

An Ireland for all

Éire do Chách

Manifesto 2020

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Contents

6	Foreword
9	Our five aims for Ireland in 2025
10	Building an Ireland for all: What our aims mean for every citizen
15	Quality of life for every family
16	Fair taxes & sound public finances
22	Creating a strong SME sector
28	Genuinely affordable childcare
32	Securing a fair & decent society
36	A healthcare system for all
44	Parity for Mental Health
48	An inclusive Republic for people with disabilities
55	Owning your own home
57	Strengthening home ownership
60	Cutting construction costs
59	Directly build Social and Affordable rental homes
60	Penalising land hoarding and underuse of property
61	Helping generation rent
62	Ending homelessness
65	Building Strong, Vibrant & Safe Communities across Ireland
66	Keeping families and communities safe
74	Building a world-class education system
80	Protecting rural Ireland
86	Supporting Irish towns
92	Ensuring a fair price for farmers
98	Arts for all the community
103	Delivering our climate change targets
104	Addressing climate change
112	Building a connected Ireland
118	Create a Digital New Deal
122	Giving every citizen an equal chance
127	Working for Ireland's values on the global stage
128	Securing a Brexit Deal that works for Ireland
132	Protecting the Good Friday Agreement & strengthening North-South links after Brexit
136	Recognise and build on our proud military heritage
140	Fighting for the EU's values
142	Giving Ireland a strong voice in the global community

Foreword

Ireland has many strengths, but we also face many serious challenges. The biggest of these is to make sure that we have a country which serves all of its people.

People are struggling to access our health services when they need them. Communities feel abandoned and believe that decency and fairness have been forgotten. Far too many families are homeless and many people are struggling to pay high rents or to buy a home.

However, Fine Gael are still proud of their record and it wants five more years in power with the same plans and the same Ministers. Ireland has had nine years of over promising and under delivery.

I want that to change after February 8th. I believe our country needs a new government. A government that has the will and ability to deliver real progress on health, housing, crime and the cost of living.

Our Party's manifesto sets out ambitious, deliverable and sustainable policies across a range of areas. Its main aim is to steer and transform our whole country in a positive direction while protecting Ireland's economic strength.

Our aims are

1. Quality of life for every family
2. Owning your own home
3. Strong, vibrant & safe communities across Ireland
4. Delivering our climate change targets
5. Work for Ireland's values on the global stage.

Our Party has 26 women and 58 men running as candidates across the country's 39 constituencies. Each and every one of them want to be elected so that they can help to implement our policies which I know will make a difference and will deliver change.

I am asking for your vote to help create "An Ireland for all".



Micheál Martin TD

Leader of Fianna Fáil

Our five aims for Ireland in 2025:

Fianna Fáil has a clear plan to achieve five aims for Ireland in 2025:

1. Quality of life for every family

- Fair taxes
- Affordable childcare
- A strong publicly funded healthcare system
- A strong indigenous SME sector

2. Owning your own home

- Strong supports for First Time Buyers
- Increased direct build social and affordable homes construction
- A new deal for renters
- An end to long-term homelessness

3. Strong, vibrant & safe communities across Ireland

- Increased Garda numbers
- Ladders of opportunity through our education system
- Ensuring rural Ireland is not left behind
- A strong agricultural sector

4. Delivering our climate change targets

- An island fully connected by public transport
- Ireland as a global leader in addressing climate change
- Securing a Just Transition for all communities
- Safe and regulated social media with a Digital New Deal

5. Work for Ireland's values on the global stage

- Protect the principles of the Good Friday Agreement
- Strong British Irish links post Brexit
- Upholding EU values

Building an Ireland for all: What our commitment to investing in public services means for every citizen

A ladder of opportunity for every child

We will:

- Reduce childcare costs with increased subsidies
- Launch a new childcare tax credit to reduce registered childminder costs
- Lengthen Maternity Benefit to 30 weeks and allow for shared leave
- Double the Child Benefit Payment for the first month on the birth of a first child
- Create Edible Playgrounds so that children can grow their own fruit and veg in school
- Protect children from online pornography & gambling with new internet filtering laws
- Reduce average primary school class size to 20:1 in the next government

A decent job with a decent wage

We will:

- Reduce CGT to 25%
- Equalise tax treatment for the self-employed
- Tackle insurance costs with strengthened anti-fraud penalties
- Reduce taxes on middle-income workers

Owning your own home

We will:

- Introduce a First-Time Buyer's 33% top up SSIA and retain & expand Help to Buy
- Reduce development levies to help deliver 200,000 new homes by 2025
- Build 50,000 affordable homes for purchase at below €250,000
- Slash Local Authority red tape & directly build 50,000 social homes
- Introduce a €600 Rent Tax Credit and a life time rent deposit scheme
- Establish a new €168m "Preventing Homelessness" fighting fund

