

BODY CAMERAS FOR GARDAÍ DUE TO COME INTO FORCE

Frontline Gardaí are to get new body worn cameras, which will be deployed initially on an operational pilot basis in mid-2024, before national roll-out in 2025. The announcement was made at a recent press briefing to introduce the new technology, which will be covered under the Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) Bill 2022. Report by Grace Heneghan.



An Garda Síochána has started the process of procuring body worn cameras for frontline Gardaí. The Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee TD, has said that the passage of the Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) Bill 2022, which will allow for the use of these bodycams, is one of her priorities in the upcoming autumn Dáil session.

Minister McEntee said that she hopes to enact the legislation “as soon as possible” to allow Garda Commissioner Drew Harris to pilot the technology next year, prior to the widespread roll-out in 2025.

“This modern technology is a key tool for frontline Gardaí and represents our commitment to build stronger, safer communities. It is essential to deliver on the Government’s aim to ensure An Garda Síochána is a leading edge, modern police service fit for the digital age,” noted the Minister.

“Policing organisations around the world have found that body worn cameras can help improve frontline capability with the accurate recording of incidents. Our Gardaí must have the same tools as their colleagues in other police services.

“While the deployment of these devices, including related timelines,



“Body Worn Cameras provide a safeguard, not just to Gardaí, but to the public and to the people we interact with on a daily basis” – Chief Supt Derek Smart

will be an operational matter for the Garda Commissioner once the legislation has been enacted, I will support them being brought into operation at the earliest opportunity.”

POTENTIAL TO TRANSFORM POLICING

At a press briefing on 12 September to announce the introduction of the new technology, Chief Supt Derek Smart said: “In recent years, An Garda Síochána has advanced our technology, from the roll-out of Active Mobility Devices, which have provided Gardaí with PULSE information at their fingertips, to GardaSAFE, which has transformed how we support the public, to the new Operational Uniform.

“An Garda Síochána is listening and adapting. Body Worn Cameras have the potential to transform policing. They provide a safeguard, not just to Gardaí, but to the public and to the people we interact with on a daily basis.”

Chief Supt Smart said that this is the first step in the public procurement process for what he noted as “one of the largest investments in technology in An Garda Síochána, an investment in the future of policing in Ireland”.

Andrew O Sullivan, Chief Information Officer for An Garda Síochána, commented: “A modern police service must have electronic tools to be effective in keeping people safe in today’s society. Policing itself must continue to digitalise to keep people safe in a digital age.

“One of our core principles is that every decision that could impact on a person is made by accountable, identifiable Garda personnel. There is no question of autonomous machine decision making, ever. Today’s RFI



The Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee TD, has said that the passage of the Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) Bill 2022 is a priority in the upcoming autumn Dáil session.



Garda Commissioner Drew Harris has started the tendering process for the purchase of body worn cameras, to be piloted next year before the national roll-out in 2025.

represents another major milestone in the delivery of the Garda data and technology vision, and for public safety in Ireland.”

GRA WELCOMES BODYCAM ROLL-OUT

It’s over five years since the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland recommended legislation to provide for the use of body-worn cameras. “The GRA has consistently called for garda management to expedite the roll-out to our members in order to support their frontline duties in criminal investigations and the maintenance of public safety,” GRA President Brendan O’Connor told ‘Emergency Services Ireland’.

“Our experience from talking to other police services where they are used is that they have enhanced policing by creating a safer environment for all officers. They have also contributed to successful prosecutions, particularly cases of domestic violence where perhaps a witness or injured party does not have the confidence to give evidence or make a statement. However, the camera captures the aftermath and the devastation that occurs in the immediate aftermath of the incident.”

The GRA President noted that body cameras will allow the judges and juries to relive the experience of the assaulted officer from a unique viewpoint. “Realtime footage of an out-of-control violent assailant may be a far cry from the soft-spoken, well-dressed individual presented by a polished and well-choreographed defence. The camera, after all, does not lie – as long as the chain of evidence is properly processed and protected.”

BENEFITS OF BODY WORN CAMERAS

Following the publication of a Request for Information (RFI) on Body Worn Cameras (BWC) and Digital Evidence Management Systems (DEMS) on the EU Tenders website, the public procurement process has now started.

The RFI seeks to obtain information in relation to proven business and technical solutions, including lessons learned, best practices and recommendations that will assist An Garda Síochána in identifying its requirements for BWC, DEMS and the potential for integration with/ or replacement of existing CCTV Video Management Systems (VMS).

Body Worn Camera (BWC) refers to a small, lightweight camera that is visibly worn by a Garda. The BWC records footage to its own internal encrypted storage, which is uploaded when the Garda docks the BWC in the Garda station.

BWC footage is uploaded at the end of a shift so it can be used as evidence at court or is deleted after an agreed time period if it's not required as evidence. An Garda Síochána will develop and publish detailed public policy and provide internal guidance procedures for the use of BWCs following engagement with all relevant parties before BWCs are used in public.

