

GARDA SÍOCHÁNA ACT 2005

LOCAL POLICING FORA IN LOCAL DRUGS TASK FORCE AREAS

GUIDELINES

1. Establishment

- 1.1 Section 36 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 provides for the establishment of Local Policing Fora (LPFs). Section 36(2) sets out the function of a Joint Policing Committee (JPC), which includes, at paragraph (d), the establishment of LPFs. Section 36(2) provides:

“The joint policing committee’s function is to serve as a forum for consultations, discussions and recommendations on matters affecting the policing of the local authority’s administrative area, and in particular to –

- (a) keep under review -
 - (i) the levels and patterns of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour in that area (including the patterns and levels of misuse of alcohol and drugs), and
 - (ii) the factors underlying and contributing to the levels of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour in the area,
- (b) advise the local authority concerned and the Garda Síochána on how they might best perform their functions having regard to the need to do everything feasible to improve the safety and quality of life and to prevent crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour within the area,
- (c) arrange and host public meetings concerning matters affecting the policing of the local authority’s administrative area,
- (d) establish, in consultation with the local Garda superintendent, as the committee considers necessary within specific neighbourhoods of the area, local policing fora to discuss and make recommendations to the committee concerning matters that it is to keep under review under paragraph (a) or on which it is to advise under paragraph (b), in so far as those matters affect their neighbourhoods, and
- (e) co-ordinate the activities of local policing fora under paragraph (d) or otherwise.”

Section 36(3) states:

“If any dispute arises over the establishment of a local policing forum, the joint policing committee shall submit the dispute to the Minister [for Justice,

Equality and Law Reform] whose decision, made after consulting with the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, shall be final.”

- 1.2 Action 11 of the National Drugs Strategy 2001 – 2008 provides, inter alia, for the extension of the Community Policing Fora (CPF) initiative to all Local Drugs Task Force areas.
- 1.3 In accordance with section 36 of the Garda Síochána Act and in implementation of action 11 of the National Drugs Strategy, an LPF will be established in each Local Drugs Task Force area. Accordingly, the JPCs for these areas should, in consultation with the relevant Local Drugs Task Forces and the local Garda Superintendent, make arrangements for the establishment of LPFs. Where similar fora are already in existence, JPCs should formalise such arrangements in accordance with section 36 and in consultation with the relevant Local Drugs Task Force.
- 1.4 Guidelines for LPFs in neighbourhoods other than Local Drugs Task Force areas will be made at a later date.
- 1.5 JPCs operate under guidelines issued by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on 24 September, 2008 after consultation with the Ministers for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. These guidelines include provisions for the internal procedures of JPCs. The internal procedures of LPFs set out in these guidelines are designed to be similar to those for JPCs, but to the greatest extent possible are more informal.
- 1.6 The purpose of these guidelines is to set out in detail the functions, composition and operation of LPFs in Local Drugs Task Force areas.

2. Duty of the Local Authority

- 2.1 The local authority is a key partner in the operation of LPFs. Section 37(1) of the Garda Síochána Act states: “A local authority shall, in performing its functions, have regard to the importance of taking steps to prevent crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour within its area of responsibility.”

3. Structure

- 3.1 In line with current practice in many Local Drugs Task Force Areas and taking account of the arrangements set out in the Garda Síochána Act 2005, these guidelines envisage the ideal LPF model structure for Local Drugs Task Force areas as consisting of three primary components:
 - Management Committee;
 - a coordinator;
 - public meetings, which it is envisaged will happen on a three monthly basis, although smaller more focused meetings may also occur as part of the overall process.

4. General Functions of LPFs

- 4.1 The LPF will provide a mechanism through which the community, the Gardaí and the local authority (and public representatives, other statutory agencies and other stakeholders as required) come together in a formal structured way.
- 4.2 The general functions of LPFs are set out in section 36(2) of the Garda Síochána Act (see paragraph 1.1 above).
- 4.3 In performing these functions, the LPF shall aim to:
- improve communication and relationships between the Gardaí, local authorities, other relevant stakeholders and the local community;
 - share and exchange relevant and appropriate information, including crime data on local areas;
 - identify issues of concern in relation to policing, anti-social behaviour and estate management;
 - work together to find solutions to the issues raised;
 - provide feedback on progress and hold agencies accountable;
 - improve the sense of safety and security for local residents and bring about real improvements in their quality of life;
 - develop guidelines and supports around how to manage the tensions and divisions that arise within communities as a result of the anti-social impact of alcohol-related problems, drug-dealing and drug use;
 - assist agencies to work together in a more coordinated manner in response to local problems;
 - identify and provide for the training needs of all stakeholders to participate in the LPF structure and process;
 - facilitate the capacity building of local residents;
 - organise local lectures and seminars on topics relevant to the issues being addressed.
- 4.4 In order to build upon the above activities the LPF should:
- discuss and make recommendations to the relevant JPC concerning the levels and patterns of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour in the local area (including the patterns and levels of misuse of alcohol and drugs) and the factors underlying and contributing to the levels of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour in the area;
 - advise the local authority concerned and the Garda Síochána on how they might best perform their functions, having regard to the need to do everything feasible to improve the safety and quality of life and to prevent crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour within the area;
 - assist the JPC to arrange and host public meetings as required under section 36(2)(c) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 insofar as they concern matters affecting the policing of the neighbourhood.

