

Press release 27 July 2007

Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission launches its first “public interest” investigation

The Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission has decided that it is desirable, in the public interest, to investigate the circumstances surrounding the death of Mr. Terence Wheelock on 16th September 2005. The Wheelock family has been informed of this decision.

Mr. Wheelock was found hanging in his cell at Store Street Garda Station, Dublin on 2nd June, 2005 and a cord from his clothing had been used as the ligature.

Terms of Reference

“The Garda Ombudsman takes the view that it is necessary to investigate any possibility of any failure by any member of the Garda Síochána in allowing for the presence of the cord / ligature in the cell and any act or omission by member(s) surrounding Mr. Wheelock’s arrest and detention that may have contributed to the death of Mr Wheelock.”

This investigation will be the first one commenced by the Ombudsman Commission under Section 102 (4) of the Garda Síochána Act, 2005, which is the section that allows for investigations “ in the public interest” without the necessity to have received a complaint regarding Garda conduct.

Senior Investigating Officer Mr. Brian Doherty has been appointed to lead the investigation. The team numbers may fluctuate in response to requirements that may arise in the course of the investigation. It is likely that this investigation will be carried out using powers allocated to the Garda Ombudsman under section 98 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005.

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Note 1

Significant Events relating to the case

- 2nd June 2005** Arrest of Mr. Terence Wheelock , following which he is found unconscious in a cell in Store Street Garda Station and transferred to the Mater Hospital
- 16th September 2005** Terence Wheelock dies.
- 19th September 2005** It is widely reported by the press that the Wheelock family are seeking an independent public inquiry into the death of Mr. Wheelock
- February 2006** Following an internal Garda inquiry a file on the matter is sent to the DPP. The DPP directed that there was to be no prosecution.
- 17th February 2006** Inquest into the death opens and the Wheelock family through their solicitor, request that Terence's personal belongings be made available for independent forensic testing.
- August 2006** It is indicated that following agreement an independent Forensic Team from the UK will carry out testing on Terence's clothes and the full inquest is set for November 2006
- 20th November 2006** Dublin City Coroner Inquest opens. It is adjourned on 22nd November, 2006 to allow the State Pathologist view photos of the deceased.
- 15th December 2006** Inquests re-opens and following a brief mention is adjourned until 30th May 2007.
- 13th July, 2007** The inquest finishes and the jury cannot unanimously agree on a verdict. A majority of 4:3 return a verdict of death by suicide. They also make recommendations including the installation of CCTV in all cells in Garda Stations.
- 27th July 2007** The Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission launches an investigation, in the public interest, into the circumstances surrounding the death of Mr. Terence Wheelock .

Note 2

The Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission is an independent statutory body. It was established under the Garda Síochána Act 2005.

The Ombudsman Commission, under the Act, is required and empowered to:

- Directly and independently investigate complaints against members of the Garda Síochána;
- Investigate any matter, even where no complaint has been made, where it appears that a Garda may have committed an offence or behaved in a way that would justify disciplinary proceedings;
- Investigate any practice, policy or procedure of the Garda Síochána with a view to reducing the incidence of related complaints.

The Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission will provide an independent and effective civilian oversight of policing. It will deal with the public's complaints concerning Gardaí fairly and efficiently so that everyone can have confidence in the complaints system.

ENDS