Weekly Newsletter
Issue 414
Week beginning 15/08/16

SMEs have little faith in legal protection against crime

A new report by the Irish Small and Medium Enterprises Association (ISME) has found that, despite the drop in the number of crimes targeting small and medium enterprises, the majority of those business owners have very little faith in the legal system. The group carried out a survey of businesses in the SME sector.

The survey’s main finding was that in the last 12 months, 31% of businesses surveyed were impacted by crime. However, 98% of those businesses see the legal system as ineffective in this area.

The report estimates the annual cost of crime on businesses is €1.83bn. This figure is based on a percentage (31%) of what ISME estimates as the total number of small businesses surveyed in the State (245,000) and the average cost of crime on a business. Figures revealed that each business spends approximately €5,428 on crime prevention each year; crime costs them a further €6,570. This means that each business that is affected by crime is €11,998 less well-off.

Crime rates were highest in Dublin. Nearly half (47%) of businesses in the City centre and 36% of businesses in Dublin county were victimised. In Munster, only 19% of businesses were impacted. Retail was the most targeted sector, with 45% of businesses surveyed having lost money to crime. The construction sector and the distribution sector both saw 36% of the businesses targeted.

Almost half (45%) of businesses had suffered two instances of crime. However, this figure is down from 48% in 2015. The number of businesses that saw theft from staff also dropped, from 21% in 2015 to 11% in 2016.

ISME have called for the Government to make the necessary changes to crime reporting systems and legal structures to ensure that the SME sector does not suffer from the continued criminal targeting.

Shoppers spend warily after Brexit result

Consumers have become more cautious with their spending in the wake of the Brexit vote. This is according to a new report by Retail Ireland. The Ibec group that represents the retail sector has said that the impending departure of the UK from the EU has seen sterling decline rapidly, which has put added pressure on retailers. They now face heightened pressure to compete with Northern Ireland and online shopping outlets.

The Retail Ireland monitor showed positive signs in the first half of the year, signifying the ongoing recovery. However, consumers are now wary with their spending, due to the uncertainty wrought by Brexit.

The lobby group has called on the Government to address these new pressures on the retail sector in the upcoming budget. They suggest three ways in which the retail sector could be supported:

- The continued easing on the tax burden on consumers.
- The establishment of a fund that would regenerate and improve key shopping areas where footfall has decreased due to high vacancy rates and a lack of up-keep. This fund would be called a “Town Centre” Fund.
- Retail Ireland urge the Government not to increase the minimum wage in line with the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission to achieve a Living Wage. They believe it would increase the labour costs “at a time of heightened competitive pressure”.


Hall to try to rival Vulture Funds and keep people in their homes

David Hall, Chief Executive of the Irish Mortgage Holders Association has announced plans to establish a not-for-profit voluntary housing agency. This agency would seek to administer loans to save those in extreme mortgage distress from falling victim to vulture funds, such as has been seen in recent months.

Mr Hall has been a key campaigner for debt relief since the crisis began. He is also an outspoken critic on the sale of mortgages to so-called “vulture funds”. He is currently in talks with three financial institutions in the hopes of taking on €150m in distressed mortgages. He is bidding for first tranche on up to 2,000 loans in early 2017. Of the agency he would like to establish, he said:

“This will be a not-for-profit voluntary housing agency. Yes, there will be a premium paid to the fund and I make no apologies for that, but it comes with a very strict caveat. The price will be commensurate with us providing a safe haven for these loans, not into the toxic world of the vulture fund, and not into the political minefield that is vulture funds.”

Home-owners who would avail of the Agency’s services may lose ownership of the property, but they would not be thrown out of their homes. They would stay on as tenants. The mortgages that would be eligible would be ones that had “no chance of mortgage restructure, no chance of insolvency or bankruptcy.”

Dublin Bus SIPTU members vote for strike action

Dublin Bus drivers that are members of SIPTU voted by a vast majority (95%) in favour of industrial and strike action due to an on-going pay dispute with the company. The clerical members also voted for industrial action (by 87%) and strike action (80%).

This ballot follows the refusal of SIPTU members of a recent Labour Court recommendation regarding pay. SIPTU represents seven categories and grades of Dublin Bus workers, and the ballots of the five remaining grades will take place this week, by no later than Tuesday 16 August.

Dublin Bus drivers, and other workers, have not had a pay rise in the last eight years. They also saw reductions to their pay during the recession. Dublin Bus has restructured three times since then.

