

## **Opening Statement: CEO of the Restaurants Association Ireland, Adrian Cummins**

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to take part in today's discussion. I am joined by Seán Collender, Co-Owner of Kinara Restaurant Group.

Our goal today is to shine a light on one of the forgotten aspects of street crime and anti-social behaviour - the impact it has on local businesses, including restaurants, pubs and cafés.

When we surveyed the Restaurant Association's Dublin-based members in advance of this meeting, they gave us a first-hand account of the challenges that a lack of safety and security in the city has created.

100% of the survey's respondents said Dublin city is less safe today than it was pre-pandemic.

Some had faced break-ins and theft. Many said their staff are routinely threatened and don't feel safe at work.

Customers have admitted to businesses that they feel less safe venturing into the city in recent times, particularly at night.

The idea that customers are being discouraged from visiting Dublin city restaurants and pubs correlates with polling of the public conducted in July by Red C on behalf of the Restaurants Association.

That research found that only 20% of all adults believe safety and security in Dublin city is good during the day, while only 7% said the same for nighttime.

The current situation is not only making Irish consumers less likely to support local businesses in Dublin city, however, but also tourists as well.

The damage done to our tourism and hospitality offering when events such as the attack of US tourist, Stephen Termini, are reported on around the world is immense. That particular case also resulted in a warning from the US embassy to visitors about several safety concerns they should watch out for in Dublin.

With locals and tourists alike discouraged from visiting Dublin city and its hospitality businesses, it is clear that what is needed now is not a debate about whether or not the capital has a street crime and anti-social behaviour problem. It does.

Instead, we need to be talking about how our approach can be reformed to bring about improvements.

Our members suggest three primary areas for reform:

Firstly, we need increased Garda visibility on the streets of Dublin. There is no better deterrent to crime than the possibility of a Garda being in the area to issue an arrest. We should be aiming for Dublin city to have one of the highest police per head of population ratios compared to other European capitals. That figure currently stands at just 255 Gardaí per 100,000 people in Dublin.

Secondly, we need a zero-tolerance policy towards the public sale and consumption of illegal drugs. We also need to review the efficacy of the proliferation of drug treatment centres and, in the future, of medically supervised injection facilities in the city. A forum between the relevant bodies and local businesses should be created in any area with such facilities.

Finally, well-documented taxi shortages and a lack of reliable public transport options, particularly at peak times, mean staff and customers are having to spend longer in the city than they need to. We should be urgently looking at ways of increasing the number of options available to those visiting Dublin city's restaurants and pubs to get to and from the city safely.

These are just some of the proposals the Restaurants Association's members have put forward for improving the safety and vitality of our city. I look forward to discussing them and other ways forward with the Committee.