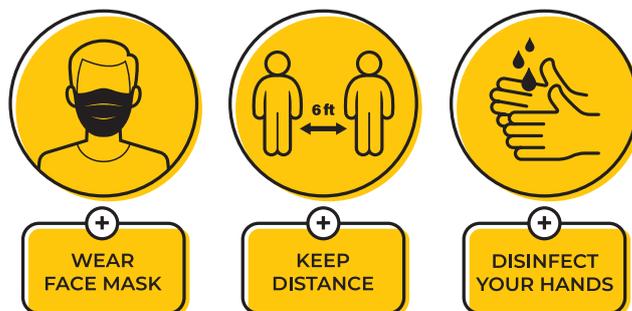
COVID-19 and the Wellbeing Strategy

The Report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland and the Health Needs Assessment Survey predated the onset of COVID-19 in early 2020. For that reason, there is no reference to the pandemic or the consequent impact on policing in Ireland in either of those documents. However, it is important to recognise the impact of the pandemic on the health and wellbeing of Garda personnel, and in particular those on the frontline.

Emerging international evidence indicates that the pandemic has understandably resulted in increased levels of stress and anxiety in society in general. Policing personnel have also been impacted in the course of carrying out their duties. Throughout the pandemic they have continued to deliver on their responsibility for maintaining public safety while dealing with the challenges of risk of exposure through interactions with the community, and concerns around exposing family members to the virus. International research suggests that the prolonged nature of the COVID-19 threat, combined with the introduction of social distancing policies which have disrupted normal patrolling routines and shift patterns, are compounding factors. (Stogner, Lee Miller & McLean, 2020)¹

An Garda Síochána has been at the forefront of the Irish response to the COVID-19 challenge from the start. The contribution and selflessness of our personnel, particularly those on the frontline, throughout this pandemic has earned the organisation considerable respect and good-will from the public.

The roll out of vaccines during 2021 has been a very welcome and positive development. We are now entering a new phase in which the focus will be on living with COVID-19 and supporting a full return to the workplace. This will present other challenges for employees and managers. The full impact of the pandemic on mental health will not be known for some time, but it is important that An Garda Síochána plays its part in destigmatising mental health issues and proactively encourages personnel to seek support when they need it.



¹ Stogner, John, Lee Miller, Bryan & McLean, Kyle (2020), 'Police Stress, Mental Health, and Resiliency during the COVID-19 Pandemic', American Journal of Criminal Justice 45:718-730



Key Definitions

What do we mean when we talk about Health and Wellbeing and the Workplace? The following definitions have underpinned our approach to the strategy and the actions that have been developed for implementation. Our ambition is for all staff to feel well, engaged and supported at work.

“Workplaces directly influence the physical, mental, economic and social wellbeing of workers and in turn, the health of their families, communities and society”

World Health Organisation

HEALTH

is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

World Health Organisation

WELLBEING

can be described as judging life positively and feeling good. It includes the presence of positive emotions and moods, the absence of negative emotions, satisfaction with life, fulfilment and positive functioning, and physical well-being.

CDC Wellbeing Concepts



HEALTHY WORKPLACE

“A healthy workplace is one in which workers and managers collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and well-being of all workers and the sustainability of the workplace”.

World Health Organisation



Health Needs Assessment Survey

In order to develop a Health and Wellbeing Strategy that would be relevant and effective, a Health Needs Assessment Survey was undertaken in October 2019 and issued to over 17,000 AGS personnel. The survey results provided the organisation with qualitative and quantitative data, directly from Garda Members and Garda Staff.

Questions were asked under 5 key areas as follows:

- Physical Health
- Mental Health
- Trauma
- Health and Wellbeing at Work
- Health and Wellbeing Supports in An Garda Síochána

Over 5,280 responses were received which equated to approximately 30.83% of the entire AGS personnel at that time (October 2019).

The breakdown between Garda Members and Garda Staff respondents was in keeping with the ratio of the total workforce and this ensured that the results were statistically significant, and representative of the organisation as a whole.

The survey also provided crucial qualitative data. Over 1,700 respondents availed of the opportunity to submit any comments or observations at the end of the survey in relation to their wellbeing. Responses ranged from a single sentence to detailed submissions outlining frustrations as well as suggestions for the future. These comments were carefully considered and many are directly addressed in the goals and actions of this Strategy.

The report on the results of the survey (the “Crowe Report”) was published in November 2020 and is available on the Garda portal.



