Review of Joint Policing Committees

Discussion Document & Outcome of Survey of Joint Policing Committee Members

(November 2012)
1  Background to Establishment of Joint Policing Committees

The Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the establishment of Joint Policing Committees (JPCs). These Committees are intended to offer local authority elected members, An Garda Síochána, members of the Oireachtas and members of the public a structured opportunity to work in partnership to address concerns about crime and community safety in each local authority area. The establishment of the JPCs recognised the need to harness the input of all local stakeholders to respond to such issues.

From the outset it was intended that the partnership between An Garda Síochána and the local authority would be central to the operation of each Committee. However, it is also acknowledged that a collective and collaborative approach on the part of all Committee members is essential if JPCs are to realise their considerable potential to benefit local communities.

2  Establishment Process

Initially JPCs were established on a pilot phase in 29 local authority areas, starting in 2006. Following the pilot phase guidelines for the operation of committees countrywide were issued in September 2008. The guidelines took into account the experience gained from the pilot programme and were developed in consultation with the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the Gardaí, the County and City Managers’ Association/Office for Local Authority Management, the Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland and the Association of County and City Councils.

There was some disparity between the rate of progress in establishing and operating JPCs across the country. However, by May 2011 the Garda authorities reported that all but three of the total of 114 JPCs were established. (The three areas were small Town Council areas).

The Garda Síochána Act also provides for the establishment of Local Policing Fora at neighbourhood level under guidelines. These Fora are intended to operate in a more informal way than the JPCs and deepen the engagement between Gardaí, the local authority and neighbourhood communities. Guidelines for the establishment and operation of Fora were issued by the then Minister in July 2009. These guidelines restrict the establishment of Fora to the fourteen areas where Local Drug Task Forces operate. It was decided to prioritise the establishment of Local Policing Fora in these areas, in the context of the resources available and in accordance with the National Drugs Strategy, because their need is greatest.
3 Review of Operation

Against the backdrop of reforms to local structures signalled in the current Programme for Government, and with a view to ensuring that the JPCs were working to their full capacity, the Minister for Justice and Equality initiated a review of their operation. This review commenced early in 2012 and is being managed by the Department of Justice and Equality, with the support of an oversight committee which includes representatives of the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and An Garda Síochána.

The structure of the review is as follows:

Phase One  Survey of Joint Policing Committee Members
Phase Two  Publication of Discussion Document and Invitation of Submissions
Phase Three  Review of Joint Policing Committee Guidelines and Recommendations

4 White Paper Consultation Process

Separate to this review process, the Department of Justice and Equality has been engaged since 2009 in a major consultation exercise leading to the production of a White Paper on Crime, due for publication in 2012. Its development has involved an end to end examination of prevention, intervention and enforcement strategies to combat crime and to reduce offending. The White Paper, incorporating a National Anti-Crime Strategy will present a policy framework for future strategies to combat and prevent crime and to reduce offending.

Public consultation was vital to the development of the White Paper and Joint Policing Committee throughout the country actively engaged in the consultation process through attendance at public consultation meetings (42 JPCs were represented), written submissions (4 JPCs) and meetings with staff of the Department (12 JPCs). Dublin City Council Joint Policing Committee organised a Workshop for community activists involved in crime prevention activities such as Neighbourhood Watch and community safety groups to maximise community input to its response to the White Paper consultation.

The feedback from JPCs during the White Paper consultations included views on how the committees themselves should operate. Those views have been incorporated into the questions set out in this discussion document.
5 Survey of JPC Members

As outlined above, the first step in the Joint Policing Committee review process was to issue a short survey to JPC members via the local authorities. The survey sought views on the degree to which JPCs

- add value to the work of local authorities/the Gardaí and community organisations
- pursue collaborative strategies and operate with an agreed work plan
- fulfil their prescribed roles as set down in legislation.

The intention was to gain an overview of the general quality of the work being done by JPCs and to identify relevant issues which would support improved operation. Respondents were not asked to identify themselves or their JPC area, although some respondents did so.

This discussion document attempts to distil the outcome of the survey and poses a number of discussion points for public input.

6 Outcome of Survey

There were 442 surveys returned to the Department. This is estimated to represent 18% of the membership of JPCs countrywide. While this is a reasonable sample size statistically, it may prompt concerns as to why many JPC members did not respond. A detailed breakdown of the responses received is in Appendix 2.

