



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
POLICING AUTHORITY

Policing Authority meeting in public 25 April 2016

Opening Statement by Chairperson Josephine Feehily

I will begin by welcoming Commissioner Nóirín O’Sullivan, Commissioner of the Garda Síochána and her team, our public audience of observers and media here in the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham and viewers everywhere to the first Policing Authority meeting with the Garda Commissioner in public.

This is a quite historic day of reform in the justice sector in Ireland. As appropriate for a historic day, we are also in a very historic place – a place associated with the Garda Síochána for many many years and used as their Headquarters until 1950.

By contrast with this beautiful old building, the Policing Authority is a very new agency - not quite four months old yet - which was established to “oversee the performance of the Garda Síochána of its functions in relation to policing services”. The Minister for Justice has described our establishment as “the most far reaching reform of the Garda Síochána in the history of the State”.

While our work is in its infancy, we have already had a number of plenary and Committee meetings with Commissioner O’Sullivan and members of her senior team as we work together towards our mutual objective of continuous improvement in policing in Ireland. There are few public services more important than effective policing for the well-being of society, for community confidence and for security of the State.

Community confidence in policing, and in the oversight of policing, is at the heart of the “far reaching reform” to which the Minister referred. Enhanced transparency, including seeing more of that oversight taking place in public, is a central tenet of the reform which is why we're here today. We have an audience here as observers, symbols if you like of that enhanced transparency, and this meeting is being broadcast and webcast as we speak.

“Performance” is a very broad concept. It is important that the Authority’s oversight of policing performance is focused and strategic in a way that recognises the distinct and different roles of the Authority and the Garda Commissioner. One aspect of performance assessment is to look at what an organisation said they would do and examine whether they accomplished what they set out to achieve, how they went about it, what worked and what didn't work, and to look at how costs and risks were managed. At its simplest in our case, the statutory framework foresees a cycle where the Authority sets policing priorities with the approval of the Minister for Justice and

Equality, the Commissioner prepares a Policing Plan for our approval, taking account of those priorities and the Authority then oversees and assesses performance against the plan.

The establishment of the Authority broke in to that cycle after the Policing Plan for 2016 had been laid before the Oireachtas in January last. Nonetheless we consider it to be the best starting point for our public conversation with the Garda Commissioner, and we chose Part three of that Plan which relates to Community Safety as our agenda for today.

I would like to underline that word conversation. This is not an investigation, and we don't expect the Garda team to have every possible fact and figure at their fingertips. It is also important to say that oversight and accountability ought not be seen as focussing principally on fault-finding. We want to hear about the work – seen and unseen - that the Gardaí and staff of the Garda Síochána do every day to keep our communities safe.

Very shortly, I will invite Commissioner O'Sullivan to make a short opening statement. We have decided that four Authority members will lead the discussion on the four objectives relating to Community Safety set out in the Policing Plan, and I will refer to those objectives as we go along. I expect the conversation which follows could take one and a half hours or so, but we will finish at 5 pm in any event, and I will be moving the discussion along to ensure that the topics are covered.

Opening Statement by Commissioner Norin O'Sullivan

Chairperson, members of the Policing Authority, Ladies and Gentlemen. This is an important meeting. In and of itself, it's important. As a landmark in the history of An Garda Síochána, it's hugely significant.

A professional policing service with robust governance practices and structures is pivotal to our democracy. An Garda Síochána is unique amongst policing services as a unitary body responsible for the security of the state and the provision of policing services.

Two very different functions. Two functions united by an underpinning philosophy: the protection of the individual and the safety of communities. We pride ourselves in being of the community and working for the community so the safety of the community is central to everything we do. As is trust. Trust is crucial. And the fantastic thing about it is that it's a two-way process. Every time a member of An Garda Síochána proves to a member of the community that they can trust them, they learn to trust the whole service: they trust An Garda Síochána.

District and Divisional Officers work with Joint Policing Committees and local Policing Fora where they're held accountable for the policing of their communities. Trust is developed and nurtured at all levels in the organisation.

From the beginning of my term as Commissioner, I have forged a new direction when it comes to our critical friends: individuals and organisations that take a view on *how* we do *what* we do. We have listened to the findings of the reports, tribunals, commissions and coverage over the past ten years. We have acted on the 784 recommendations from the 41 reports and we have framed these into our modernisation and renewal programme.

The members of the Policing Authority will have seen, from the outset, that this is not where we're at. Not now. We are committed to openness, transparency and accountability. To listening. To learning. Because it's all about trust, and that's how trust is built.

We're already getting there. Current research of Trust in An Garda Síochána has been consistently high over the last four quarters. It indicates a positive trend with 85% of the public expressing their trust in An Garda Síochána and its performance. We cannot do our job without the support of the community.

That's a figure to build on. And it's not easy to build on it. Crime and criminality continue to evolve and present different challenges to us. We have to move quickly and flexibly to cope with it. We've made major changes this year alone in response to organised crime, and we are constantly developing strategies to address other emerging crime challenges.

The Policing Authority is separate and independent from An Garda Síochána, but the two organisations are driven by parallel objectives, by a shared sense of purpose: to make sure An Garda Síochána becomes a beacon of policing that can be measured against any police service in the world. We look forward to working with the Authority in the identification of their priorities.

If you look at any of the news websites on any weekend, the one thing you can be sure of is that An Garda Síochána will figure, whether we're seeking information about an incident, dealing with a traffic tragedy, or warning people about a particular threat in a particular area. But we mustn't miss the more positive aspects of our work. We're part of the community, and when I talk about our function in keeping the community safe, sometimes that happens as part of a celebration.

The St Patrick's Day celebrations and more significantly the 1916 Easter Rising Commemorations were hugely successful and passed off without incident. The central ethos for these policing operations was 'community safety' and the women and men of An Garda Síochána who policed these events showed fantastic understated professionalism.

I look forward with my team to answering the questions posed here today and I believe we have a shared objective of promoting trust and confidence in the provision of policing services. I welcome the insight and perspective of the Authority members into policing and our activity over the past few months.