Survey results at a glance...

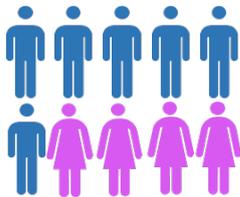
Survey Responses

5,248
Responses

Response Rate- 30.83% (N = 17.020)
4,065 Garda Members
1,183 Garda Staff

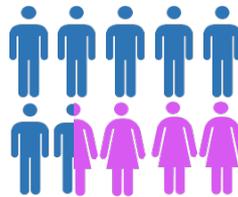


Survey Gender Breakdown



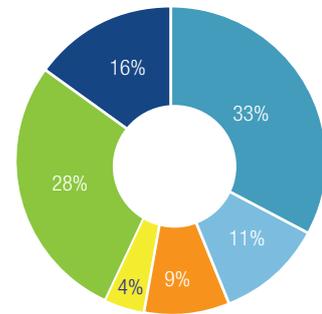
Male: 59%
Female: 40%
Prefer not to say: 1%

Actual AGS Gender Breakdown



Male: 65%
Female: 35%

Length of Service



< 2 2 - 5 6 - 10
11 - 15 16 - 20 > 20

Mental health



Overall Mental Health self-rating (out of 10)- **6.8**

Garda Members 6.8 Garda Staff 7.3

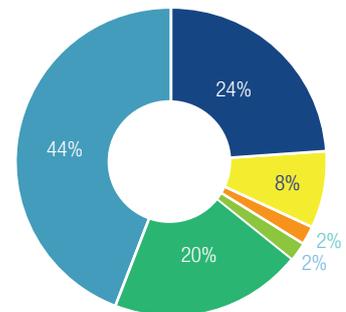
Physical health



Overall Physical Health self-rating (out of 10)- **6.6**

Garda Members 6.4 Garda Staff 7.2
Shift Workers 6.3 Non Shift Workers 7.0

Age of Respondents



18 - 25 26 - 35 36 - 45
46 - 55 > 55 ?

Member/Staff Breakdown

Crowe Survey



Member of An Garda Síochána 77%

Garda Staff 23%



Member of An Garda Síochána 82%

Garda Staff 18%

What you told us...

Quotes from Members and Staff



In fact training for all staff in our organisation would be brilliant, training in the identification of the different types of mental health issues that people can suffer from and steps to be taken to help those people.



Traumatic scenes and incidents have an effect on all persons in attendance. Supports have improved during my service but are far behind the supports of other agencies.



There is a view that if mental health is reported it will be 'held' against you in the future for promotions etc



It is impossible to change the nature of policing to eliminate stress but the organisation does need to identify ways to make the job easier and assist members who are finding it difficult to cope.

From Data to Delivery

The data from the Health Needs Assessment survey provided baseline statistics and also valuable feedback (both positive and negative) on the experience of services and supports in An Garda Síochána. A number of themes emerged from the survey results and following detailed consideration, priorities were identified. These priorities and the key messages received from personnel are set out below. All of these issues are closely aligned with those identified by other Police Services internationally. This reflects the shared experiences of both frontline officers and those in supporting roles. The next step was to create a Vision and Action Plan that would take us from data to delivery.

THEME	KEY MESSAGES
Mental Health	Additional supports need to be put in place and stigma addressed
Post-incident Supports	Timely defusing and debriefing supports should be available to all
Physical Health	AGS needs to do more to promote physical health and fitness
Work Environment	Bullying and harassment needs to be dealt with. Inadequate communication in relation to organisational change
Supports and Services	Mandatory counselling – strong view that this should be explored



Vision

“Support and Promote Health, Wellbeing and Work Ability*
for All Employees of An Garda Síochána”

*Work ability (WA) was originally defined as a person’s physical and mental ability to meet the demands of their job (Ilmarinen, 2009; Ilmarinen et al) It is based on the balance between the individuals’ resources and work demands and is strongly determined by individual factors, such as health status, lifestyle, work demands, and physical, organisational, or psychological conditions.

The vision set out in this Strategy adopts a holistic approach to wellbeing.

A range of factors affect everyone’s wellbeing but we also know that good mental and physical health are crucial pillars that strengthen our resilience and ability to cope with daily life.

In relation to our workplace, there is no doubt that policing as a profession has unique challenges and hazards. It is important that our Strategy and Action Plan recognises this and that appropriate services and supports are available to all as required.