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with three statements related to the working of the JPCs. The following summary shows the general thrust of the responses and indicates the proportion of respondents who responded “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the three statements. The information is broken down between the five categories of JPC members.

Q1 The JPC provides significant added value to the actions of local authorities/the Gardaí and community organisations in its area.

77% of total respondents were in agreement.

The percentage of those in agreement within each of the five categories of JPC members is set out below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1 Respondents</th>
<th>% in agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T.D. or Senator</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority Elected Member</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority Official</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garda</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Representative</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q2. **JPC meetings should consist largely of the consideration of collaborative actions by a range of stakeholders, rather than questions simply being put to Garda representatives.**

83 % of total respondents were in agreement.

The percentage of those in agreement within each of the five categories of JPC members is set out below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 2 Respondents</th>
<th>% in agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T.D. or Senator</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority Elected Member</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority Official</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garda</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Representative</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q3. **The JPC has an agreed work plan, which is distinct from the Garda Policing Plan for the area or from any local authority strategy plans, and which addresses the range of functions described in the guidelines, i.e.**

- providing a forum for consultations, discussions and recommendations
- reviewing levels and patterns of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour as well as the relevant underlying factors
- advising local authority and An Garda Síochána
- arranging and hosting public meetings
- forming relevant sub-committees or groups to address particular issues of importance in the JPC area

71 % of total respondents were in agreement.

The percentage of those in agreement within each of the five categories of JPC members is set out below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 3 Respondents</th>
<th>% in agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T.D. or Senator</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority Elected Member</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority Official</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garda</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Representative</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 Other Feedback

The survey also provided an opportunity to make individual comments on the operation of the JPCs. These comments as well as the input received during the White Paper Consultations have been summarised in Appendix 1. The feedback received has been grouped into four main themes and key points for discussion have been identified in connection with each of the themes. The four themes are:

- General Commentary on operation of JPCs
- The JPC as a Strategic and Collaborative Forum
- Structure and Membership
- Communications

8 Discussion Points

8.1 General Commentary on operation of JPCs

As is clear from the survey feedback, there is a high level of support for the work of the JPCs, but concerns do exist as to whether they are maximising their potential. Given the variations between each local authority area in terms of location, size and issues of concern, it is important that guidelines are flexible enough to accommodate differing situations. Feedback indicated that respondents from smaller town areas tended to favour a more localised project based approach, compared to members from larger areas who tended towards a more strategic and thematic approach. Many respondents felt that JPCs are important, not just in relation to policing, but in building constructive relationships between state agencies and between those agencies and local communities generally.

Discussion Point (1)

JPCs are intended to act as a forum for collaborative engagement by the key local stakeholders in relation to policing issues.
While there appears to be widespread support for this concept among JPC members, there are also concerns that JPCs may not realise their full potential in all local authority areas.

In this context, what are the most important things that can be done to improve the way JPCs work by,

- Central Government
- The Garda authorities
- Local authority management
- Other stakeholders

8.2 The JPC as a Strategic and Collaborative Forum

There was very strong support for the concept of collaborative strategic actions to address local situations. However there was concern that this is not always the approach adopted in practice, and that JPCs may lose impetus if their work is not managed in a more coherent and coordinated manner. There is a risk that some JPCs might become ‘talking shops’, going over the same ground without coming up with proposals for concrete action. There were a range of suggestions on how to support collaborative actions (See Appendix 1) and these included requiring JPCs to highlight collaborative achievements annually.

Discussion Point (2)

How can the JPC guidelines be improved to support constructive engagement and strategic, collaborative working by all JPC members?

8.3 Structure and Membership

There was a variety of feedback about the present structure and membership requirements. Most of this centred on -

- the desirability or otherwise of having 114 JPCs *
- how the needs of county and town council areas can be best addressed in any given county in a complementary and efficient manner
- the mechanism for including input from stakeholders who are not JPC members.

* During the present review process the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government published an action programme for local government reform under which the existing town councils will be replaced as part of a new model of governance, and it follows that this will have implications for the number of JPCs in the future.
Discussion Point (3)

In the context of Local Government Reform, what sort of flexibility might be built into the guidelines to ensure that the range of local policing issues which may arise are adequately addressed?

