

DF CHIEF OF STAFF OPENING STATEMENT:

JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE – 26 SEP 2023

Ar an gcéad dul síos, mar Cheann Foirne Óglaigh na hÉireann, ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le baill an choiste as ucht an cuireadh chun labhairt libh ar chursaí a bhaineann le, agus tosaíochtaí, Óglaigh na hÉireann. Táim ag tnúth go mór le caidreamh dearfach libh agus le sibh a chuir ar an eolas faoi na hábhair atá faoi mo chúram.

As Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces, may I commence by thanking the members of the Committee again for the invitation and opportunity to address you once more. I've noted the key areas that you have outlined in your letter of invitation and I will address some of those issues here in my opening remarks but also in our later engagement.

For the purposes of this session, and to state for the record, I am accompanied this afternoon by Brigadier General Rossa Mulcahy (to my left), who is my Assistant Chief of Staff.

Regarding the **Working Time Directive**, the members will recall from my last appearance that I stated then that the decision on its implementation for the Defence Forces were welcome. I am pleased to report that there has been some very meaningful engagement between the Department, Military Management and the Representative Associations in the interim and that has been followed by further bilateral engagements between Military Management and the respective Representative Associations. The intent of those discussions was to allow all stakeholders to establish defined positions and to consider additional protections in order to accurately inform policy advices to An Tánaiste. The Defence Forces Board (DFB) recommendations have been submitted to the Department and discussions are ongoing in relation to this submission

The DFB understands and accepts that there will be a cost in terms of the availability of human resources for our Units and Formations arising from WTD implementation. But I'm confident that we can collectively and successfully address those challenges in the fullness of time.

Concerning our **Transformation Agenda**, at our last appearance I addressed the government approved recommendations of the Commission on the Defence Forces. In the intervening period the IRG-DF Report has been published and those recommendations have also been accepted for implementation. I am also happy to report that I have welcomed two new civilian

members onto the Defence Forces Board, namely the Head of Transformation, who arrived in June, and the Head of Strategic HR, who arrived in early September. Both of those appointees will play a key role in delivering on our ambitions.

Governance and oversight structures have been established and introduced and the Detailed Implementation Plan is close to being finalised. But there has already been significant progress in some key areas. Over 95% of the early actions identified in the High Level Action Plan have been successfully completed. The Defence Forces have developed a new Vision for the Future Force to be approved by An Tánaiste and we have a clear view on the wider implementation of projects to deliver key outcomes over the next eighteen months. I have met with the External Oversight Board (EOB) on two occasions and the DF Women's Network also attended on 18 September. Further monthly meetings and engagements with the EOB are scheduled for October, November and December. In recognising the increasing volume and scope of staff support that will now be required to be provided by the Defence Forces to progress the work of both the EOB and the proposed statutory Tribunal Inquiry, I have sought sanction for additional staff resources to assist and sustain that effort.

On **recruitment and retention**, the members of this Committee will be very cognisant of the human resource difficulties that the Defence Forces have, and are experiencing, in this space across all three Military Services.

Our recruitment strategy analysis directed a focus on delivering improvements across 4 principal recruitment themes, namely:

- (1) expanding our induction pools so that more people apply;
- (2) enhancing our marketing tools to engage our target audience;
- (3) optimising our selection and induction methodologies to remove potential obstacles to application; and
- (4) maximising our retention rates for those who are inducted to ensure that they 'stay the course' in training.

To date in 2023, we have inducted 244 general service recruits, 18 of which are female, representing 7.3% of the total inducted. We have also inducted an additional 11 specialists and are planning to induct 60 Cadets this year (10 female representing 16%). We are also progressing competitions for additional medical (3) and dental officers' (1) capacity, a pharmacist and 10-12 instrumentalists. Overall, the projected figure for PDF inductions for

2023 is circa 400 - 425. To note, we have only inducted 20 personnel onto the Reserve, 25% of which are female but the Reserve Recruitment portal is re-opening in October and this will result in increased levels of induction.

To address the **Gender perspective**, I can report that the total number of females serving in the Defence Forces today is 549 Whole Time Equivalents, representing 7% of the total force.

In terms of new applications to join the Defence Forces, you will appreciate that we have a rolling General Service recruitment model, so the numbers are constantly changing and percentage figures provided are rounded up or down as appropriate. In mid-August there was a total of 4694 expressions of interest to join, 13% of which were female (552). Circa 43% of those expressing an interest initially did not continue to engage with the application process.

- Of the remaining eligible applicants 2335 presented to do the Psychometric test, 10% of that number were female (256). Note: NS applicants are no longer required to do a psychometric test under a pilot scheme ongoing.
- 59% of applicants passed the psychometric test, (1378 personnel), and again 10% of that number were female (143).
- Of those applicants who continued to engage in the process after the psychometric tests 1066 were invited fitness tests and interview. 10% of those invited were female (106).
- 40% of applicants (373) did not show for the interview / fitness test day. 14% of that figure were female (51).
- Only 6% of applicants (35) failed the fitness test and 7 of those were female.
- To date, 374 applicants have been called to undergo the medical examination. 6% (23) have failed the medical examination, only 2 of which were female.
- The process is ongoing and continuous as the Defence Forces have introduced a year-long rolling induction offer.

In terms of personnel exiting the Defence Forces to date, we have a total exit figure of 481 in 2023 (Officers 53 – 42 voluntary, 5 female; Enlisted Ranks 428 – 307 voluntary, 26 female). Many aspects of military service have the potential to influence retention rates, including, career opportunities, remuneration, intensity of training and operational missions, work-life

balance considerations, and infrastructure and equipment developments. The ongoing transformation programme goes to the heart of these influencing factors as we seek to improve an individual's work-life balance, career development and cultural and working experience. We are investing considerably in new infrastructure; we have drawn down some of our overseas deployments; We are developing remote working practices and blended learning programmes to reduce the travelling burden; we have submitted proposals to the Department/Minister on extending mandatory retirement ages. These types of initiatives, form the cornerstone of our retention strategy and will define the total package for those who continue to serve.

I thank the Chairman for giving me the opportunity to address the committee and I am happy to take any questions that you may have within my scope and area of responsibility.

Go raimh míle maith agaibh.