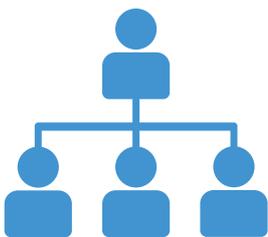
We are committed and determined to understand and address the issues affecting our staff and to “Keeping our People Supported”





Goal 1: Identify, Communicate and Enhance Existing Resources

PRIORITIES



We will [clearly identify the structures](#) within AGS that have a role in Health and Wellbeing. We will outline the roles and responsibilities within each area and ensure that contact details are easily accessible. A new Garda National Wellbeing Office under the remit of the Garda CMO will work closely with the Garda Occupational Health Service and the Garda Employee Assistance Service to ensure there is a co-ordinated approach on wellbeing issues across the organisation.



We will ensure that all policies that relate to Health and Wellbeing are collated for ease of reference. Where appropriate, we will [consult with stakeholders](#) on new wellbeing policies to ensure they are relevant and effective in their implementation.



We will ensure that procedures are documented and accessible. All procedures should be periodically reviewed to ensure that best practice and any new developments underpin how we do things.



Goal 2:

Promote Health, Wellbeing & Work Ability Across the Organisation

PRIORITIES



We will pay particular and increased attention to [mental health](#) in the workplace and find better and evidence-based ways to [support managers](#) and staff to have open conversations to build and improve relationships and support in the workplace.

We will work with colleagues as the new Operating Model is embedded across the organisation to ensure that Health and Wellbeing forms an integral part of overall organisational development.



We will provide opportunities to share [best practice](#) on Health and Wellbeing including raising awareness of issues and inviting employees to participate in initiatives such as an Annual Wellbeing Week.



We will develop and introduce [a Wellbeing App](#) to ensure that every employee can access information directly to any internet enabled device. This will allow staff to seek out information on a 24/7 basis and not solely from their workplace PC.

We will use existing work processes such as the development of the Policing Plan to highlight Health and Wellbeing, the “Your Ideas” campaign, and ideas from the Hackathon (which provided the name for the Strategy).



We will ensure that [colleagues in volunteer roles](#) will be trained and supported to deliver the best possible service to others.



Goal 3:

Develop Partnerships with Key Stakeholders Inside & Outside AGS to Build Capacity & to Provide Support & Advice

PRIORITIES



We will work with our [colleagues in HR](#) to collaborate on the wide range of issues which relate to Health and Wellbeing.

We will further develop the [Wellbeing Stakeholders Forum](#) within AGS to include representatives of key business areas, the Representative bodies, Unions and Associations, etc.



We will identify appropriate [statutory and voluntary bodies](#) and seek to develop a working relationship with them to support employees on a diverse range of issues – including illnesses, addiction, suicide, fitness and wellbeing.

We will introduce a series of [seminar events](#) promoting health and wellbeing across the country and invite subject experts to present on topics that affect all employees.



We will develop and enhance relationships with [other blue light organisations](#) in Ireland, Northern Ireland and the UK. We will further develop our working relationship with Oscar Kilo, the UK Police Wellbeing Service.

Action Plan for Health and Wellbeing 2021-2023

GOAL 1: IDENTIFY, COMMUNICATE AND ENHANCE EXISTING SERVICES

No	Goal	Actions Ref	Actions	Timeline
1.1	Communicate end-to-end wellbeing services	1.1.1	Outline a clear pathways guide that illustrates the end-to-end health and wellbeing supports.	Q1 2022
		1.1.2	Outline a clear definition of what each service offers to the frontline and how to access that service.	Q1 2022
		1.1.3	Establish Garda National Wellbeing Office (GNWO).	Q3 2021
1.2	Engage on key policies and procedures highlighted in Crowe findings	1.2.1	Ongoing engagement with business owners across AGS to ensure Health and Wellbeing is embedded in our policies and procedures.	Ongoing
		1.2.2	Run Alcohol Awareness Campaign.	Q1 2022
		1.2.3	Engage with HR&PD to support bullying and harassment education.	Ongoing
		1.2.4	Work with HR&PD to ensure annual leave procedures are clear, transparent and fair to all employees.	Ongoing
		1.2.5	Promote awareness of best practice around "Living with COVID-19" in relation to staying well and coping with the effects and aftermath of the pandemic.	Ongoing
1.3	Enhance Services	1.3.1	Promote usage of key supports, including Garda Employee Assistance Service, Peer Supporters and Garda Occupational Health Service.	Ongoing
		1.3.2	Run information campaign on enhanced 24/7 counselling service.	Q4 2021
		1.3.3	Identify training needs for personnel who deliver key supports.	Q4 2021
		1.3.4	Roll out additional training for personnel who deliver key supports.	Q1 to Q4 2022
1.4	Enhance Services	1.4.1	Produce and publish mandatory post-traumatic incident support, review and signposting (PSRS) procedures document.	Q2 2021
		1.4.2	Design and deliver clear engagements pathways protocol for PSRS.	Q3 2021
		1.4.3	Expand risk assessment and support for those in high risk roles which include exposure to psychological hazards.	Q4 2021
		1.4.4	Examine the introduction of periodic psychological supervision (mandatory counselling) for Garda personnel, and identify appropriate procedures for implementation.	Q4 2021
		1.4.5	Review and enhance the Peer Support network and structures.	Q4 2021