8.4 Communications

Many respondents focussed on the need for effective communication with other locally based committees or organisations as well as ways for JPCs to listen effectively to the diverse concerns of local communities. There was some positive feedback on the Local Policing Fora which operate in local authority areas with Local Drugs Task Forces.

Discussion Point (4)

What are the most important things that JPCs can do to communicate effectively, both with local communities and other local structures? (e.g. Local Drugs Task Forces (LDTFs), Local Policing Fora (LPF), RAPID Area Implementation Teams (AITs), Local Development Companies, Community Alert/Neighbourhood Watch, Residents Associations)

9 Summary and Invitation of Submissions

This document has identified four key discussion points in relation to the operation of JPCs. Feedback forms on each are attached for ease of use.

The feedback and suggestions summarised in Appendix 1 may also help in more detailed consideration of the issues involved. The views of all stakeholders and interested parties are welcome to help frame future enhancements to the JPC structures and operation.

JPCs are also invited to consider the discussion document formally at their next meeting and furnish any proposals arising from that meeting to the Department of Justice and Equality as part of the consultation process.

Submissions in relation to the Discussion Points outlined in this document or any other matters relating to the operation of JPCs may be sent by e-mail to jpc@justice.ie, or by post to JPC Review, Crime 1 Division, Department of Justice and Equality, 94 St Stephen’s Green, Dublin 2, to arrive by the end of January 2013.
Discussion Point (1)

JPCs are intended to act as a forum for collaborative engagement by the key local stakeholders in relation to policing issues.

While there appears to be widespread support for this concept among JPC members, there are also concerns that JPCs may not realise their full potential in all local authority areas.

In this context, what are the most important things that can be done to improve the way JPCs work by,

- Central Government
- The Garda authorities
- Local authority management
- Other stakeholders

Your Views
Discussion Point (2)

How can the JPC guidelines be improved to support constructive engagement and strategic, collaborative working by all JPC members?

Your Views
Discussion Point (3)

In the context of Local Government Reform, what sort of flexibility might be built into the guidelines to ensure that the range of local policing issues which may arise are adequately addressed?

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What are the most important things that JPCs can do to communicate effectively, both with local communities and other local structures? (e.g. Local Drugs Task Forces (LDTFs), Local Policing Fora (LPF), RAPID Area Implementation Teams (AITs), Local Development Companies, Community Alert/Neighbourhood Watch, Residents Associations)

Your Views
5 Other Views

Space is provided for any other comments relating to the role and operation of JPCs, or related issues, which you would like to submit for consideration as part of the review process.

Your Views
APPENDIX 1

Feedback Commentary

The feedback summarised below is derived from individual comments made by respondents to the JPC survey as well as the input of JPCs to the White Paper consultation process. Specific suggestions made are also highlighted.

1. General Feedback from Respondents

   a) Comments from respondents confirmed very strong support for the concept of strategic and collaborative action by a range of stakeholders to address local issues.
   b) A number of JPCs have not been established very long and members felt that they are still only settling in to their roles.
   c) It was also felt that JPCs are important to enhance trust between Gardaí, other state agencies and local communities. However, some respondents felt that their JPC was not, at present, fulfilling its potential as a means of addressing local issues.
   d) Respondents from smaller town JPCs tended to emphasise an area based approach to local issues - while members of larger county or city JPCs emphasised more thematic approaches.
   e) Some respondents stressed the need to have a tangible impact at local level - if JPC work is concentrated at high level then it is difficult for people to see their relevance.
   f) A number of respondents felt that JPCs should have their own budget and that resource restrictions generally could hamper the operation of JPCs.

2. The JPC as a Strategic and Collaborative Forum

   2.1 Key Feedback

   a) Quite a number of respondents (elected, Garda and community) expressed concerns in relation to the conduct of meetings, in particular
   b) JPC members not engaging collaboratively, adopting adversarial attitudes and forming in to what are effectively opposing “camps”
   c) JPCs operating as unproductive “talking shops” with some feedback suggesting this may be more prevalent in some Town Council areas
   d) The role of the Chairperson was seen as crucial to the effective operation of the JPC and there were suggestions that relevant training for Chairpersons should be addressed.
   e) A need for a greater focus on progressing specific tasks at meetings
   f) Elected members using the JPC solely to hold Gardaí to account or to generate local press coverage and continue political arguments
g) There was concern in some committees at the emphasis on simply questioning Gardaí as opposed to developing collaborative solutions
h) Several respondents indicated that the JPC had not yet developed agreed work plans.

