

Meeting 1 of the Dublin Citizens' Assembly

Opening address by Mr. Jim Gavin, Chairman

30th April 2022 - Grand Hotel, Malahide, Co. Dublin

Good morning,

Céad míle fáilte - welcome to the open session of the Dublin Citizens Assembly.

I am honoured and privileged to be your Chairman for this most significant gathering of free people to discuss, debate and dream about the future of our great county and city of Dublin.

Firstly, can I once again congratulate each and every one of you for your commitment to public service by agreeing to take part in this Citizens' Assembly. I am most grateful that you have made the time in your busy life to commit to and serve a purpose higher than yourself.

In the first instance can I remind us of all that our purpose has been defined by our House of the Oireachtas, in the Term of Refence:

"a Citizens' Assembly, to be known as the Dublin Citizens' Assembly, with a total of 80 members, including an independent Chairperson, 67 randomly-selected members of the public living in Dublin City and County, and 12 Councillors selected from across the four local authorities, to consider the type of directly elected mayor and local government proposals in that regard"

Later today we will elect a number of members' representatives for Steering Group to support the Assembly in the efficient and effective discharge of its role and functions. In practice, the Group shall assist with planning and operational issues associated with the work programme. The Steering Group will also be supported by the Secretariat and the Expert Advisory Group.

Ireland is a leader in the deliberative democratic process, and before we start, I would like to mention a five key principles that have served those who have gone before us in previous Citizens' Assembly's.

Openness: this Citizens' Assembly will operate with complete transparency with all plenary meetings being streamlined live at www.citizensassembly.ie and all documentation, including submissions, freely available on the website. The Assembly is open to hearing from all sections of society on any issue associated with our remit, including our Diaspora and young people under 18 years of age, who are not directly represented in the Assembly membership;

Fairness: it is important that:

- we allow the full spectrum of views to be heard on every issue;
- our briefing material for Assembly members is of the highest quality;
- presentations by selected speakers are factual, informative, impartial and accessible.

Equality of voice amongst all Assembly members - each member will have the opportunity to voice their opinions and allow other members to voice theirs, with no-one dominating the discussion;

Respect: Members will respect each other's opinions by ensuring that everyone can make contributions and express their views freely without fear of personal attacks or criticism;

Efficiency: the Convention will make best use of our limited time together and ensure that members are supported to the greatest extent possible, including in their preparation for meetings; all meetings will start and end on time.

Collegiality: recognising that we are a diverse group, we will work together in a spirit of friendship together as we embark on this important task.

For this Assembly I would like to introduce and add a seventh principle, and it's a founding principle where **Psychological Safety** exists. It's a basic human need and is a shared belief that the team and the Citizens Assembly is safe space. When we feel safe it's easier for us to engage, to speak up and share ideas. A safe environment welcomes diversity. It allows Citizens' Assembly members to flourish regardless of gender, colour, race, background, or political preferences. The result is a rich give-and-take experience where everyone feels connected and part of the Dublin team.

So back to this weekend.

We live in a VUCA world - it has volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

So, our first job as an Assembly we'll bring order, shape structure and develop a REAL understanding of how local government works across the city and county, to get to grips with the practical realities of the system and to acquire a detailed knowledge of the depth and breadth of the services and facilities provided by the four local authorities.

We'll do this in a number of ways - we'll hear from the academics, the councillors and others in the political system, the local authority staff and the people of Dublin, who I hope will speak to us about their lived experience of local government in the region.

When we're satisfied that we understand how everything works, then we should proceed to do three things:

- Firstly, we'll try to articulate a vision for the sort of Dublin in which we want to visit, live, work and raise a family;
- We'll look at the international experience of directly-elected mayors and systems of government in similar-sized cities across the globe; and
- Then we need to see what has to change for us to deliver on our dream for a new or different Dublin.

As part of this element of the programme, we'll hear from many experts at home and abroad – from England, Europe, North America – all of whom have very different models of local government, some of which may be very attractive to us.

In every phase of the programme, discussion between the Members will form a key feature of our work – we should spend as much time talking amongst ourselves as we do listening to others. It is only by doing this that we can develop the expertise necessary to arrive at practical, reasonable and innovative recommendations.

Our guiding reference is our terms of reference, and if we do our work properly, at the end of the process, we should be in a position to build consensus around these recommendations – while there may not be unanimous agreement on the type of directly-elected mayor and local government structures that are best suited for Dublin, all members should be able to agree that the debate was conducted in a respectful environment, that they were given every opportunity to voice their opinion and that that process was scrupulously fair.

And lastly from me at this point, can I just repeat that you should have NO concerns about your current lack of knowledge about our system of local Government. I can assure you that none of us has enough information right now to answer the questions we have been asked. We are about to embark on a voyage of discovery and I'll be delighted to lead you on this journey if you'll come with me.

In conclusion, as your Chairman, my role is to ensure that every Member is treated the same way and given every opportunity to participate to the greatest extent possible. I ask that you engage with me in this regard so we can collectively be the best we can be delivery for the people who matter most – the 1.4 million people who call Dublin their home.

One hundred years on from the creation of the State and the vision of the founding fathers of the City, we have been offered the opportunity to make a contribution to the future of Dublin. We want to see the city of the three castles tower to its

historic best, a landmark for excellence, inclusion, innovation and community. We want Dublin to be a great place to visit, live, work, and raise a family.

So, as we take the first steps together on this voyage, I wish you all the very best of success. I look forward getting to know each and every one of you and I do believe that at the conclusion of our work we will have made friend for life.

Go raibh maith agaibh.