



AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA
POLICING AUTHORITY

Meeting of Comhchoiste na Gaeilge, na Gaeltachta agus Phobal Labhartha na Gaeilge

02 February 2022

Opening Statement by Mr. Bob Collins, Chairperson of the Policing Authority

A Chathaoirligh,

I thank the Committee for the invitation to attend today. My initial contribution is brief and its content pertains to both matters under discussion, while recognising that the Committee will deal separately with both. The brevity of these remarks reflects the different statutory position of the Authority relative to these topics rather than its view of their importance.

The Authority's vision for the Garda Síochána is of a police service that is ethical, effective, human rights based and which merits and enjoys the confidence of the increasingly diverse people it serves.

In considering how a police service merits that confidence, a key element is how it attunes itself to the diversity of the population it serves. That attuning is at least two fold. It is in the provision of a service that is alert to the needs and rights of the population – including linguistic- but also one that as much as possible reflects that population in terms of class, ethnicity, religion and sexuality. The degree to which the police service reflects, shares and can legitimately claim to understand the lived reality of the population it serves adds to that confidence.

There is an increasing richness to the diversity of the Irish population and with that comes a challenge for the Garda Síochána in how to respond. These are issues of equality and fairness. The response cannot diminish existing obligations. The Garda Síochána has an enduring obligation – a legal obligation - to provide a service to Irish speakers, especially to those in the Gaeltachtaí, in the Irish language, who in turn have a right to receive their public services in Irish. Legislation continues to guarantee that right.



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It is useful and timely to re-examine interventions that were made in good faith and to assess as whether and to what degree they have achieved their aims but also whether they can, over time, inadvertently create conditions that may hinder the Garda organisation from responding to that richness. There are many people who have established their lives and families in this country who may wish to join the police service and who may be precluded from doing so. The obligation on the Garda Síochána to provide a service through the Irish language should not in any way be diminished by efforts to ensure that it can also respond to a diverse community for whom that same imperative - to receive a service that resonates with their lived experience and reality - also exists.

The challenge for the Garda Síochána is to now explore what other interventions are necessary and will serve to deliver a response in line with those rights and obligations defined in law while also allowing the organisation respond to and benefit from a changing population.