

# Written Ministerial Statement

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## Department of Justice

### MINISTERIAL MEETING HELD UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE INTER-GOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENT ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE CO-OPERATION (IGA)

*Published on Thursday 27 October 2022.*

**Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice):** This statement is to provide an update on a Ministerial meeting held under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Co-operation on Criminal Justice Matters (IGA), which was held virtually on Wednesday 19 October 2022. I attended the meeting along with Minister Helen McEntee, the Minister of Justice, Ireland.

This was the fourth formal IGA Ministerial meeting I have attended and, as I have previously said, I am committed to keeping colleagues informed of the important work being carried out under the auspices of the IGA. Unfortunately, given the current suspension of the institutions, I am doing so via this Written Statement, rather than the usual Oral Statement.

Cross-border co-operation on justice matters is vital to both of our jurisdictions. It is essential, therefore, that there is limited disruption to the valuable work that is being carried out under the auspices of the IGA regardless of the challenging political situation we are facing in Northern Ireland. I wish to assure colleagues, in the absence of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, work at official level and the cooperation between law enforcement partners will continue unabated.

The meeting on 19 October provided Minister McEntee and myself with the opportunity to review progress against the agreed work programme for 2021 to 2023. A copy of the Work Programme 2021-23 can be found in the Assembly Library.

I would like to put on record my thanks to all the members of the five Project Advisory Groups who have continued to deliver positive collaborative work and information sharing on a wide range of extremely important issues.

The **Public Protection** Group have plans in place to hold three seminars on the topics of hate crime, staff wellbeing and human trafficking awareness. The Probation Board for Northern Ireland are currently conducting research on human trafficking and exploitation and will share findings and learning with the partners when it is complete.

The **Support for Victims** Group have been sharing information in relation to registered intermediaries schemes, which has resulted in better support being provided for vulnerable adults in the justice system on a cross-jurisdictional basis.

The **Forensic Science** Group have continued to engage and share information around best practices and have had joint training opportunities on handwriting analysis. Quarterly meetings to discuss drugs trends and toxicology continue.

There has been good co-operation and progress between PSNI and An Garda Síochána as they work closely together within the **Criminal Justice and Social Diversity** group. A Seminar has been arranged to look at the areas of hate crime and the recording of non-crime hate incidents and associated challenges.

The **Youth Justice** group have been cooperating on a range of issues including information exchange on the Strategic Framework for Youth Justice (NI) and the implementation of Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027 (Ireland).

## **Joint Agency Task Force**

The Joint Agency Task Force (JAFT), instituted under the Fresh Start Agreement, and which is led by senior law enforcement officers on both sides of the border, provided a written update.

There continue to be high levels of co-operation and operational activity between all the various law enforcement agencies involved in tackling the six priority areas which are Rural Crime, Drugs, Trafficking in Human Beings including Children, Immigration Crime, Financial Crime and Excise Fraud. Cross-border operations during this reporting period have included days of action tackling rural crime, ATM thefts, human trafficking and organised immigration crime, drugs and excise fraud. The most recent publication from the Joint Agency Task Force can be found in the Assembly library.

The Joint Agency Task Force is adding value and producing results through this continued collaboration. The impact of this work in disrupting organised crime gangs and making our communities safer is very impressive and I am very grateful to all those involved both in providing the strategic direction but also the operational cooperation on which that success is based.