

# Gardaí Roll Out New Water Cannon Trucks And Body Armour

Gardaí introduced one of their two new water cannon trucks at Garda HQ, in addition to some new Garda body armour for public order policing duties, at the launch in early June of a six-year report on advances made by An Garda Síochána to modernise the force since it first started implementing the new plan in 2018.

**G**arda Commissioner Drew Harris first signed off on the purchase of the two water cannon trucks in September 2024 as part of the recent expansion of Garda fleet of vehicles. The water cannons were first delivered in January 2025, and one was on display at Garda HQ on 9 June during the launch of the 'Transforming An Garda Síochána 2018-2024' report.

According to the report, a wide range of significant changes have been rolled out; over 15,000 mobility devices have been issued to Gardaí,

while 700 body worn cameras are also being piloted.

Significant investments have been made over the last two years in the procurement of additional personal protective equipment for Gardaí, including incapacitant spray with greater potency and upgrades to body armour and defensive equipment available for Public Order Units.

The Garda fleet at 3,672 vehicles – including the two water cannons, ASU vehicles, Public Order and Community Engagement vans – is

the largest it has ever been, and the report also notes that public trust in the force stands at 89%.

It was compiled to provide an organisational account of the implementation of the 'A Policing Service for Our Future' programme in An Garda Síochána, a key recommendation of which was the delivery of the Garda operating model.

The operating model has been rolled out to all 21 Garda Divisions and represents the biggest structural change to the organisation. It has



Gardaí in public order policing gear flank the water cannon truck in the courtyard of Garda HQ – one Garda models the new body armour and a shield that will soon be rolled out for public order unit members.

(Pic: David Mac Redmond, Journal.ie)



One of two new water cannon truck was on display at Garda HQ in early June – each truck has the capacity to carry 5,200 litres of water. (Pic: David Mac Redmond, Journal.ie)

established four functional areas within each division, community engagement, performance assurance, crime and business services functions.

Garda Headquarters claims the operating model serves to enhance the service it provides to the public, particularly the most vulnerable in society.

According to 'Transforming An Garda Síochána' report: "The acute risks of physical harm and psychological trauma that members of An Garda Síochána face in carrying out their duties remains a core concern for the organisation". The continuous need to protect, support and care for our personnel has been the basis for an extensive, cross-service investments in recent years," it said.

Since the Dublin riots of November 2023, Gardaí said that significant investments have been made in personal protective equipment (PPE) for members of the Force. Those include new incapacitant spray and upgrades to body armour and defensive equipment now available for public order units.

"This includes new shields, helmets, torso protectors and limb guards designed to protect gardaí involved in the policing of riots and significant public order incidents from blunt impacts, stabbing implements, flames and accelerants," the report said.



A garda models the new body armour and shield as he demonstrates how to use a new incapacitant spray (Pic: David Mac Redmond, Journal.ie)

**'JOURNEY OF REFORM FAR FROM OVER' – ICCL**  
The Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) has welcomed the publication of the Garda report of its progress on reforms since the recommendations were made by Commission on the Future of Policing (CoFPI) 2018 but cautions that "the journey of reform is far from over".

After what An Garda Síochána acknowledges in the report were "significant challenges to its reputation and credibility" following a series of scandals, human rights are now officially recognised as the foundation and purpose of Irish policing.

In 2024 ICCL published an independent review of progress on CoFPI implementation and found outstanding concerns regarding accountability, transparency and the effectiveness of police oversight bodies to hold An Garda Síochána to account.

ICCL has previously cautioned that the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2025 only partially implemented the root-and-branch reforms recommended by CoFPI. Joe O'Brien, Executive Director of ICCL, said the report highlights a lot of progress made by An Garda Síochána to improve policies and strategies.

However, he said it is also necessary to look at how these changes are being implemented in practice, and claimed that on moving forward, rigorous monitoring will be essential to ensure ongoing progress and accountability.

"Members of the public have recently expressed concern to ICCL about the policing of protests in Dublin and Shannon, including the disproportionate use of force against peaceful protesters. ICCL will continue to monitor the policing of protest as a key area in which we see unacceptable interferences with human rights.

"The government's stated plans to introduce facial recognition technology into Irish policing risks exposing the public to indiscriminate surveillance and misidentification, and damaging the Garda's relationship with the public, which has been long built on its community policing model."



While the report highlights a lot of progress made by An Garda Síochána to improve policies and strategies, it is necessary to look at how these changes are being implemented in practice, according to Joe O'Brien, Executive Director of ICCL.



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Garda Commissioner Drew Harris first signed off on the purchase of the two water cannon trucks in September 2024, which were then delivered to Garda HQ in January 2025

### AGSI CALLS FOR INCREASE TO 18,000 IN GARDA NUMBERS

The Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors (AGSI) had claimed that with Garda numbers stagnating and dissatisfaction rising across the force, there is need for urgent action, and is calling for an increase in Garda numbers to 18,000 to both serve an increasing population and prevent a policing crisis.

AGSI and inspectors attended the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration on 17 June, to highlight issues around recruitment and retention, the Operating Model, and the erosion of community and roads policing.

AGSI recognises the dual role of An Garda Síochána as Ireland's Policing and National Security Service and recognises the work done by Government and the Minister for Justice in strengthening national security but with the evolving international landscape, the Association is now calling on Justice Minister Jim O'Callaghan to continue his work in strengthening resources and legislation in this area.

#### AGSI's key points at the Joint Oireachtas Committee meeting:

**Recruitment and Retention:** This remains a significant challenge for An Garda Síochána. Difficulties experienced securing new entrants and retaining members have been frustratingly consistent over the last five years, with numbers hovering either side of the 14,000 mark.

**Operating Model:** A significant portion of AGSI's submission was devoted to the "unworkable" Operating Model implemented by Garda management and government. Adapted from international policing systems, the model has failed to account for Ireland's unique geography and rural-urban dynamics.

Gardaí on the ground report increased administrative burdens, confusing responsibilities, excessive centralisation, and the disappearance of key leadership roles from local areas. Officers report a decline in service quality and visibility, and our members are worried that it's not serving the public well. There's a significant and growing frustration in the AGSI that we are not being listened to.

**Community Policing:** Gardaí permanently assigned to community roles have dropped from 807 in 2015 to just 697 today. Officers in these roles are frequently redeployed to fill gaps in other units, undermining trust-building efforts and local engagement. Community Gardaí interact with all their local community partners such as businesses and residents whilst also engaging with an array of community services.

**Roads Policing:** The Association is calling for a national road safety strategy that blends strong enforcement with public education and cross-agency collaboration. Roads Policing Units (RPU) have seen their numbers drop by 41% over the past 15 years, from 1,046 officers in 2009 to just 620 in 2024. AGSI welcomes increased investment in technology and vehicles, yet issues such as staff abstraction, a lack of enhanced training, and low morale continue to obstruct progress.

In its concluding remarks to the Committee, AGSI warned that without decisive and meaningful reform, Gardaí may struggle to meet the most basic expectations of public safety and community engagement in the years ahead.



Ronan Clogher, AGSI General Secretary, addressed the meeting on 17 June.