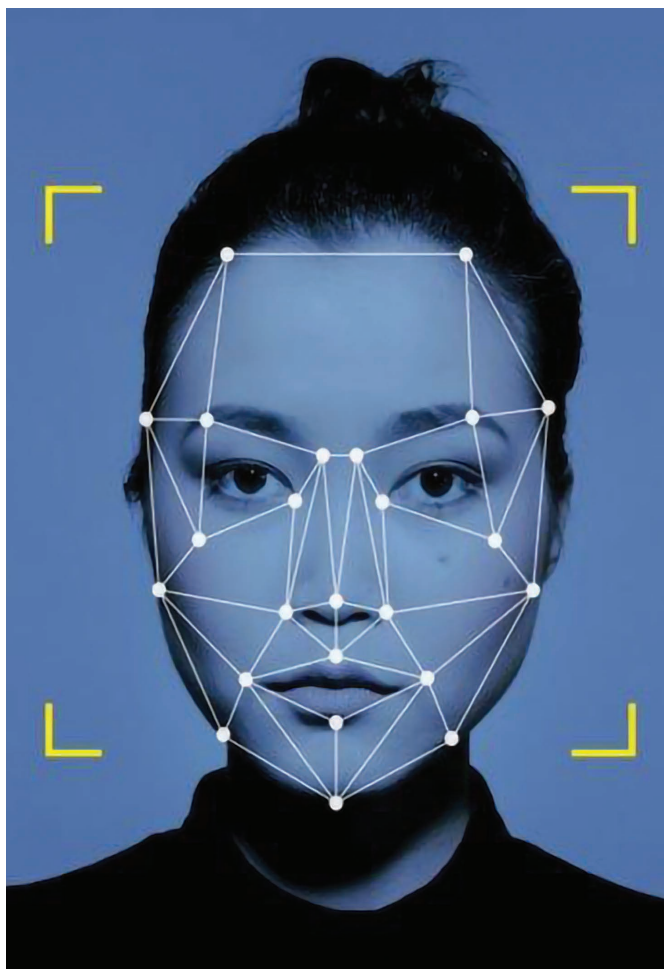
Based on the experiences of other police services who use BWCs, An Garda Síochána expects that they will:

- Improve safety for Gardaí.
- Reduce complaints of Garda misconduct.
- Save time in court preparation and appearances.
- Lower costs for investigations and court appearances.
- Improve ability to collect evidence for trial.
- Enhance accountability.
- Reduce challenges around arrests.

All digital imagery collected will be managed by a Digital Evidence Management System (DEMS) – an ICT software

solution that will enable Gardaí to collect, store, manage and analyse digital evidence from BWC footage.

DEMS will also provide Gardaí with a platform on which



Facial Recognition Technology will now be provided for separately in the new Garda Síochána (Digital Management and Facial Recognition Technology) Bill 2023

BODY CAMS PILOT MUST ENSURE PROTECTION OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS – ICCL

The Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) has cautiously welcomed the Garda announcement that body worn cameras will be introduced on a pilot basis next year before moving to a national roll-out in 2025.

Liam Herrick, ICCL's Executive Director, said: "Body worn cameras are a new form of surveillance technology to be introduced in Ireland and they directly impact on people's privacy rights and other key civil liberties such as freedom of assembly. We need to be very careful in how they are introduced and ensure that adequate safeguards are put in place to protect people's fundamental rights.

"If surveillance technology infringes on fundamental rights, it must be demonstrated that it meets the threshold of legality, necessity and proportionality, and that it is the least intrusive measure. The detail of the use of body worn cameras and what safeguards will be put in place – including how and when Gardaí will use the cameras; how footage is stored and/or used; and how access to this footage will be managed – is yet to be finalised and will be key."

He maintained that the pilots should assess whether the cameras deliver on their promised benefits, and the results should be reviewed and published before moving to any national roll-out of this technology, which he added should not be a predetermined outcome of this process.

In relation to the issue of facial recognition technology, ICCL maintains that there is no lawful basis for its use in law enforcement in Ireland. "We note An Garda Síochána's intention to subject some body worn camera footage to retrospective FRT and we reiterate our opposition to FRT and to any legislation being proposed over the coming year. Retrospective use of FRT has been shown to represent as major an interference with people's fundamental rights as live FRT use."



Liam Herrick, ICCL Executive Director

to manage existing CCTV Video Management Systems (VMS). The DEMS typically include a public portal to facilitate publicly uploaded digital images following public appeals for assistance in criminal investigations or reports of criminal activity/offences by members of the public.

FACIAL RECOGNITION TECHNOLOGY

The Garda Síochána (Recording Devices) Bill 2022 is in line with the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland (published in 2019) which called for the deployment of body worn cameras by Gardaí to enhance the frontline policing capability. As a priority action contained in Justice Plan 2022, the Bill is part of a suite of legislation being introduced by the Government to reform An Garda Síochána.

In further developments, the Justice Minister said the use of Facial Recognition Technology will now be provided for separately in the new Garda Síochána (Digital Management and Facial Recognition Technology) Bill 2023, following her consultation with government colleagues in June.

The Minister said that this will be a separate Bill to be drafted on a priority basis “to provide for the safe and ethical use of Facial Recognition Technology to assist Gardaí to investigate the most serious crimes” which are subject to a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

These include

threats to national security and critical infrastructure, homicide, rape and aggravated sexual assault, child sexual abuse, abduction, including child abduction. Other crimes also include the most serious violent offences such as robbery, aggravated burglary, and assault causing serious harm.

An Garda Síochána has no plans to use live facial recognition on body worn cameras. Footage on the camera is expected to be relatively small in volume and not a significant source for retrospective FRT.

