

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Rural and Community Development

Opening statement by Dr. Deiric Ó Broin, Chair Designate

Wednesday 3 October 2018



Opening Statement

Good morning. Thank you Chairman for your invitation today.

I was raised in the 1970s in the then small rural village of Dunboyne in County Meath. I went to local schools and like many, was among the first generation of my family to access third level education. The community I come from, is part not just of who I am, community is a large part of my life's work professionally, as a volunteer and as an activist. For me Pobal is not simply a professional interest, though I promise to bring the highest standards to my new role.

Pobal is the continuity of community activism I believe in. I am privileged to be asked to lead it forward as Chairman, having served on the board since 2013.

For over 25 years, I have worked professionally in local economic and community development. I have worked with local communities, with local development agencies including LEADER, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and with local authorities. I teach at Dublin Institute of Technology and I am an academic engaged in research. I am the Chairperson of the All-Ireland Branch of the Institute of Economic Development, a member of the Executive Committee of the Irish Branch of the International Regional Studies Association, and an advisor to the Irish Social Enterprise Network. Community development is my work, it is my world and it is my passion.

Community is about inclusion. It is about enabling activism. I am Chairman of the Ballymun Town Civic Alliance and secretary of the North Dublin Chamber of Commerce. I am a member of Dublin's Local Community Development Committee and Social Enterprise Committee. I volunteer my time and for me Pobal is a catalyst. Community is its purpose.

In 26 years, Pobal has developed in response to Government priorities. It adapted its skills to respond to changes and challenges. As Chairman, **my approach** will be to provide leadership and oversight of the future strategy and policies, in particular on implementing Government policy on social inclusion and early years. Central to this is ensuring that internal controls and implementation are effective, that the CEO and Pobal Management Team have the direction and support required, while ensuring Pobal is lean, fit for purpose and responsive to the future needs of communities and stakeholders.

Looking to the **future contribution** of Pobal, I am very conscious we are responsible for managing significant amounts of taxpayers' money allocated by Government.

A **key strategic priority** for me as Chairman will be ensuring that Pobal **continues** to provide a highly effective service for managing Government grants and payments to **communities**. This must be underpinned by high standards in accountability, in financial management, and in the support we provide to all those we work with.

Because Pobal manages a wide range of programmes it has built up specialist skills and systems to support this work. In recent years the ranges of skills required has increased, with ICT, procurement,

governance, accountability and more, becoming increasingly important. I am committed to Pobal continuing to develop and deepen its skills so that Ireland has a vehicle through which Government can confidently allocate funds to communities, with the knowledge that the funds will be properly managed and the programmes delivered effectively.

Another key priority area for me is bureaucracy. I am acutely aware of changes in the regulatory environment for the organisations' Pobal supports. I understand the need to ensure procedures are fair, proportionate and appropriate to the scale of funds allocated. This is not easy in a world where there is an expectation for increased governance, oversight and financial prudence.

It is Pobal's policy to identify the minimum data requirements needed for effective administration, acknowledging that issues such as European level data requirements must be reckoned with. Pobal has made real inroads in this area in the last year, increasingly using online platforms to reduce red tape. The Strategic Plan 2018 – 2021, to be launched shortly, identifies reducing bureaucracy for community organisations as a clear objective, and the Board and I will ensure this objective is met.

The policy changes I referred to earlier have seen a growth in early years services, and Government investment has been particularly important in recent years. Pobal is working hard to support this growth. Further development of these services, and especially the development and implementation of the Affordable Childcare Scheme, will be a significant challenge for Pobal over the next two years. It is change we are committed to meeting and managing effectively.

I am proud to say that every day, in towns and villages across Ireland, there are Pobal staff on the ground working with communities delivering services locally, to combat social exclusion. Pobal's commitment to social inclusion, and to community development through working with local groups, with agencies and with childcare providers is what we do, and it is what we are.

As Chair Designate, I want to acknowledge the leadership and commitment to Pobal of every member of the Board and in particular our outgoing Chairman, Mr. Séamus Boland. Séamus has contributed enormously over the last seven years, and I say thanks.

I want also to commend the work of the staff of Pobal, working alongside local and national community organizations to build stronger communities, to support families, to assist individuals and to nurture children every day.

I am deeply honoured to have been nominated by the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Deputy Michael Ring as Chairman Designate for Pobal. I am conscious of the responsibility I have undertaken and I come here today Chairman to you and members of the Committee to present my credentials, to begin my work and to answer any questions you may have.