A caring approach to delivering health services

We will:

- Double the National Treatment Purchase Fund to €200m
- Reduce the monthly Drug Payment Scheme threshold to €100 per month
- Fund a special €10 top-up payment for all Carer and Disability Benefits
- Abolish Prescription Charges
- Lower treatment and Emergency Department waiting times

A sustainable future

We will:

- Establish a National Infrastructure Commission for 30-year decarbonisation planning
- Create a new Biodiversity Fund to protect species
- Set up a new open Anti-Litter Fund to tackle illegal dumping and dog fouling
- set out a Digital New Deal to regulate big tech and protect vulnerable users

Safe streets and strong communities

We will:

- Increase Garda numbers to 16,000 and the Garda reserve to 2,500
- Smash gangland crime with new special anti-terror laws
- Introduce mandatory sentences on knife crime attacks
- Tackle antisocial behaviour with new laws including eviction powers
- Establish an independent gambling regulator
- Establish a new Community Investment Fund to build new facilities and amenities

A vibrant rural Ireland

We will:

- Establish a Rural Crime Bureau as a new special Crimes Unit
- Create new Town Teams to lead the way in re-vitalising towns across Ireland
- Ensure a fair price for farmers with a €200 per head suckler cow payment scheme
- Set up a new specialist IDA, Enterprise Ireland unit for rural investment

Dignified and independent living for older people

We will:

- Increase the State Pension by €5 a week, every year
- Establish a commission to examine the state pension age, and defer any further pension age increase pending its completion
- Pay a state (transition) pension in the interim for 65 and 66 year olds
- Expand Housing Adaptation grants, home help hours and homecare packages
- Invest in Dementia Advisors & workers to help older people remain in their own home
- Protect the Free Travel Scheme



**Quality of life
for every family.**

Fair taxes & sound public finances

Ensuring all families benefit from sustainable economic growth

Sound public finances are the cornerstone of delivering an Ireland for all. The key challenge facing the next government is ensuring that the fruits of economic growth are shared across the whole country in every household. In contrast, Fine Gael has clearly resolved to pursue a Tory lite approach of cutting taxes, particularly for high earners without any consideration of the impact on services. They have also been heavily criticized by the independent Irish Fiscal Advisory Council for overseeing a “spending drift” in areas such as Health.

Fianna Fáil is the only party to set out a clear route for a fair taxation system that promotes balanced regional development, delivering prosperity into every home not just a few. Our 4:1 Spending to Taxation policy ratio will help to ensure that for every euro in tax reduction from available financial resources at least four will be invested in services. This balance will help ensure that our public services are equipped to meet the challenges of modern Ireland while still providing a taxation system that rewards hard work and enterprise. As outlined in our Fiscal Responsibility Commitment we will fully uphold our EU and National Fiscal Obligations to place the public finances on a long-term sustainable footing.

Our goals

- An emphasis on investing in public services above tax cuts
- A tax system that rewards all workers
- Stable public finances to fund public services
- A strong Eurozone that encourages key investment

Over the next five years we will:

Retain €1.2 billion of available financial resources to account for demographic pressures, non-forecast spending requirements and risks to the economy

Fine Gael have consistently under accounted for demographic pressures. This has led to expenditure drift and budgets being missed. Since 2012 Fine Gael have needed €7.4 billion extra in funds over what was budgeted for. It has been most acute in the Department of Health where expenditure is consistently coming in over budget. In addition, Fine Gael have repeatedly called for massive tax cuts despite the major risks facing Ireland's open economy.

- We will hold back €1.2 billion of the €11 billion available financial resources to fully account for demographic pressures, non-forecast spending requirements and the risks facing the economy. This leaves €9.8 billion for expenditure and tax measures.

Uphold a 4:1 Services to Taxation spending ratio

Over the past four budgets Fianna Fáil faced down Fine Gael policies and prioritised public services and tax reductions for low and middle-income workers. In government we will commit to building a public service that delivers for all citizens and target any tax reductions on ordinary workers. Our 4:1 Public Services to tax cuts ratio is built around this goal.

- We will allocate additional resources on a 4:1 basis in favour of public service investment.

Expand the Rainy Day Fund to protect against economic downturns

We need a rainy day fund that is capable of having a real impact in the event of a downturn. We will expand the fund and help prevent spending overruns in other departments that are reliant on unforeseen corporation taxes to fund them.

