

Donaldson hopes to be first minister by autumn

DUP leader says he is planning a meeting with Taoiseach within coming weeks

Protocol causing 'political instability in Northern Ireland', warns Lagan Valley MP

BRIAN HUTTON

Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader Jeffrey Donaldson is hoping to take over as the North's first minister as early as the autumn.

The Lagan Valley MP has suggested a series of shifts in his Stormont team could pave the way for his return from Westminster after almost a quarter of a century.

While he was happy to lead the party from London over the coming weeks and months, he said a "suitable vacancy" may

open up before the end of the year which could see him co-opted as an MLA.

"I'm hoping for the opportunity in the autumn to be able to return to Stormont," he told The Irish Times.

Mr Donaldson, who took over the party leadership in June just weeks after losing a bruising contest for the post to Edwin Poots, has made it clear he wants to lead the DUP as first minister.

One possible route for him back from Westminster was to take over former DUP leader

Arlene Foster's seat in Fermanagh South Tyrone.

But Mr Donaldson has ruled out that constituency for himself. "It wouldn't be my intention to step into that role," he said.

However, he said he believed Ms Foster would still vacate that seat in the autumn.

The revelation suggests the possibility of a number of changes among his 28 MLAs to allow for him to take the top Stormont role alongside Sinn Féin's Michelle O'Neill. Deputy First Minister, before next year's Assembly elections.

It could also mean an early byelection for his Lagan Valley seat, where Alliance has been closing in on the DUP's lead in the constituency. The UUP has also vowed it would not enter any political pact but would run for the seat, opening the possi-

Early byelection

bility of splitting the unionist vote. The current First Minister, Paul Givan, a close ally of Stormont Minister for Agriculture Mr Poots, is an MLA for Lagan Valley.



■ DUP leader Jeffrey Donaldson: shifts in his team could pave the way for his return from Westminster. PHOTOGRAPH: JAMES FORDE

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Visits have already been lined up for east Belfast, north Belfast, Foyle and east Derry.

On British government proposals for a de facto amnesty for all Troubles-related killings, Mr Donaldson said there was cross-party consensus against the controversial plans.

"Ideally I'd like to get back to Stormont as soon as I can, and I am hopeful that a vacancy can arise. But if not then, I will stand as a candidate and lead the team in the Assembly elections."

Mr Donaldson has appointed former DUP leader and ex-first minister Peter Robinson to head an internal review of the party's organisational structures, which he said would deliver "complete reform".

As part of a number of pledges during his leadership contest, Mr Donaldson is starting a "listening tour" across the North's 18 constituencies this week.

"It is not the way forward," he said. "We are talking to the UK government about the need for access to justice as well as information recovery for victims. We are clear you cannot substitute justice with information recovery. It is essential that victims still have access to justice."

Mr Donaldson also said he was planning a meeting with Taoiseach Micheál Martin within the coming weeks.

His "message to the Irish Government will be very clear", he said, pointing out that North-South relations would be

harmful unless the so-called Irish Sea border, introduced under the post-Brexit arrangements agreed in the Northern Ireland protocol, is removed.

"The protocol is not only creating economic instability, but political instability in Northern Ireland," he said.

"It is the case that if the protocol continues to harm our relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom, then it will also have an impact on our relationship with Dublin, given the three sets of relationships covered by the Belfast Agreement are interdependent and interlocking.

"If you harm one relationship, you harm all of them.

"As far as North-South relations are concerned, if the Irish insist on implementing the protocol and continue to harm our relationship with Great Britain, then it will not be business as usual on a North-South basis."

Charity urges council not to repossess

OLIVIA KELLY
Dublin Editor

Asenior citizens housing charity at the centre of a negative findings by the Charities Regulator in relation to the private use of its assets is appealing to Dublin City Council not to repossess its property.

An investigation by the regulator into Cabhrú Housing Association Services last month found a friend of the former chief executive had been staying in an apartment at senior citizens' complex, McSweeney House on Berkeley Street.

The regulator also determined an apartment in another complex, Fr Scully House on Gardiner Street, had been used inappropriately as the registered address of a company not connected to the housing charity. A member of the former chief executive's family was a director of the company, the regulator found.

In February of last year the council decided to take over McSweeney House from Cabhrú, previously known as the Catholic Housing Aid Society (Chas).