5. **LPF Management Committee**

- 5.1 The JPC should engage in a process of consultation with the Local Drugs Task Force and other stakeholders, so as to identify and appoint an LPF Management Committee to oversee the establishment of the LPF. Where local fora are already in existence, and a Management Committee is already in place, JPCs should formalise such arrangements in consultation with the Local Drugs Task Force.
- 5.2 The membership of the Management Committee should include:
- a representative of An Garda Síochána of Inspector or more senior rank;
 - a representative of the local authority at a senior level, eg. Area Manager or person at equivalent level of responsibility;
 - a representative nominated from the relevant local drug task force;
 - no less than three residents from the local community;
 - one local authority elected member chosen from those elected members who have registered with the JPC their interest in being a member of the relevant LPF. The local authority elected member shall rotate every second year on a basis to be decided by the elected members who have registered their interest and in consultation with the other members of the Management Committee. If the elected members registered are unable to choose one member among their number, he or she will be chosen by lot. In order to facilitate as wide a representation of elected members as possible, no local authority elected member may register for membership of more than one LPF.

The Committee may also include representatives of other state agencies as required.

- 5.3 Committee representatives other than the locally elected representative should be appointed for a period of at least three years.
- 5.4 Use of substitutes to attend meetings should be kept to a minimum. In exceptional circumstances, where a Committee member cannot attend a meeting, notification should be given to the chairperson of the substitute in a timely manner.
- 5.5 To the greatest extent possible, the principle of gender equality in membership should be adhered to.

6. **Chairperson and Conduct of Management Committee Meetings**

- 6.1 At its first meeting the Management Committee should agree a chairperson. This may be an independent chairperson or a position rotated between the members of the Committee.
- 6.2 The Management Committee should agree its own decision-making procedures based on established good practice.

- 6.3 Attendance by all Committee members at meetings should be consistent over time.
- 6.4 At least 21 days before a meeting, members of the Committee will be notified of the date, time and place of the meeting.
- 6.5 An agenda and related documents, including minutes of the previous meeting, should be circulated in advance of a meeting. This should not prevent the raising of an item of business that is, in the opinion of the chairperson, particularly urgent. In order to increase the productivity of meetings to the greatest extent possible, members should give advance notice of questions which will be raised.
- 6.6 Minutes of a meeting shall be submitted for confirmation as an accurate record at the next following ordinary meeting and recorded in the minutes of that meeting.
- 6.7 It is envisaged that the Management Committee would meet once per month. The frequency of meetings should be kept under review so that the Management Committee conducts its work efficiently and effectively, while at the same time not diverting scarce resources from other work unnecessarily.

7. LPF Coordination

- 7.1 The Management Committee should appoint one of its members or another person to co-ordinate the activities of the LPF and to liaise between the LPF and the JPC. The coordinator will perform a key role in building open and trusting relationships with the local community and all stakeholders as the LPF develops. In order to carry out this role effectively, the coordinator should have considerable local knowledge and experience of working in the community. S/he should also be readily accessible to the local community.
- 7.2 In appointing the coordinator the following competencies should be considered:
- outreach skills;
 - communication skills;
 - problem-solving skills;
 - facilitation skills.
- 7.3 The Management Committee will perform a crucial role in supporting the coordinator in his/her day to day activities.
- 7.4 In accordance with section 36(2)(e) of the Garda Síochána Act (see paragraph 1.1) and section 16 below, the JPC should put in place effective liaison arrangements between the JPC and the LPFs established in its administrative area, for example, through the establishment of a sub-committee.
- 7.5 The coordinator has a key role to play in bringing the issues to the JPC and in providing feed back to the community on the work of the JPC. The work of

the LPF does not take place just at meetings. The LPF process needs to ensure that there is continuous contact between all stakeholders and members of the community on an ongoing basis between meetings. Also, it is essential that actions arising from meetings are followed up and progressed. The coordinator is responsible for carrying out this work. S/he is the public face of the LPF and this direct human contact is a key feature of building community relationships.