Action Plan for Health and Wellbeing 2021-2023

GOAL 2: PROMOTE HEALTH, WELLBEING AND WORK ABILITY ACROSS THE ORGANISATION

No	Goal	Actions Ref	Actions	Timeline
2.1	Promotion of Health and Wellbeing	2.1.1	Launch a Wellbeing App to support the promotion of health & wellbeing education and services, and disseminate police-specific health & wellbeing information on a 24/7 basis.	Q3 2021
		2.1.2	Launch a Wellbeing Hub on AGS Portal.	Q4 2021
		2.1.3	Ensure that Health & Wellbeing is formally represented within the Op Model structure using designated Divisional Liaisons and support for Health and Wellbeing groups.	Q4 2021
		2.1.4	Drive development of policy on Menopause.	Q4 2021
2.2	Mental Health	2.2.1	Publish Mental Health Statement of Intent.	Q4 2021
		2.2.2	Mental health training, education and awareness options for supervisors/ management and leadership teams. (a) Examine (b) Identify (c) Implement	(a) Q4 2021 (b) Q1 2022 (c) Q2 to Q4 2022
		2.2.3	Define the role and responsibilities of the support services (internally and externally) to support personnel (and their line managers/supervisors) with mental health concerns.	Q4 2021
2.3	Physical Activity	2.3.1	Engage with Coiste Siamsa and publish list of AGS sports/social formal and informal networks.	Q4 2021
		2.3.2	Promote physical wellbeing in line with Healthy Ireland through creation of a calendar of initiatives.	Q4 2021
2.4	Nutrition	2.4.1	Engage with social groups to encourage and support local healthy eating campaigns and incentives (Safe Food and Healthy Ireland).	Q2 2022
		2.4.2	Publish Dietary advice for shift-workers.	Q2 2022
2.5	Facilities	2.5.1	Estate Management will continue to ensure the availability of appropriate food preparation and storage facilities for Garda Stations and other Garda facilities.	Ongoing
		2.5.2	Estate Management will continue to ensure the availability of appropriate showering facilities and changing rooms for Garda Stations and other Garda facilities.	Ongoing

Action Plan for Health and Wellbeing 2021-2023

GOAL 3: DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE AGS TO BUILD CAPACITY AND TO PROMOTE SUPPORT AND ADVICE

No	Goal	Actions Ref	Actions	Timeline
3.1	Partnerships	3.1.1	Establish partnership with the National Office of Suicide Prevention to ensure the organisation has up-to-date guidance and expert knowledge in this area.	Q3 2021
		3.1.2	Establish partnership with Healthy Ireland and their work on the Healthy Workplace Framework.	Q4 2021
		3.1.3	Work with other State bodies to identify and implement initiatives to support better work/life balance including the challenge of increased working from home and new legislation.	Ongoing
		3.1.4	Establish partnership with Oscar Kilo and use resources accessed through this partnership to upskill and support all involved in providing wellbeing services in An Garda Síochána and, in turn, better support all Garda personnel.	Ongoing
		3.1.5	Ongoing engagement with Health & Wellbeing Stakeholder Forum.	Ongoing
		3.1.6	Explore ideas for annual AGS Health and Wellbeing Symposium to include webinars etc.	Ongoing
		3.1.7	Ongoing engagement with internal stakeholders and solutions-focused initiatives e.g. Hackathon, Your Ideas.	Ongoing
3.2	Explore opportunities for learning from the shared experience of other Irish blue light organisations	3.2.1	Establish working partnership with Irish emergencies response/blue-light organisations including the Defence Forces, paramedics, and the Fire Brigade to create opportunities for learning.	Ongoing



Ready, Set, Go...

