

# 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 at 2pm on Friday 22 May 2026*

**Mrs Long (The Minister of Justice):** This statement is to provide an update on a Ministerial meeting on Friday 8 May 2026 held under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Co-operation on Criminal Justice Matters (IGA), which was established on 26 July 2005. The IGA allows for the Ministers of the Northern Ireland Executive and the Government of Ireland responsible for criminal justice matters to meet at least annually to facilitate effective co-operation and co-ordination on criminal justice matters. It is not an accountability mechanism; rather, it allows for enhanced cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

The Ministerial meeting was held in person at Armagh Court House. I attended the meeting along with Jim O'Callaghan, Minister of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration.

At the meeting, Minister O'Callaghan and I formally closed the 2023- 2025 IGA Work Plan and signed off a new work plan to run from January 2026-January 2028. This is attached at **Annex A**. I would usually provide members with an oral update on activity undertaken under the Work Plan; however, as we are still at a very early stage in the new reporting period, I consider there is greater value at this point in members reviewing the Work Plan itself. An oral update will be provided on completion of the first year of activity.

As ever, I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to the members of the five Project Advisory Groups for their continued commitment to, and collaboration on, areas of shared priority across both jurisdictions.

The **Public Protection** Group work centres on collaborative responses to emerging challenges, cross border seminars, research activity and leadership development.

The **Support for Victims** Group will continue to prioritise domestic abuse, sexual violence, human trafficking and Domestic Homicide Reviews, with further joint learning events and operational cooperation planned.

The **Forensic Science** Group priorities including joint strategic planning, business continuity support, knowledge exchange and collaboration on capital projects, alongside continued participation in European networks and the UNLOCK training programme.

The **Criminal Justice and Social Diversity Group** is strengthening cooperation to address hate crime, protect minority communities and improve responses to radicalisation, violent extremism and Paramilitarism.

The Youth Justice Group is focused on early intervention, diversion, bail support and addressing harmful attitudes and behaviours informed by the Stable Lives, Safer Streets joint research project funded by the Shared Island Initiative.

Further, the Joint Agency Task Force (JATF), which was instituted under the Fresh Start Agreement and which is led by senior law enforcement officers on both sides of the border, with the objective of working collectively to tackle cross-jurisdictional organised crime within existing operational frameworks. As per the terms of the Fresh Start Agreement, the JATF is required to report on its

operations to the Ministerial meetings under the IGA. Whilst the Department of Justice is not operationally responsible for the JATF, I see value in reporting the positive collaborative work of the JATF and its many successful operations. A copy of the 19th JATF report is at **Annex B**.

The 19th JATF report highlights continued strong cross-border cooperation between law enforcement partners in tackling serious and organised crime. The Task Force remains a highly effective framework for intelligence sharing, coordinated operational activity and overcoming jurisdictional barriers. Key findings of the 19th JATF report include:

- Ongoing disruptions of organised crime groups exploiting the Common Travel Areas.
- The continued prevalence of rural crime, particularly burglaries and theft, driven by organised crime groups exploiting the border.
- Significant drug trafficking activity, particularly cocaine and cannabis and record-level seizures such as the largest cocaine seizure in Northern Ireland (185Kgs in May 2025)
- The increasing complexity in financial crime, with growth in online fraud and complex cross jurisdictional investigations.
- Challenges law enforcement is facing in tackling human trafficking cases, particularly victim engagement and online exploitation.
- Continued threat from excise fraud, including illicit fuel, alcohol and tobacco supply chain.

Although organised crime groups continue to evolve, the report highlights the ongoing commitment of law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border, which has been effective in disrupting their activities. I am very grateful to the JATF for its continued commitment to protecting our communities from harm.

Naomi Long MLA  
Minister of Justice