

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

10 November 2017 – 17 November 2017



Northern Ireland
Assembly

The Northern Ireland Assembly was dissolved at 00:01 on Thursday 26 January 2017.



Wednesday 15 November 2017

Department of Justice and Equality

Niamh Smyth asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the reason the rural border Garda division particularly in counties Cavan and Monaghan is being starved of Garda resources in view of the fact that in 2010 it had 413 members and that the number in 2017 is at 330 members; if Garda personnel in this area will be increased; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Charles Flanagan: As the Deputy will be aware, the severe economic crisis in Ireland led to the closure of the Garda College in Templemore in 2010 when a moratorium of Garda recruitment was also imposed by the then Government. The Government that came into power in 2011 had to first stabilise the public finances, bring the State to the position where we could exit the bailout, and then steer the economy into growth. As the Deputy will be aware, in recent years, the country has had the fastest growing economy in the EU. As a consequence of the recovery, the Government re-opened the Garda College at the first available opportunity and began an ambitious recruitment campaign.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, close to 1,400 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide, 33 of whom have been assigned to the Cavan/Monaghan Division. In addition, another 200 trainee Garda are scheduled to attest later this year which will see Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, increase to around the 13,500 mark by year end - an increase of 500 since the end of 2016.

This Government is committed to ensuring a strong and visible police presence throughout the country in order to maintain and strengthen community engagement, provide reassurance to citizens and to deter crime. The substantial increase in Garda numbers is tangible progress on achieving this Government's vision of an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians.

I am pleased to say that Budget 2018 will support the continuation of this high level of investment in the Garda workforce and ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. A further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College, an additional 500 civilians will also be recruited to fill critical skills gaps across the organisation and to facilitate the redeployment of Gardaí from administrative and technical duties to front-line operational duties. There are plans to strengthen the Garda Reserve with new Reserves expected to commence training early in 2018.

We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Garda Division, including the Cavan/Monaghan Division, in the coming years.

This investment in personnel is complemented by substantial investment in resources across the board for An Garda Síochána. Some €330 million, including €205 million under the Capital Plan, is being invested in Garda ICT infrastructure over the period 2016 to 2021.

The Capital Plan 2016 – 2021 provides for an investment of €46 million the Garda fleet to ensure that An Garda Síochána has a modern, effective and fit for purpose fleet. This is in addition to the investment of almost €30 million in the period 2013 to 2015. In the period 2013 to end of 2017 almost €44 million will have been invested in the fleet with some 2,000 vehicles coming on stream in that period.

This investment in resources will facilitate the provision of more effective policing services and I expect that the Cavan/Monaghan Division, like all other Garda Divisions will benefit from these new resources becoming available.

The Deputy will be aware that it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and Districts and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. I am assured by the Commissioner that the allocation of Gardaí is continually monitored and reviewed taking into account all relevant factors including crime trends, demographics, and security assessments relating to the area in question so as to ensure optimal use is made of Garda human resources.

I am informed by the Commissioner that on the 30 September 2017 the latest date for which figures are readily available the strength of the Cavan/Monaghan Division was 321 compared to 397 in

2010. There are also 12 Garda Reserves and 38 civilians attached to the Division. When appropriate, the work of local Gardaí is supported by a number of Garda national units such as the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

The Deputy will also be aware that there is close and ongoing cooperation between An Garda Síochána and the PSNI on all aspects of policing, with a particular focus on combatting security threats and cross-border crime. The Garda Commissioner and the Chief Constable of the PSNI, who are responsible for operational policing cooperation, have repeatedly emphasised the scope and the value of the close and high quality cooperation between the two police services in combating crime, protecting community safety and saving lives. The two police services operate a joint Cross-Border Policing Strategy which has as its aims to improve public safety throughout Ireland, to disrupt criminal activity and to enhance the policing capability of both police services on the island.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-11-15a.295&s=cross-border+2017-11-10..2017-11-17#g297.r>

Thursday 16 November 2017

Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport

Robert Troy asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the status of his Department's review of cross-border SPSV operations.

Shane Ross: As the Deputy is aware, in order to carry persons for hire and reward, the Taxi Regulation Act 2013 requires the holding of a small public service vehicle (SPSV) licence and a SPSV driver licence. These requirements only apply to services if and when they are provided in the State. The 2013 Act does not provide for such services to be delivered on a cross border basis. The legislative position is similar in Northern Ireland.

As a result, under current legislation, if a SPSV operator wishes to operate cross-border taxi services, they would have to apply for and obtain licences in both the North and the South.

Accordingly, and to ensure that cross border taxi services can be legally facilitated and appropriately regulated, it has been decided that primary legislation will be needed in both jurisdictions, on a reciprocal basis, to provide for the exempting of particular requirements on licenced taxi operators in respect of certain cross-border services, subject to specified conditions. This approach was agreed, last year, between myself and the Minister for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland at that time, Chris Hazzard.

My Department is committed to developing the necessary legislative changes, which will require Government approval in due course. However, any changes to the Taxi Regulation Act 2013 can only be progressed and ultimately enacted, in parallel with reciprocal legislative changes being introduced by the Northern Executive.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-11-16a.589&s=cross-border+2017-11-10..2017-11-17#g590.q>

Thursday 16 November 2017

Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation

Niall Collins asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation her views on the latest InterTradeIreland report which shows that 19 out of 20 businesses do not have a plan to deal with Brexit.

Frances Fitzgerald: Brexit will clearly present a number of different challenges for Irish businesses. An added complexity is that the uncertainty surrounding the precise nature of the UK's future relationship with the EU makes planning and preparing for Brexit all the more difficult for companies here. This is partly why many businesses do not yet have detailed Brexit contingency plans in place.

My Department and its enterprise agencies are focused, however, on assisting companies to prepare for the UK's withdrawal from the EU. This includes efforts to build awareness of particular and sector-specific challenges that Brexit is likely to pose. Much of our broader work so far to help mitigate the impact of Brexit on Irish firms is captured in my Department's recently published response paper to the UK's impending exit from the EU, entitled "Building Stronger Business - Responding to Brexit by Competing, Innovating and Trading". This paper summarises the policy measures already taken, outlines future initiatives we intend to take forward and details the steps the Department has taken already to ensure that we can work as efficiently as possible to support our companies.

Our State Agencies have also been very active themselves in taking forward projects aimed at helping businesses in Ireland prepare for the post-Brexit commercial environment. InterTrade Ireland, for example, has introduced a scheme to help SMEs avail of expert advice on Brexit. It has also been working hard to raise awareness of the particular challenges Brexit may present for cross-border trade.

Enterprise Ireland, meanwhile, has launched a "Brexit SME Scorecard" - effectively a new interactive platform which can be used by Irish companies to self-assess their exposure to Brexit. The Agency has also introduced a "Be Prepared Grant" that helps SME clients meet the costs of implementing a plan to mitigate risks arising from Brexit. Furthermore, the Local Enterprise Office Network are hosting information events around the country aimed at helping companies plan for Brexit.

While progress has been made in helping many different businesses prepare, we know much more work remains to be done. That is why we will remain absolutely focused on our Brexit-related initiatives and will continue to explore new avenues and means of helping our companies plan for the future.

Source <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-11-16a.118&s=cross-border+2017-11-10..2017-11-17#g120.r>