The decision followed controversy over the operations of the organisation and the resignation earlier in February of its chief executive, Mical McGovern.

Cabhrú had required the title of council-owned lands on Berkeley Street for the long-planned redevelopment of McSweeney House. The council last year said it would not go ahead with the planned transfer of lands to Cabhrú and would instead ask that it surrender its 99-year lease on the Berkeley Street site to the council.

However, Cabhrú chairman Liam Meagher is urging the council to allow the charity to go ahead with its redevelopment plans.

In a letter to councillors on Friday, Mr Meagher said the board accepted the findings of the regulator and "regrets that there were weaknesses in governance". Over the past year it had taken steps "to address these governance shortcomings", he said.

The board "acknowledges the previous decision of Dublin City Council to take back ownership and responsibility for McSweeney House in Berkeley Street, the 21 units of which currently lie vacant".

But he said: "Now that the Charities Regulator has published its report, the board would request the elected councillors of Dublin City Council to reconsider that decision."

Irish chess champ follows in father's footsteps to win title

RONAN MCGREEVY

Chess is having a moment. Many discovered – or rediscovered – this most intellectually demanding of board games during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This coincided with the release of Netflix's successful miniseries, The Queen's Gambit, based on the story of chess prodigy Elizabeth Harmon.

"Chess is the art of the science of logic," the former world champion Mikhail Botvinnik once declared, yet it can seem impossibly arcane to the casual observer.

The Queen's Gambit, thanks to a masterful performance by actress Anya Taylor-Joy, has made chess accessible and exciting in a way that many had never envisaged.

Coláiste Éanna, in Rathfarnham, Co Dublin, was the venue for the 100th Irish chess championship, which was won by Mark Heidenfeld (53), an IT consultant based in Germany.

Therein hangs an extraordinary story. His father, Wolfgang Heidenfeld, was a Jewish refugee who fled Nazi Germany for South Africa in the 1930s.

By a circuitous route he came to Ireland in 1957, became fascinated, and finally moved his family here in 1961. Mr Heidenfeld senior won the Irish championship six times.

Mark was born in Ireland, but moved to Germany as a child. He remains affiliated to Ireland in chess and qualifies to play in the Irish championship. He last won the Irish champi-

onship in 2000, and last participated in 2001. The pandemic gave him time and space at home in Ulm, southern Germany, to practise.

His father died in 1981, when Mark was 13, but he bequeathed him a chess library of 1,000 books.

"I was quite fortunate in a number of games. I didn't quite believe it until it happened," he said of his win.

"It's been a long time since I won a big tournament. I'm really happy that it went this way."

Very strong

The Irish championship is run by the Irish Chess Union (ICU). Its chairman Desmond Beatty says that chess in Ireland is "very strong, but not big". There are 1,000 players affiliated to the ICU across the island of Ireland, out of a population of almost seven million.

Armenia has 300,000 players, out of a population of three million.

Mr Beatty is ambitious for Irish chess, saying that he would like to get to Armenian-levels of participation.

Ireland has one grandmaster, Alexander Baburin, who learned chess in the old Soviet Union, the powerhouse of the game worldwide. The ICU wants to have five Irish grandmasters and 5,000 players on a regular basis.

The portents are good. Mr Heidenfeld succeeds Tom O'Gorman, who was just 18 when he won the championship last year.



■ Mark Heidenfeld winner of the 100th Irish Chess Championships 2021. Mark's father Wolfgang won the Irish championship six times. PHOTOGRAPH: TOM HONAN

Briefs

Dublin

Man appears in court over chase on wrong side of M50

A man from Dublin has been refused bail after a court heard he drove on the wrong side of the road with headlights turned off and tried to swerve at gardai in an overnight traffic pursuit.

Dylan Maughan (20) of St Killian's Park, Clondalkin, was arrested and charged with dangerous driving in the west of Dublin in the early hours of Saturday, which he denies.

He was arrested running from the car wearing one runner, while the other was found beside the driver's seat of the abandoned vehicle, it has been alleged.

He faced objections to bail when he appeared before

Judge Cephas Power at Dublin District Court on Saturday.

Garda Andrew Flood said Mr Maughan made no reply to the charge at the time. He said the accused was the driver of a Volkswagen Jetta, spotted at just after 3.30am by gardai at Fonthill Road in Clondalkin where it failed to stop.

