

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

4 May 2018 – 11 May 2018



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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



Thursday 10 May 2018

Department of Justice and Equality

Pat Gallagher asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality the Garda numbers within the Donegal division; the increase in those numbers in each year since 2014; if further provision has been made for the remainder of 2018 for increasing Garda numbers particularly in the context of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Simon Harris: As the Deputy will appreciate, it is the Garda Commissioner who is responsible for the distribution of resources, including personnel, among the various Garda Divisions and I, as Minister, have no direct role in the matter. Garda management keeps this distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities so as to ensure that the optimum use is made of these resources.

I am informed by the Garda Commissioner that, as of the 31 March 2018, the latest date for which figures are available, the strength of the Donegal Division was 388. There are also 14 Garda Reserves and 36 Garda civilian staff attached to the Donegal 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 Armed Support Units, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau.

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. To achieve this the Government has put in place a plan for an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021 comprising 15,000 Garda members, 2,000 Reserve members and 4,000 civilians. We are making real, tangible progress on achieving this goal.

Since the reopening of the Garda College in September 2014, just under 1,800 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána and have been assigned to mainstream duties nationwide. 32 members of this cohort have been assigned to the Donegal Division. Garda numbers, taking account of retirements, increased to 13,551 at the end of 2017 – a net increase of over 600 since the end of 2016.

I am pleased that funding is in place to maintain this high level of investment in the Garda workforce to ensure that the vision of an overall workforce of 21,000 by 2021 remains on track. This year a further 800 new Garda Recruits will enter the Garda College; some 400 of whom have already done so. In total, 800 Garda trainees are scheduled to attest during the year, some 200 of whom attested in March. Further, Garda numbers, taking account of projected retirements, are on track to reach 14,000 by the end of this year.

In addition, a further 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 in 2018.

This focus on investment in personnel is critical. The moratorium on recruitment introduced in 2010 resulted in a significant reduction in the strength of An Garda Síochána. We are now rebuilding the organisation and providing the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí across every Division, including the Donegal Division.

I am advised by the Commissioner that the allocation of resources is been kept under constant review in line with operational and security demands including any possible policing requirements post Brexit.

I am further advised that An Garda Síochána is acutely aware of the ongoing complex negotiations regarding Brexit and is committed to ensuring the organisation is prepared for all possible outcomes and any possible policing implications and challenges arising. I understand that a high level team composed of managers from across the organisation has been established by the Commissioner and that scoping exercises in anticipation of Brexit have been conducted by An Garda Síochána.

My Department is engaged on an ongoing basis with An Garda Síochána as part of the deep and detailed work being undertaken right across Government and the public sector in response to the UK decision to leave the EU. Furthermore, An Garda Síochána is represented at a senior level in the ongoing discussions between my Department and the UK Home Office in relation to the operation of the Common Travel Area.

The Deputy will 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 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.

I would also point to the Annual Cross Border Conference on Organised Crime and the Biennial Cross Border Organised Crime Threat Assessment, jointly produced by An Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). The conference provides the opportunity to assess and address changing trends in crime, and to build upon and enhance the operational actions already being undertaken. The Threat Assessment provides an insight into organised criminal activity on both sides of the border together with an assessment of the cross border nature of such criminality. All of this serves to inform operational strategies and resource allocation decisions.

I am confident that this cooperation will continue post Brexit and I and my officials are in regular contact with counterparts in the UK and with the EU Commission to ensure that crime and security cooperation along the border is not undermined by Brexit. In its approach to the Brexit negotiations, the Government has ensured that a very high priority has been given to protecting the gains of the Peace Process and the avoidance of a hard border - nationally and by our partner Member States and by the EU Commission.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2018-05-10a.305&s=cross-border+2018-05-04..2018-05-11#g307.r>

Thursday 10 May 2018

Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment

Lisa Chambers asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on the recent visit of Mr. Michel Barnier here; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Paschal Donohoe: The EU's Chief Negotiator for the Article 50 negotiations, Michel Barnier, attended the All-Island Civic Dialogue in Dundalk on 30 April. Mr Barnier's visit was yet another demonstration of the EU's continued steadfast support for Ireland and commitment to addressing our specific concerns in the Brexit negotiations.

Mr Barnier delivered the keynote address to the All-Island Civic Dialogue and met with a range of individuals and groups in attendance. His participation over lunch in a meeting of the Brexit Stakeholder Forum, which I hosted, was particularly welcomed and useful. The Taoiseach and I also had a bilateral meeting with Mr Barnier in advance of his address to the All-Island Civic Dialogue. Our meeting offered an opportunity to take stock of the current state of play in the negotiations on both

the future relationship and the draft Withdrawal Agreement, including progress on the draft Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland.

There was agreement at the meeting that significantly more progress is needed on the Protocol, including the backstop on avoiding a hard border, ahead of the June meeting of the European Council. Recalling the European Council Guidelines of 23 March 2018 and the principles that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed and that negotiations can only progress as long as all commitments undertaken so far are respected in full, there was also agreement that there can be no Withdrawal Agreement without a satisfactory agreement on the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2018-05-10a.160&s=all-island+2018-05-04..2018-05-11#g162.r>