8. The LPF - Working with Other Stakeholders

8.1 The work of the LPF should be informed by a community development approach, i.e. involving the people most affected by issues in the development of responses to those issues. The LPF should establish, support and liaise with local community structures as are required to ensure the maximum involvement of all parts of the community including:

- tenants' and residents' groups ;
- RAPID Area Implementation Teams (AIT) community representatives;
- ethnic and minority groups;
- youth groups;
- drugs users' fora.

9. Meetings

9.1 Meetings of the LPFs are a core aspect of the new policing partnership approach envisioned in these guidelines. These meetings provide an opportunity for the local community and representatives of the various agencies to address local concerns.

9.2 It is envisaged that the LPF will meet on a quarterly basis although smaller more focused meetings should also occur as part of the overall process. The meetings of the LPF should be arranged so that any significant issues which arise at the LPF meeting and which can not be resolved at that level can be entered on to the agenda of the next JPC meeting and addressed promptly.

10. Notice of LPF Meetings

10.1 Appropriate provision should be made to ensure that marginalised and hard to reach sections of the community are made aware of LPF meetings. Particular care should be taken to choose a date, time and place which will maximise the opportunity of the community to attend the meetings. In this respect, use should be made to the greatest possible extent of active community networks and local groups.

10.2 Reasonable notice of forthcoming meetings should be provided to the local community and all interested parties. Advertisements should be placed informing the public:

- of the date, time, place and purpose of the meeting;
- that they are welcome to attend;

- that they have the right to make their views known and ask questions of the members of the LPF Management Committee;
- that in some circumstances it may not be possible to provide information requested.

10.3 Care should be taken to ensure that meetings take place throughout the local area and in an appropriate venue so as to maximise local attendance.

11. Subject Matter of Meetings

11.1 The LPF needs to be flexible and open in relation to dealing with all issues of concern that are brought to it by members of the local community. If the LPF cannot deal directly with an issue raised, then it should see it as part of its work to refer the person on to the appropriate group or agency. This is important in order to build the trust of the community, to show them that their concerns will be addressed and to try to bring about practical improvements in people's quality of life.

11.2 The emphasis of LPF meetings will be on crime, policing and estate management and also on obtaining the co-operation of the public in preventing crime.

11.3 Section 36(4) of the Garda Síochána Act 2005 provides: "Neither the joint policing committee nor any of its subcommittees may consider matters relating to a specific criminal investigation or prosecution or matters relating to the security of the State." This section applies to Management Committee and LPF meetings.

11.4 The LPF should not consider a matter if:

- it would endanger the security of one or more individuals;
- it relates to an individual;
- it involves information received by the Garda Síochána or the local authority in confidence;
- it would, or would be likely to, prejudice the prevention or detection of crime or the apprehension or prosecution of offenders; or
- it is deemed prejudicial to a Garda operational matter, such as the deployment or composition of specialist units, or involves material of a sensitive nature.

11.5 Individuals shall not be discussed or named. An individual's right to privacy and the provision of the European Convention on Human Rights Act 2003 must be adhered to.

12. Internal Procedures for LPF Meetings

12.1 At an LPF meeting, the Garda representative will present a written report which will include general information in relation to the commission of crime and crime prevention matters in the area and reply to questions. Data on local drug-related policing activity will also be included.

- 12.2 An official nominated by the city or county local authority manager, as appropriate, will also present a written report on relevant estate management and other local authority activities and reply to questions.
- 12.3 An excessive amount of time should not be spent on questions and speeches.
- 12.4 Other individuals affected by, or involved with, the issues being addressed may be invited to attend a meeting and speak, if considered appropriate by the Management Committee, to a particular agenda item, for example, representatives of statutory agencies where the Management Committee considers that their particular expertise is required.
- 12.5 As new data sources are developed, these should also be included in communication strategies.
- 12.6 Reports to the LPF should also include any matters outstanding from the previous meeting, such as issues that were passed to the JPC to be addressed.
- 12.7 In certain circumstances it may not be possible for either the Garda or the local authority representative to reply to a question, for legal reasons or because it would not be in the public interest to do so (see paragraphs 11.3 - 11.5 above).
- 12.8 In some circumstances, it may not be possible to provide information or respond to a question because to do so would involve the disproportionate use of resources and the Management Committee should be informed accordingly.
- 12.9 A record should be kept of all issues raised and actions agreed. This will form part of the official records of the LPF process.
- 12.10 All agreed actions should be re-stated at the end of the meeting and followed up at the beginning of the next meeting.
- 12.11 LPF meetings should be chaired by the chairperson of the Management Committee.
- 12.12 The format of LPF meetings should be flexible so as to maximise local input.
- 12.13 If information cannot be provided for any of the reasons set out in paragraphs 11.3 – 11.5 above the chairperson should encourage the questioner to rephrase the question in order to create a greater opportunity for information to be provided. This may involve the questioner submitting a general rather than a specific question.