SIPTU Divisional Organiser for Transport, Owen Reidy, said,

“The company returned to profitability in November 2014 and, over recent years, passenger numbers and revenue have increased accordingly. It is now past time for the pay of Dublin Bus workers to increase.”

SIPTU has urged the company to return to the bargaining table to “avoid the very real prospect of 24 and 48 hour stoppages and perhaps an indefinite all-out strike”.
Public sector pay to be examined by commission

A new commission will be established to review public sector pay. This is ahead of the expiration of the Landsdowne Road agreement in mid-2018.

It has been asked to consider pensions in any future pay awards. It will also compare rates of pay between the public and private sectors. Public sector allowances and other benefits will also be considered.

The commission will take account of sectors where there are increased difficulties retaining staff, such as the healthcare sector, and examine whether or not higher pay should be awarded in these sectors.

The evidence used by the commission will be published. However, while the pay recommendations will “inform the thinking of government”, it will not be binding.

Dara Calleary TD has asked the commission to also take into account the 90,000 retired public service workers who had their pensions cut by approximately 12% during the economic crisis.

The commission is expected to be formally established in October this year, and will report to the Government in 2017.

Ibec’s head of Industrial Relations, Maeve McElwee has also called for the methodology for comparing private and public pay levels to be published. It will be important to keep the work done by the commission as transparent as possible, to ensure public trust.

Tusla database will not be fully rolled out until end of 2018

In 2009, a business case for the National Child Care Information System was developed. This would comprise of a digital database of children who are deemed to be at risk, and could be accessed by support workers in any location. In 2013, Tusla took over responsibility for developing such a resource from the HSE. They were given a €1.8m budget to do so.

However, nine years later, no such resource is operational. There are currently 17 separate social service regions, and there is little to no transfer of data between them. The issue with a lack of resources has also been cited as one of the reasons for the high turnover of staff.

One of the main issues faced by the social care system is that there is no central information bank, and parents have been known to move children to a new area to avoid dealing with social services.

Tusla have carried an audit of the work that needed to be done to implement improvements to the IT infrastructure. They have, to date, only spent €500,000 of their €1.8m budget. The remaining €1.2m will be used to ensure roll-out of the central database by the end of 2018.
This week at Public Affairs Ireland

**On the Blog**

Emotional Intelligence: Why it’s even more important this year  
Billy Byrne  
Read [here](#)

On Brexit: A role for Ireland’s Export Trade Council  
Tom Ferris  
Read [here](#)

Government’s Personal Microfinance Credit Scheme helps those who most need it  
PAI editor  
Read [here](#)

Publicly-Funded Higher Education was the only Viable Option the Cassells Report Suggested  
Annie Hoey  
Read [here](#)

Who Governs Ireland?  
Michael Williams  
Read [here](#)

**Notes from the Editor**

Please note that there will be no Newsletter Update next week, Monday 22 August. Normal delivery will resume the following Monday, 29 August. I would like to apologise for any inconveniences this may cause.

Please also note that PAI’s conference, “Brexit: Some implications for public policy and public administration in Ireland” has been rescheduled. It will now take place on Friday 21 October. We are pleased to announce that EU Commissioner for Agriculture, Phil Hogan, will deliver the Keynote Address. Other speakers will include economist Jim Power and former union leader Blair Horan.

Issue 2 of *The Public Professional* is now available. Members can access it for free through our website. Non-members can buy print or digital versions on a copy-by-copy basis, or through a yearly subscription.

If you have any questions or comments, you can contact our editor, Shauna, at [editor@pai.ie](mailto:editor@pai.ie).
Policy development and legislation in a changed political environment

The advent of a new minority Government this year represents a new vista for many in the public service and the political system. Instead of a Government being able to rely on an inbuilt majority in both the Dáil and Seanad, the new Government has no guaranteed assurances that legislation will be passed as proposed or in a timely fashion.

Our half-day conference will address these changes. Specifically, talks will focus on policy development and the legislative process in a changed political environment.

Government Chief Whip, Regina Doherty TD, will be the Keynote speaker.

It will take place Friday 30 September, 9.00am to 1.00pm.

For more information, or to book, you can call is at (01) 819 8500, email info@pai.ie or visit our website.
Adjourned until 2.00pm on Tuesday 27 September 2016

Parliamentary Committees adjourned sine die