

Tullamore Tribune

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140 gardai in County Offaly

There are now only 140 gardaí in County Offaly while in 2010, before the recruitment process began, there were 148, Deputy Barry Cowen told the Dáil.

Speaking during a debate on rural crime, he said there is a pressing need for improved Garda resources in terms of equipment and Garda numbers and for the reopening of Garda stations. “The onus and responsibility to provide security is on the State and this is the first line of that defence,” he said. “It is incumbent on the Government to act accordingly.

He said the debate was a response to the many burglaries and aggravated burglaries throughout the country and, in particular, the heinous crime carried out on Richie McKelvey at his place of residence. “I send our best wishes to him and congratulate the extended community in Coolderry, including the IFA, those involved in the community alert programme, Muintir na Tíre, and everyone who helped to ensure that this issue was brought front and centre as it relates to the national situation,” he said.

“We want to help communities with a more productive method of allowing CCTV, especially off motorways and at the main junctions but also in communities,” he said. “The onerous methodology that exists at present is proving the need for this. There are associated costs that local communities cannot bear. I hope that under the CLÁR scheme, for example, an effort will be made to accommodate the provision of such facilities in communities to help them.”

Repeat offenders on bail should be electronically tagged and monitored, and not allowed to run rampant, as they are doing, he said. Legal aid for repeat offenders should be questioned.

Corcoran Kennedy seeks increased funding for arts centres

An update on the Creative Ireland programme which is a high level, high ambition, five-year initiative, which aims to place creativity at the centre of public policy was sought in the Dáil by Fine Gael Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy.

She asked Minister Heather Humphreys if something could happen around the capital programme. “I am thinking of the counties I am more familiar with such as Offaly for example, where we have the Birr Theatre and Arts Centre, the Dunamaise theatre in Laois, and the new amphitheatre in Cloughjordan, all of which have been very well funded by the Department over the years,” she said. “They are receiving ongoing public funding. Does the Minister see any new programmes being brought forward to help them to innovate and develop their own infrastructure there?”

In reply, Minister Humphreys said with regard to the arts and culture capital scheme, some €10 million has been awarded to more than 120 arts centres, theatres, galleries and performance spaces across the State. “This is the largest investment in our local and regional arts infrastructure in a decade,” she said. “Deputies will be glad to hear that 85% of the

funding went to projects outside Dublin. The scheme links in very well with Pillar 2 of the Creative Ireland programme, to enable creativity in every community. As the Deputy has pointed out, a number of projects in Laois-Offaly received funding: Birr Stage Guild Ltd. received €32,844 under strand 1; Teach Ceoil in Killeagh received €13,496 under strand 3; Laois Arts Centre received €20,000. I am aware the Deputy has been very supportive of all these local projects and the good news is that I have been able to secure additional capital funding in budget 2018. I hope to be in a position to invite applications for a further round of the scheme in the coming months.”

Government accused of trying to give impression that housing crisis is “normal”

Public representatives are at the coalface in respect of the housing crisis by virtue of the constituency clinics they hold on a regular basis and the large numbers of representations they receive from people who find themselves in terrible and unfortunate predicaments, Deputy Barry Cowen told the Dáil.

“I refer to those individuals who are living in rented private accommodation, those who are in receipt of HAP from the State, those who are languishing in the homes of their families or friends, those who are couch surfing, etc.,” he said. “The Government has tried to give the general population the impression that this is somehow normal when one compares and contrasts matters as per an OECD report, on the first page of which it is stated that it should not to be used for the purpose of comparing the situation in different countries because many of the methodologies used to gather the data in the various countries are different.”

Deputy Cowen said it might be a report compiled this year but if one looked at the material relating to Ireland, one could see that the 2015 figures are used and that the report does not take account of many circumstances in which people who are homeless or who are seeking help and assistance from the State find themselves.

“It belittles those who spoke in favour of that being normal,” he said. “When one hears Fr. Peter McVerry or Brother Kevin Crowley on the radio expressing the frustration and anger they feel, it only serves to remind us that we need a much more inclusive approach and an understanding and recognition of failings in this area.”