13. Dissemination of Information

- 13.1 The LPF will promote and provide information on its work to the wider community.

- 13.2 There needs to be a clear agreement at the outset between the JPC and the Management Committee in relation to the type of information that can be shared. This should include a clear distinction between information that must be kept confidential to the members of the JPC and the LPF Management Committee and information that can be shared with a wider audience at general meetings or in public feedback.
- 13.3 Reports to the LPF should primarily be functional documents, which can be made publicly available.
- 13.4 All such reports should be readily available for consultation and reference by members of the local authority and the public at the appropriate local authority offices, on its website if it has one, and any other means which appear appropriate to the local authority, the Garda Síochána and the members of the Management Committee.

14. Sub-Committees

- 14.1 The Management Committee can establish sub-committees involving the coordinator and non-members of the Committee to address particular local issues which might arise from time to time. No more than two such sub-committees shall be established.

15. Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation

- 15.1 Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the activities and effectiveness of the LPF is a core part of its work. Appropriate indicators should be developed so as to monitor the specific functions and ongoing activities of the LPF. Some of the indicators that can be used to monitor progress are as follows:
- Inputs:
 - human resource inputs, i.e. increase in numbers of community Gardaí, drug unit staff, local probation staff, estate management personnel, etc;
 - communication and information inputs: numbers of meetings, attendance at meetings, distribution of leaflets and other information;
 - Outcomes:
 - local survey data and focus groups assessing perceptions of change within the community;
 - incident reports: reports on incidents addressed through the process should be maintained so as to assess the practical impact of the LPF in relation to identified local problems;
 - perceptions of improvements in cooperation between stakeholders, as determined through the use of interviews and focus groups, for example.
- 15.2 Not later than three months after the end of each year, the Management Committee shall provide to the JPC a report on its activities during the preceding year.

16. Relationship with JPC


- 16.1 The JPC is the key forum where the LPF can bring issues that cannot be addressed effectively at local level. The LPF should identify broader policy issues or any other matters that arise from its work that cannot be dealt with at LPF level and report these issues to the JPC at its next available meeting.
- 16.2 The co-ordinator of the LPF shall have the right to attend and speak at meetings of the Joint Policing Committee covering their area. In administrative areas, where there is more than one LPF coordinator, there should be an agreed representative of the coordinators who will attend and speak at the JPC. The Co-ordinator has a key role to play in bringing issues to the JPC and in feeding back to the community on the work of the JPC.
- 16.3 The chair of the JPC and the senior representatives of the Garda Síochána and the local authority are encouraged to attend or be represented at meetings of the LPF where appropriate.

17. Cooperation and Joint Action with Other LPFs

- 17.1 LPFs from different areas should develop links in order to look at common issues arising from their work and how these issues can be addressed. If the Management Committees of two or more LPFs consider it appropriate to do so, they may, by resolution of each of the Management Committees, cooperate and act jointly. A Management Committee may cooperate and act jointly with more than one LPF. Management Committees co-operating in this way should keep their JPC informed on an ongoing basis. If LPFs from different local authority administrative areas wish to co-operate and act jointly, they should refer the matter to their respective JPCs.
- 17.2 It is essential that LPFs take all necessary steps to ensure that there is no duplication or overlap in their work, but that their activities complement each other and maximise efficiencies.

18. Policing and Local Authority Plans

- 18.1 The Garda Síochána, in the development of sub-district policing plans and the local authority plans respectively, should build on the work and experience of the LPF by aiming to incorporate its outcomes into these plans. This will give the local community some ownership of the proposed priorities/interventions at local level and also ensure that the process is having a meaningful and observable impact on the development of locally based responses to problems.



Dermot Ahern
Minister for Justice,
Equality and Law Reform

 July, 2009

