

Cathaoirleach, Committee Members,

Thank you for the invitation to meet and address you this evening. I am accompanied today by Superintendent Seán Fallon & Sergeant Pauline Glennon.

An Garda Síochána at its core is committed to keeping people safe. Indeed the Garda Síochána Act mandates us to vindicate the human rights of every citizen. During today's meeting I hope to detail how An Garda Síochána is working to deliver for people with disabilities.

The prevention of harm and protection of vulnerable people is a key component of policing, and under the government reform programme, we have placed a strong emphasis on the importance of human-rights in policing.

While human rights was seen by some in policing as secondary to enforcing the law, this could not be further from reality, as observing those rights actively enables us to keep people safe.

Protecting the rights of the most vulnerable; those who have suffered injury or trauma; victims of crime, those with disabilities and those suspected of wrongdoing helps ensure a just outcome for all.

As the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has said, "Police are the first line defence for human rights."

Training is key to implementing this approach, and as part of a range of measures to embed human-rights, we in conjunction with the University of Limerick, have introduced a course on Policing and Human Rights Law in Ireland.

This course has been completed by more than 3,500 personnel thus far. Colleagues from the USA, the Belgian Federal Police, and Tanzanian Police have taken the course also.

The course delivers modules on Rights and the Victims of Crime, Rights and Vulnerable Witnesses and Suspects, Diversity and Human Rights and Hate Crime.

There has been a top down participation approach in this course, cementing the commitment and leadership of senior personnel to the area of human rights. Garda Personnel who complete the course are designated as Human Rights Champions.

Our Human Rights champions are provided additional access to supplementary learning opportunities such as modules on Autism, Neurodiversity, Mental Health & ISL

Further to this training and responding to recommendations made following the publication of the report of the Commission of the Future of Policing in Ireland, one of our key organisational priorities has been to develop a human rights policy framework, with two strategies delivered in 2019 & 2022.

These strategies are reflective of the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In line with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, An Garda Síochána remains committed to eliminating discrimination, protect human rights and promote equal opportunities.

In working to deliver in this area An Garda Síochána has implemented training on Hate Crime to the entire Garda organisation, circa 18,000 personnel. This has provided practical reassurance to communities and individuals of our commitment to identifying their particular needs, including anti-disability hate crime.

Our training (e.g Hate Crime) invites the input and contribution of members of the community with disabilities and representative organisations to ensure their voices are heard.

From the time our Garda Trainees commence their training as part of the community centred policing module, they are equipped with the skills to police diverse communities. During their placement to Garda Stations in an observational role, they will be exposed to vulnerable and minority groups, and learn first-hand about the challenges they face.

An Garda Síochána adopts a collaborative approach to ensure that we observe the rights of our communities, and work with internal and external stakeholders to continually improve our response. Examples of this include our engagement with the Courts Service around Trauma Informed Practice, AsIAM and other disability representative groups.

In the area of equality, there are currently 589 Garda Diversity Officers (GDO) nationwide. Their role includes ensuring equal access to policing services for all. There are GDO's in every Garda Division in Ireland, and their details are publicly available on the Garda website.

Every effort is made at local level to provide the necessary services, and if, on those occasions that a member of the public has concerns or complaints around access, they can contact our access officer via the Garda website, who is available to assist them to overcome these obstacles.

The Garda Internship programme has actively sought representation from groups including those with disabilities to undergo a paid internship in the organisation, which has been fulfilling and rewarding for both the Interns and their colleagues in An Garda Síochána. Two such programmes have been completed, and I am happy to advise that a number of our Interns have secured permanent employment with us.

The Garda Síochána Act 2005, places an obligation on An Garda Síochána to 'bring criminals to justice, including by detecting and investigating crime'. As an organisation we are mindful that from time to time those with disabilities will be a victim of, or at times a perpetrator of crime, and we have trained our personnel in how to deal with such challenges.

An Garda Síochána liaise regularly with stakeholders in the Mental Health Services, area around our interaction with people who are at risk of immediate harm and the use of the Mental Health Act 2012.

To conclude,

An Garda Síochána has built trusted relationships with local communities by listening and learning.

By engaging with empathy and respect.

By being friendly, approachable and open.

By ensuring our engagements are of the highest ethical standard that protects the human rights of all involved.

But most of all by treating people like how you would want to be treated.

Thank you.