

## **NEW GARDA VETTING PROCESS INFORMATION LEAFLET**

### ***Introduction***

In recent years it has become good practice for many organisations who work with children and vulnerable adults to have vetting procedures in place for their staff and volunteer workers. Indeed, in many instances a vetting policy has been a requirement for those organisations which are in receipt of funding through the HSE and other state departments.

However, many organisations have experienced severe difficulties in the past to obtain 'clearance' for their existing and prospective staff members and volunteers.

In some areas it was common practice to get Garda 'clearance' through the local Garda Station. Where 'clearances' could not be obtained by the organisations themselves, sometimes the HSE or other organisations processed applications through their channels.

It is recognised by An Garda that the process as it presented itself was not only cumbersome and very time consuming, most of all it did not achieve the desired level of monitoring and the depths of research that is deemed required to ensure best possible safety and vetting practice. All in all, the situation up until recently was highly unsatisfactory for all parties concerned.

### ***New Garda Vetting Procedures***

The Garda Vetting Unit was decentralised to Thurles in 2007. The Unit has begun to address the difficulties of the process and the shortfalls of the system in the past. They have established a range of new guiding principles in relation to the vetting process. All of the measures are aiming to fulfil the key purpose: to ensure that a worker, either as an employee or volunteer or board /committee member has gone through a proper and comprehensive vetting process. A complete and thorough vetting process is beneficial to all involved. The Garda Vetting Unit has also recognised that it is important that applications are being processed in a speedy manner.

The revised Garda Vetting process will pose a significant challenge to voluntary disability organisations across the country. In order to achieve an improved and higher level in Garda Vetting, DFI, has been advised of the following system changes, which are currently being implemented:

### **The Changes in the Garda Vetting Process**

- The process will be called Garda Vetting. The process will not be referred to as 'Garda Clearance' anymore.

- The Garda Vetting Unit **does not provide** 'clearance for persons to work with children, vulnerable adults or any other capacity'. The function of the Garda Vetting Unit and the new vetting process is to disclose details regarding 'all prosecutions, successful or not, pending or completed, and/or convictions'
- Registered organisations must make their own decisions in relation to suitability or otherwise of prospective employees, students or volunteers. The function of the Garda Vetting Unit extends solely to the provision of disclosure to an organisation.
- In future all applications will have to be channelled through an 'Authorised Signatory'. The role of the 'Authorised Signatory' is described below.
- Whilst it is still common practice, in future the HSE will **NOT** be able to process applications on behalf of voluntary organisations anymore. This change of the current system to the new system will take place gradually.
- Applications can only be made through the 'Authorised Signatories'. It will **NOT** be possible anymore to go through a local Garda Station or to directly contact the Garda Vetting Unit in Thurles. For administrative reasons, the number of 'Authorised Signatories' will be strictly limited to ensure that the overall process does not become overloaded.
- The new Garda Vetting process is the only valid and recognised system in the state. Staff and volunteers 'cleared' under the old system will have to be re-vetted over time.

### ***Authorised Signatories***

Application to the Garda Vetting Unit can only be made by an 'Authorised Signatory'. Organisations which have a large work force (employees & volunteers combined) may qualify to have an authorised signatory for themselves. It is anticipated that an organisation qualifying for their own 'Authorised Signatories' will have a combined volunteer and employee workforce in excess of a few hundred staff. Other smaller organisations will have to access an 'Authorised Signatory' through another mechanism such as Garda Vetting Networks of DFI members.

### ***Management of Garda Vetting Applications***

- All 'Authorised Signatories' are trained by the Garda Vetting Unit in the management of Vetting applications and disclosures. Following training they are registered with the unit and given a registered number and security password.
- The 'Authorised Signatory' is the liaison person between the requesting organisation and the Garda Vetting Unit.
- All application forms are validated by the 'Authorised Signatory' and are submitted **ONLY** by them to the Garda Vetting Unit.

- Applications will not be processed if submitted by any other party than the registered 'Authorised Signatory'.
- Details of individual applications will not be communicated with any unauthorised person.
- All disclosures are made in writing to the 'Authorised Signatory' and to no other person or organisation.

### ***What does all that mean for voluntary disability organisations?***

Obtaining Garda Vetting for employees and volunteers of an organisation is vital for the safety of children and vulnerable adults. Therefore it is critical that all organisations put in place a comprehensive vetting policy. Failure to implement appropriate measures may have detrimental effects on the organisation in future (e.g. liability issues, claims against the company and its directors, breach of contractual obligations, etc.)

Any Vetting Policy has to be comprehensive, which means that vetting has to be extended in time to all employees, voluntary workers and board / committee members without exception.

All of the above pose a significant challenge to many disability organisations. In addition to some organisational hurdles, it should also be noted that there may also be some cost implications for organisations.

### ***Next Steps***

As outlined above, individual 'Authorised Signatories' will only be allocated to larger disability organisations. All other organisations will have to go through other qualifying mechanisms.