

Check against delivery

Topical Issue Debate.

Dáil Éireann, Alan Shatter T.D., Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence

28th September 2011

I would like to thank the Deputies for raising these matters. In particular, it provides me with an opportunity to address the position in relation to the important topics the Deputies have highlighted.

The Deputies will be aware that, under plans agreed by the previous Government as part of its compliance with the terms of the EU-IMF agreement, Garda numbers are to be reduced to 13,500 by the end of this year and by a further 500 to 13,000 by 2014.

This is a situation the Government has inherited and it is not of its making. In that framework the reduction in Garda numbers is inextricably linked to the extremely difficult economic conditions facing the country. At the same time, however, I can assure the Deputies, and the House, that it is a priority for the Government to maintain Garda frontline services at the highest level possible.

In the circumstances it is entirely appropriate that the Garda Commissioner should carry out a review of An Garda Síochána's capacity to operate with reduced resources. In this context the Commissioner has indicated that, in conjunction with his senior management team, he is undertaking such a review. Additionally, he has confirmed

that his primary focus in the review will be to ensure that Garda resources are managed and deployed in the most appropriate manner to meet existing and emerging policing requirements.

The Garda Commissioner's review will examine all aspects of current policing, including the deployment of personnel, the utilisation of

modern technologies and the operation of Garda stations. Clearly an examination of the opening hours, and in some cases the viability, of stations will form part of this. These are important operational issues which must be addressed by those best placed to make informed decisions based on a professional assessment of how best to meet the policing needs of the country as a whole.

The closure of some Garda stations will be a question that the Garda Commissioner will have to address as part of the review process. In that connection he will have to consider whether, in appropriate cases, a better policing service could be delivered to a local community by having Garda members out on patrol rather than in a station.

That being said, I wish to make it fully clear, at this juncture, that no decisions have been made in relation to the closure of Garda stations. I am looking forward to receiving the Commissioner's proposals which will be directed towards maximising Garda efficiency as well as prioritising the resources available for operational front-line policing.

The Deputies have also raised the issue of the replacement of senior officers who retire from the Force. With regard to the level of senior positions, the situation is that a Minister can, in appropriate circumstances, seek a derogation from the moratorium on public service appointments from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and then request the Government to appoint suitable candidates to such positions. Indeed, through that process, in March of this year, I obtained sanction for the filling of senior Garda posts. These included a Deputy Commissioner and an Assistant Commissioner.

Before I conclude I would like to pay tribute to the Garda Síochána along with the commitment and the professionalism they display in carrying out their duties.

I am confident that the Garda Force will continue to maintain the confidence of the public and operate successfully as it has been doing so effectively since the foundation of the State.