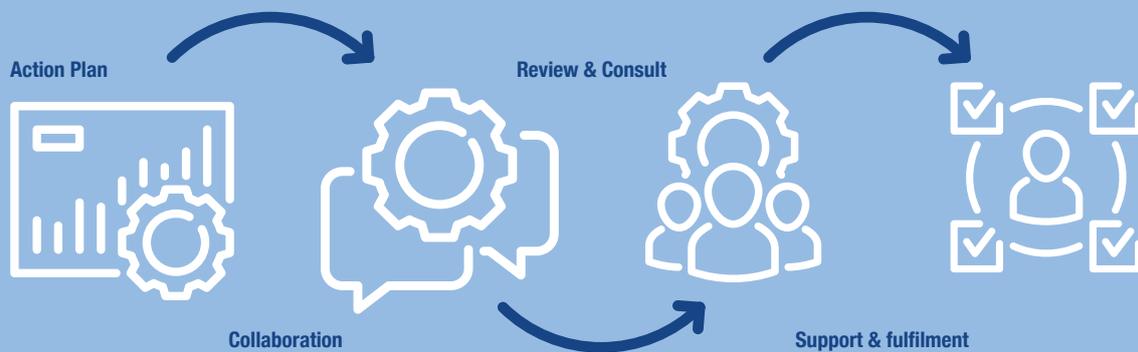
The Strategy and the Action Plan are just the beginning. There will be ongoing engagement with the Stakeholder Forum and with the Divisions to promote the Strategy and also to monitor progress and feedback.

Implementing the Action Plan will require a collaborative approach and will also encourage individuals to take a pro-active role in supporting their own wellbeing.

The Action Plan will be reviewed quarterly and progress reports will include updates from around the country on initiatives and ideas.

We want to ensure that a focus on Health and Wellbeing is evident in every workplace across An Garda Síochána. The actions set out in this document will support that objective and demonstrate our commitment to create a workplace where people feel well, supported and fulfilled.

If you would like to get in touch with the project team, please email us at Well.Team@garda.ie



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who contributed to the development of this Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The Wellbeing Stakeholder Forum was established in 2019 to provide key stakeholders with an opportunity to feed into the project. This collaborative approach has allowed for the exchange of ideas and discussion among stakeholders which will ultimately benefit all personnel in An Garda Síochána. Membership of the Forum has changed over the course of the project and the following is the full list of participants.

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Catherine Bannon HRPD Workforce Modernisation

Sergeant Brendan Brogan Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors

Monica Carr HRPD Human Resources Directorate

Edel Comiskey HRPD Human Resources Directorate

Superintendent Michael Comyns Association of Garda Superintendents

Superintendent Brian Conway Garda College

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Sergeant Jamie Cullen HRPD Employee Relations

Inspector Antoinette Cunningham, Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors

Stephen Dalton, Garda College

Garda Ray Dennison, Garda Representative Association

Alice Donovan, Strategic Transformation Office

Chief Superintendent David Dowling, Association of Chief Superintendents

Kieran Downey, Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants

Emer Doyle, Strategic Transformation Office

Elaine Duffy, Garda Employee Assistance Service

Inspector Declan Egan, Health and Wellbeing Strategy Team

Garda Pat Ennis, Garda Representative Association

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Superintendent Dan Flavin, Association of Garda Superintendents

Inspector Tony Gallagher, Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors

Inspector Will Gardner, HRPD Employee Relations

Chief Superintendent Fergus Healy, Association of Chief Superintendents

Assistant Commissioner Paula Hilman, Personal Capacity

Alison Keogh, Health and Wellbeing Strategy Team (Action Manager)

Sarah Langrell, Health and Wellbeing Strategy Team

Adam Long, Health and Wellbeing Strategy Team

Sergeant Clare Malone, Garda Employee Assistance Service

Paul Malone, Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants

Phillip McAnenly, Garda Representative Association

Chief Superintendent Terry McGinn, An Garda Síochána Women's Network

Superintendent Della Murray, Garda Employee Assistance Service

Jenny Nolan, HRPD Strategy Performance & Transformation Lead

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Garda Conor Staunton, Garda Representative Association

Lorraine Watters, Health and Wellbeing Strategy Team

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2021-2023

Well.Team@garda.ie