

Chapter 3

Garda Síochána

3.1 Maintenance of Garda Vehicles

Outsourcing of Garda Vehicle Maintenance

A consultant's report on Transport Maintenance and Procurement Compliance in An Garda Síochána delivered in July 2002 recommended, *inter alia*, that An Garda Síochána “*outsource the entire maintenance activity including management of the fleet, the contracts and costs, quality service performance management and compliance management to a national service provider or consortium.*”

This recommendation was reiterated in the final report of the Garda Strategic Management Initiative Implementation Steering Group in February 2004. The thrust of these recommendations was that better value for money would be achieved through organising vehicle maintenance in this way.

During the course of audit in Spring 2006, I noted that the repair and maintenance of the Garda fleet, apart from vehicles maintained at the Garda transport garage, was arranged at District level and that this work was generally carried out by main dealers in each District. Competitive tendering did not take place for this maintenance work.

I asked the Accounting Officer why the key recommendation regarding the outsourcing of vehicle maintenance had not yet been implemented.

The Accounting Officer informed me that following the reports on Garda Transport in 2002, the understanding was that a contract for the outsourcing of the maintenance of the entire fleet with the exception of some security vehicles would be put in place sometime in 2003. In light of the complexity of outsourcing the Garda fleet of over 2,000 vehicles, as evidenced by the experience of other Police Forces, it was necessary to engage in lengthy discussions involving the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the consultants who had prepared the report and An Garda Síochána.

Following the consultant's report a process to draft a Request for Tender (RFT) commenced. Due to the ongoing discussions and a variety of technical reasons the RFT was not finalised within the planned timeframe. When all the factors had been considered it was decided that the project would be outsourced using a two-stage process. A pre-qualifying request for information was issued to the market and the responses were currently being evaluated and a RFT would be issued to the qualifying companies shortly.

This project was due to be completed this year and was being undertaken with the expert assistance of consultants.

He added that as the priority of the remaining small cohort of garage staff was to keep the Garda fleet in a roadworthy condition and ensure its maximum operational availability, staff were not available to organise or supervise a maintenance contract.

Maintenance Arrangements

I asked the Accounting Officer if he was satisfied that the arrangements to source vehicle maintenance with local main dealers without competitive tendering was conducive to getting value for money particularly in the Dublin area where there are a number of main dealers for the marques used by the Gardaí. In this regard, I noted that payments in the range €200,000 to €420,000 had been made to some dealers/maintenance firms in the Dublin area in the two years 2004 – 2005.

The Accounting Officer stated that for the vast number of Districts outside of Dublin and possibly Cork, there was no alternative to using the local main dealer. In the absence of a national contract whereby costs for servicing could be negotiated centrally, the local dealer would know that he was the only one capable of preserving the warranty and ensuring the safety of Garda members and the public. Otherwise

vehicles would be absent from their Districts for long periods involving consequential costs in terms of fuel and time.

He noted that due to the wide geographic spread and the requirement to minimize downtime of Garda vehicles the nearest approved/or main dealers were utilized at a local level. He stated however, that as the average age of vehicle in the fleet was under 4 years, the majority was under warranty at any time and for this reason, it was considered essential that main dealers aligned to the particular manufacturers were used to preserve these warranties. This was the reason main dealers were used for scheduled maintenance and in order to ensure that members of An Garda Síochána could carry out their duties in safety and with confidence.

Investigation into Alleged Irregularities

In the course of audit, I became aware that an investigation was underway to establish the facts surrounding allegations of irregularity involving a main dealer in Dublin engaged to maintain some of the Garda fleet.

The Accounting Officer informed me that, in February 2006, the Garda Internal Audit Section conducted a preliminary examination of possible irregularities in the servicing and maintenance of a number of Garda vehicles by a contractor. This examination raised suspicions of improper procedures that may or may not amount to criminal behaviour, including

- Overcharging for labour
- Charging for parts not used
- Using non genuine parts
- Causing loss
- Withholding warranty entitlements.

He said that in the course of the preliminary examination no evidence of criminal behaviour by members of An Garda Síochána or civilian support staff allocated to the Garda Transport Section came to light. In addition, no breaches of discipline in respect of members of An Garda Síochána had been identified to date. As a result of the Garda Internal Audit Section examination, the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation was requested to carry out a full criminal investigation into the matter. This investigation was ongoing.

