
For Written Answer on : 06/09/2019
Question Number(s): 679,677,678 Question Reference(s): 36541/19, 36539/19, 36540/19
Department: Justice and Equality
Asked by: Brendan Smith T.D.

QUESTION

* To ask the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the need to provide additional staffing resources to the Border region in 2020 in view of the adverse impacts of Brexit and the unique policing demands on Garda Border divisions; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
- Brendan Smith T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Friday, 6 September, 2019.

* To ask the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the need to provide additional staffing resources to the Border region for the remainder of 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
- Brendan Smith T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Friday, 6 September, 2019.

* To ask the Minister for Justice and Equality his views on the need to provide additional staffing resources to the Border region in 2020 in view of the adverse impacts of Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
- Brendan Smith T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Friday, 6 September, 2019.

REPLY

The Garda Commissioner has responsibility for managing An Garda Síochána and for the allocation of Garda resources, in light of identified operational demands. This includes responsibility for the manner in which Gardaí are deployed. As Minister I have no direct role in that matters. I understand however that Garda management keeps the distribution of resources under continual review in the context of crime trends and policing priorities, to ensure their optimum use.

In common with all Government Departments and State Agencies, An Garda Síochána has been preparing for Brexit and there is ongoing engagement between senior Garda management and my Department in this regard. Preparation has had a wide-ranging focus on operational requirements, including personnel, infrastructure and technology. I know the Commissioner is committed to ensuring the organisation can deal with any policing challenges arising from Brexit though clearly the circumstances which may arise are dependant on the political settlement.

As the Deputy will appreciate, policing in the border region has always presented particular challenges and this can be expected to increase in the context of Brexit. It is also the case

that violent dissident republican groups continue to seek to frustrate counter-terrorism efforts and organised criminals seek to exploit the two jurisdictions in order to try to evade detection.

The 2018 Cross-Border Threat Assessment prepared jointly by An Garda Síochána and the PSNI estimated that some 43 per cent of organised crime gangs in Northern Ireland have a cross-border dimension. Likewise, mobile organised crime groups, responsible for multiple instances of domestic burglary, operate on an all-island basis. There are increasing instances of borderless crimes such as cyber fraud and international terrorism.

The success of cross border policing actions is grounded in the recognition that the best means of combatting the threat to our communities is to maintain and enhance the excellent levels of cooperation between law enforcement agencies north and south of the border. The Gardaí and PSNI, along with other agencies, have worked together closely for many years and enjoy an excellent working relationship and co-operation at all levels.

The Fresh Start Agreement recognised this and led to the establishment of Joint Agency Investigation Teams which have had considerable success in combatting this type of crime. I understand this is also the context for the Commissioner's operational decision to establish an additional Armed Support Unit in Cavan.

As the Deputy may be aware, Garda Armed Support Units provide a rapid armed response capacity and capability on a regional basis. Members of the ASUs are highly trained and equipped with a variety of non-lethal and lethal weapons and perform high visibility armed checkpoints and patrols throughout their respective Regions. ASU's are already based in Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal and Dundalk, Co. Louth in the Northern Region.

I would also point out that An Garda Síochána is a growing organisation. We currently have over 14,200 Gardaí nationwide, supported by over 2,600 Garda staff. And as part of the Government's plan to achieve an overall Garda workforce of 21,000 personnel by 2021, there is ongoing and increased recruitment both of new Gardaí as well as Garda staff, allowing for redeployment of Gardaí to operational duties at the front-line. Since the reopening of the Garda Training College in 2014, approximately 2,800 new Garda members have attested and been assigned to frontline policing duties in communities throughout the country. Another 200 probationer Gardaí are due to attest by the end of this year. Further, the Garda Commissioner's decision to recruit a net 600 Garda staff in 2019 will allow for the redeployment of approximately 500 experienced Gardaí to frontline and visible policing duties by the end of this year.

As part of this overall increase, additional Garda resources have been deployed to border areas in recent months and this process is continuing. I am advised by the Commissioner that the strength of the Northern Region as on 31 July, the latest date for which figures are currently available, was 1,494 Gardaí. There are 56 Garda Reserves and 150 Garda civilian staff attached to the Northern Region. An additional 50 Gardaí were assigned to the region from the last attestation on 7 June 2019. In total, there are now more than 150 additional Gardaí deployed in the Northern Region compared to the position at the end of 2017.

The increased resources coming on stream have also provided the capacity to expand the specialist bureaus including the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau and the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime

Bureau, all of which are particularly active in the Northern Region in addition to the Armed Support Units.

The ongoing recruitment will provide the Commissioner with the resources needed to deploy increasing numbers of Gardaí to deliver a visible, effective and responsive policing service. These requirements will be kept under ongoing review by Garda management with a view to addressing any policing requirements for the Border region which may arise. In the event that a “no deal” Brexit gives rise to additional requirements in border areas, further resources can and will be provided through redeployment.