

**Garda Síochána Inspectorate
Press Release**

**Publication of Garda Inspectorate Report
“Responding to Child Sexual Abuse – A follow up Review”**

Tuesday 27 February 2018

The Garda Inspectorate welcomes the publication today by the Minister for Justice and Equality of the Inspectorate’s twelfth report entitled “*Responding to Child Sexual Abuse, a follow up Review*”. This review directly relates to a previous Inspectorate report on the investigation of child sexual abuse published in 2012 and it is the first time that the Inspectorate has specifically re-examined an area previously inspected. The report is a comprehensive examination of Garda Síochána practices and procedures in handling this important issue and as Chief Inspector Mark Toland observed, “*child sexual abuse is one of the most serious types of crime for the Garda Síochána to deal with.*” The aim of the review is to look at the progress of the recommendations made in the previous report, examine joint-working arrangements under Children First National Guidance and consider the impact of new threats and challenges that face the investigation of child sexual abuse by the Garda Síochána.

Using updates provided by the Garda Síochána, together with information obtained from meetings, field visits and data analysis, the Inspectorate assessed the level of implementation for each recommendation made in the 2012 report. Out of the 29 recommendations made, the Inspectorate assessed that 13 are implemented, six were not implemented and six are partially implemented. The review also found that despite actions taken, four of the recommendations were assessed as not satisfactorily addressed.

While the Inspectorate welcomes the measures already taken to address the recommendations made in 2012, it is, nevertheless, disappointed that some are still not implemented. While accepting that not all the recommendations are the sole responsibility of the Garda Síochána, it is more than five years since the publication of the report. Chief Inspector Toland stated “*the Inspectorate believe that the pace of implementation needs to increase as less than half of the recommendations are*

considered implemented.” The limited progress in implementing many of the recommendations means that the intended benefits have not yet been realised.

As well as forensically examining the recommendations made in the 2012 report, there are 24 new recommendations made to address the findings identified during the review. Many of the new recommendations are aimed at improving joint-working arrangements between the Garda Síochána and Tusla, the Child and Family Agency who are the two primary agencies involved in the day-to-day protection of children. These agencies need to work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for children. That was also a theme identified in the original 2012 report. As a result, the Inspectorate now believes that a national approach to child sexual abuse is needed to enhance child protection practices and make Ireland a safer place for children. This process needs to bring together all of the relevant government departments and agencies necessary to drive change.

Some of the other main findings in the report are:

- Despite progress in joint-agency working, many barriers identified in the 2012 report still remain;
- Processes in place between the Garda Síochána and Tusla for managing child protection cases are inefficient. Other jurisdictions have more structured and dynamic processes for making decisions in these types of cases;
- Child Sexual Exploitation(CSE) is a developing form of criminal behaviour and presents unique challenges to child safety;
- 66% of all reported sexual offences in Ireland involve a victim who is a child;
- It is not Garda policy to approach a victim where the referral is made by a third party;
- There is continued use of inexperienced gardaí to investigate child sexual abuse;
- Joint interviewing of a child victim by gardaí and social workers is not in place;
- The creation of specialist centres for victims of child sexual abuse, a key recommendation in the 2012 report, is still at discussion stage;
- Since the 2012 report there has been a considerable increase in the risks posed to children by the internet and social media;
- The volume of online child abuse material is growing exponentially;
- There was an insufficient online garda presence at the time of the review. Other jurisdictions have a stronger online presence to target those grooming children and accessing child abuse material;
- There are still long delays in the forensic examination of computers despite an increase in resources; and
- Internet service providers have an important role to play in preventing access to child abuse material.

Notwithstanding some of the deficiencies identified, the Inspectorate would like to acknowledge some of the positive actions taken since the publication of the 2012 report. In particular, the decision to create a Garda National Protective Services Bureau and to start a roll-out of divisionally based Protective Services Units is a very encouraging step forward. Mr Toland commented that the divisional Protective Services Units *“have the potential to address many of the outstanding recommendations from the 2012 report as well as areas of concern found during this review.”*

Some of the key recommendations made in this review are:

- To develop a National Strategy for Child Sexual Abuse, Child Sexual Exploitation and Online Risks to Child Safety;
- To develop a new joint approach for assessing and managing child welfare notifications;
- To complete the roll-out of all Divisional Protective Services Units by the end of 2018; and
- To review the resourcing needs for pro-active operations and re-active investigations.

Other significant recommendations are:

- To develop a national protocol for the sharing of information;
- To review the policy of not approaching child sexual abuse victims who are identified through third party referrals;
- To move to a standard operating procedure for conducting joint interviewing; and
- To implement a standard operating procedure for assessing, managing and investigating child abuse material referrals.

An important part of the review was the engagement with two adult survivors of child sexual abuse. Their testimonies gave an insight into the difficulties victims sometimes endure once they have reported abuse. The Inspectorate would like to thank them for their contribution and hope that the changes recommended in this report will improve the outcomes for all victims. The Inspectorate would like to acknowledge the many committed staff in the Garda Síochána, Tusla and all the agencies/victim support groups that met with the Inspectorate and thank them for their assistance during the course of the inspection.

This review builds on the recommendations made in the original 2012 report and other Inspectorate reports, most notably the Crime Investigation report published in 2014. The Inspectorate believes that the implementation of recommendations in this report will enhance child protection practices, reduce the risk of child sexual abuse and exploitation and make both the physical and virtual worlds safer places for children.

Copy of report is available at <http://www.gsinsp.ie>

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Notes for editors

The Garda Síochána Inspectorate is an independent statutory body established under Part 5 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, which commenced its work on 26 July 2006. Its objective is to ensure that the resources available to the Garda Síochána are used to maintain and achieve the highest levels of effectiveness and efficiency in its operation and administration as measured against best international practice. Under Section 115 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, the Inspectorate must be three members, including a

Chief Inspector, appointed by the Government. The current members of the Inspectorate are Mr Mark Toland, Ms Pauline Shields and Mr Hugh Hume.

Mr. Mark Toland was appointed Chief Inspector of the Garda Síochána Inspectorate in November 2017 having previously served as a Deputy Chief Inspector from 2012 to 2016. His policing career was in the Metropolitan Police Service where he worked for 30 years prior to retiring in 2010 and he received the Queens Police Medal for distinguished service in the same year. Before returning to the Inspectorate, Mark served as a Commissioner on the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission from 2016 - 2017.

Ms. Pauline Shields was appointed as a Deputy Chief Inspector of the Garda Síochána Inspectorate in October 2016. Pauline served for 30 years with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in a variety of different policing roles and retired at the rank of Chief Superintendent. For services to policing and the community in Northern Ireland Pauline was awarded an OBE in the 2014 New Year's honours list.

Mr. Hugh Hume was appointed as a Deputy Chief Inspector of the Garda Síochána Inspectorate in November 2017. Prior to his appointment in the Inspectorate, he served as a police officer in the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) for almost 31 years and completed his service at the rank of Detective Chief Superintendent. Hugh was awarded the Queens Police Medal in 2016 for distinguished police service.

The Inspectorate has produced eleven reports since its establishment in 2006. Further details of the Inspectorate's work and copies of previous Inspectorate reports can be found on our website. www.gsinsp.ie