He alleged Mr Maughan drove on the wrong side of an N4 slip road and that he again failed to stop at the Ninth Lock Road in Clondalkin.

The court heard the car was abandoned after it had been driven on the wrong side of the Naas Road and also on the M50 in an effort to evade gardai.

TOM TUITE

Limerick

Gardaí appeal for witnesses after a man was seriously assaulted

Gardaí are appealing for witnesses after a man in his late 30s was seriously assaulted in Limerick in the early hours of yesterday morning.

The incident occurred at Monabrah Road, Ballynanty.

The man was discovered nearby on the footpath at Cosgrave Park, Moyross with serious injuries.

He was taken by ambulance to Limerick University Hospital where his condition is currently understood to be serious but stable.

Gardaí say they are are

appealing for anyone with information who was on Monabrah Road or Cosgrave Park between 3.15am and 4am yesterday morning to come forward to assist their inquiries.

Gardaí are particularly interested in speaking to any road users, including taxis, that may have dash cam footage.

Anyone with information is asked to contact Gardaí at Mayorstone Garda Station 061 456980, the Garda Confidential Line 1800 666 111 or any Garda station.

SARAH BURNS

Historical conference



■ RIC cadets in Dublin

Timing key to commemorating role of RIC, says historian

A controversial plan by former minister for justice Charlie Flanagan to commemorate the role of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) in Irish society was badly timed and unlikely to receive much support after decades of "indoctrinating" the public against the force, a historical conference in Cork has heard.

Prof Marie Coleman of the School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics at Queens University Belfast told the West Cork History Festival the "biggest mistake" with the proposed commemoration of the RIC and Dublin Metropolitan Police was the then government's timing.

"I think the RIC could have been commemorated

but timing the commemoration of the RIC for January 2020 was catastrophic because January 1920 was when the first Black and Tans came in."

With the date chosen "it was inevitable it was going to be seen to be commemorating the Black and Tans. Had it been done at a different time, say March 2022, the centenary of the dissolution of the RIC, then maybe it could have been done in that more historical reflective context".

The January 2020 date was just weeks ahead of a general election, and it was notable the first politician to speak out against the commemoration, Mayor of Clare, Cllr Cathal Crowe was later elected a TD, Prof Coleman said.

BARRY ROCHE

Donnelly committed to safe access zones around abortion service facilities

SARAH BURNS

Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly has said he is "fully committed" to the introduction of legislation on safe access zones around healthcare facilities providing abortion services.

The Minister's comments come following a report in the Irish Examiner that said the legislation had been shelved.

Mr Donnelly said in a statement on Saturday that it was originally intended to provide for "safe access to termination of pregnancy services" in the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018.

"However, a number of legal issues were identified which necessitated further consideration," he said.

"Officials in the Department of Health continue to work with me to ensure safe access around medical facilities."

"I have also been engaging with a range of stakeholders and civil society groups in relation to the review of the Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy Act which is being finalised with a view to it starting in the coming weeks."

Priority

Mr Donnelly added that a priority for him as the health minister is women's healthcare and "the provision of safe services for all women".

The Green Party's spokeswoman for health, Neasa Hourigan, said that she would like to reiterate her party's "commitment to the development of safe access zones for abortion services".

Ms Hourigan said the inclusion of safe access zones was

"one of the most important commitments" in the Programme for Government and one that the Green Party "fought hard for".

"Access to abortion services and the right to do so in an equitable and safe way is something the people of Ireland campaigned long and hard for and the Green Party is determined to see this aspect of the Coalition's commitments fulfilled," she said.

Confusion

"Though the confusion this morning is unfortunate it is crucial for the Minister to set out a clear timeline for the completion of that legislation."

"The creation of safe access zones sits alongside the independent review of law around reproductive health care services that will begin by the end of this year."

Labour senator Annie Hoey said: "Despite their celebrations at the time, the Government no longer seem interested in ensuring safe access to abortion services for women who need it. Minister Donnelly needs to prioritise this legislation when the Oireachtas returns. If he decides not to, the Labour Party will."

In contrast, a spokeswoman for the Pro Life Campaign, Eilís Mulroy said the Minister's statement "shows just how subservient he is to the abortion lobby".

She said: "The Government should never have committed to bringing forward such legislation in the first instance."

"If enacted, it would represent a gross infringement of civil liberties and freedom of expression."

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