2.2 Suggestions

a) Using five year strategic plans in preference to an annual work plan, and this approach would coincide with the term of elected members
b) Ensuring appropriate linkage between Garda Policing Plans, local authority development plans and JPC work plans, each of which should be complementary and support the implementation of the other plans
c) JPC members might be required to give written notice of issues to be raised in advance of meetings and limits could be imposed on the number of items each member could raise which would help structure meetings and provide a balance between Q&A and strategic deliberations
d) To help focus on outcomes JPCs might be asked to highlight the most successful outcome from their work plan on an annual basis using an evidence based approach.
e) Appropriate use of closed meetings
f) Greater use of appropriate sub-committees to progress JPC work plans
g) JPCs might be given specific functions - for example in relation to licensing of premises.
h) JPCs may be able to facilitate Garda contribution to the assessment of proposed developments at planning stage.

3. Structure and Membership

3.1 Key Feedback

a) Some respondents suggested widening the membership to include a broader spread of opinion, age groups and backgrounds, including additional community, business or professional representation as well as statutory bodies (e.g. Chamber of Commerce, Community Alert, Neighbourhood Watch, HSE, Probation Service, Drugs Task Forces and Education providers)

b) A number of elected members as well as Garda representatives felt that the present structure
   • created overlap and duplication between Town and County JPCs
   • created overlap with other structures (e.g. Community Alert, County Development Board) especially in rural areas
   • imposed unsustainable time pressure on members represented on both County and Town committees
3.2 Suggestions

Suggestions made to in relation to membership included
a) Having JPCs in City and County areas only and having Town issues dealt with by the county JPC, possibly with the use of Town sub-committees.
b) JPCs might be allowed to co-opt members from outside the regular JPC membership for specified periods
c) Given the number of other county/town based committees and community based groups which JPC members may be involved with, JPCs themselves might need to meet less frequently
d) It might be useful to bring all the other relevant stakeholders not represented on the JPC (e.g. RAPID Coordinators/Area Implementation Teams, Local Drugs Task Forces, Local Development Companies, Community Alert etc ;) to a plenary session once or twice a year.

4 Communications

4.1 Key Feedback

a) Respondents mentioned the need for close contact with other local structures such as LDTFs, Community Alert, City/County Development Board etc and that JPC and City/County Development Boards have potential to reinforce each others goals and objectives
b) Respondents referred to the need to highlight examples of achievements and good practice among JPCs
c) The importance of a public platform for interaction between Gardai and public representatives was emphasised and it was felt that local press coverage can help highlight important issues.
d) Respondents highlighted the need for effective communications from JPCs back to communities, and for them to be pro-active in facilitating community input to policing policies
e) Local Policing Fora (LPF) may address some local concerns more effectively than JPCs, especially in urban areas
f) LPF are effective at encouraging community involvement as they are less likely to operate with reference to political allegiances
g) In the Dublin area some respondents highlighted the need for complementary activity between area JPCs and enhanced communication between LPF and each JPC
h) There was a range of feedback on public meetings including,
   • concern about low levels of attendance
   • indications that no public meetings had taken place

4.2 Suggestions

Suggestions in relation to Communications included
a) Having additional public meetings in some areas
b) Considering that JPC plans with specific practical actions were useful to help communities understand the actions of relevant agencies compared to higher level strategic plans
APPENDIX 2

RESPONSE TO JPC SURVEY - STATISTICAL BREAKDOWN

Surveys returned by Membership Type

- Local Authority Elected Member: 34%
- Garda Representative: 17%
- Community Representative: 15%
- Local Authority Official: 16%
- Not stated: 8%
- Oireachtas Member: 10%

Bar chart showing the number of surveys returned by membership type.
Question 1 - all responses

- Strongly Agree: 34%
- Agree: 43%
- Neutral: 11%
- Strongly Disagree: 3%
- Disagree: 7%
- Not Stated: 2%

Question 2 - all responses

- Strongly Agree: 46%
- Agree: 37%
- Neutral: 9%
- Strongly Disagree: 1%
- Disagree: 4%
- Not Stated: 3%

Question 3 - all responses

- Strongly Agree: 27%
- Agree: 44%
- Neutral: 14%
- Strongly Disagree: 3%
- Disagree: 6%
- Not Stated: 6%