- We will increase the annual contributions to the Rainy Day Fund by €250 million to bring the total annual contributions to €750 million. This will be subject to the Exchequer account being in surplus in each of the years and will bring the entire pot in the Rainy Day Fund at the end of 2025 to €5.3 billion. This surplus allocation does not come out of the €11bn additional financial resources.

Reduce the tax burden for middle income earners

Ireland has a strong progressive income tax system that should be upheld. Fianna Fáil will target tax reductions on ordinary working people to ensure they feel the benefits of economic growth.

We will:

- Reduce the Universal Social Charge rate from 4.5% to 3.5%.
- Increase the Standard Rate Income Tax band by €3,000 for a single person and €6,000 for a couple.
- Increase the Home Carer's Tax Credit to €2,000.
- Increase the Earned Income Tax Credit to €1,650 equalising it with the PAYE Tax Credit.

- Increase the Income Tax Exemption limits for over 65s by €500 for a single person and €1,000 for married couples.
- Introduce a €600 Rent Tax Credit.
- Introduce a €2,000 Child Minders Tax credit.

These personal taxation measures will cost €1.3bn.

Retain and protect our 12.5% Corporate Tax Rate

The stability, certainty and competitiveness of our Corporate Tax rate is the cornerstone of our Foreign Direct Investment strategy. Fianna Fáil is fully committed to defending it.

- We will maintain our 12.5% Corporate Tax rate.

Work with the OECD on BEPS 2.0 and a Digital Tax Proposal

The OECD is making progress on the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting programme and on proposals for a Digital Tax. This will have significant implications for Ireland's tax base. Corporation tax reform needs to be global in nature to ensure fair taxes. We will work on a multi-lateral basis for tax certainty.

We will work with the OECD on BEPS 2.0 and a Digital Tax Proposal.

Bring down mortgage interest rates

Ireland has the second highest mortgage interest rates in the Eurozone. Fianna Fáil has kept the pressure on banks over the last number of years and rates have reduced but not far enough. Some lenders still discriminate between new and existing customers and cash back gimmicks are designed to muddy the water for consumers. According to the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission a cashback offer on a €300,000 mortgage can cost the customer nearly €44,000 over the life of the mortgage by way of higher interest charges. Banks should be competing on rates and rates only.

No doubt Ireland's legacy mortgage arrears issues have a direct impact on interest rates. Until fair and sustainable solutions are found these legacy issues will continue to persist and this will impact on interest rates.

Fianna Fáil will:

- End discrimination between new and existing customers.
- Review the role of cashback offers and ensure lenders are competing on rates alone.
- Make mortgage switching easier for customers to increase competition and drive down interest rates.
- Enable An Post and Credit Unions to enter the mortgage market in a more substantial way.

In addition we need personal accountability in the banking sector, we will:

- Fully implement the Senior Executive Accountability Regime that will give the Central Bank powers to hold senior bankers personally responsible.

Ensure no significant increases in the Local Property Tax

Fine Gael has continually dodged the issue of reforming the property tax. In contrast we believe that localised rates, broken down to the smallest level using CSO statistics, should be introduced to replace the 0.18% current tax rate to reflect the increase in property values since 2013 and avoid increases in home owners' bills. The national overall revenue from the Local Property Tax will remain at approximately €500m before further units are added into the collection and will be invested in local communities.

- We will ensure that homeowners do not face significant increases in property taxes.

Complete Banking Union with a Eurozone Deposit Insurance scheme

The missing pieces in the Eurozone framework that were ruthlessly exposed during the financial crisis still need to be addressed. Fianna Fáil is committed to making sure the Eurozone is resilient in the face of any future shocks.

- We will work to complete the banking union with a Eurozone wide Deposit Insurance scheme to withstand future shocks to the system.

Establish a European Monetary Fund

In co-ordination with steps to establish a European Deposit Insurance Scheme we will secure the durability of the Eurozone from financial instability.

- We will work to revamp the European Stability Mechanism into a new European Monetary Fund to ensure it is fit for purpose in preventing and tackling any future financial crisis.

Build a real Fiscal and Transfer Union to prepare for future downturns

The Eurozone needs to be prepared for an inevitable future downturn. A Eurozone budget and joint bond issues will help to address the imbalance between monetary union and the lack of fiscal union.

- We will work with our EU colleagues to build up a mutually beneficial Fiscal union.

Change the fiscal rules to allow for greater capital investment

The Fiscal Compact and other spending rules were designed to co-ordinate policies and protect the integrity of the Eurozone. However overly stringent rules risk undermining the basis for sound capital investment. With pressing demands in climate change transition and housing we need to facilitate targeted long-term investment.

- We will work with our EU colleagues for a review of the Eurozone spending rules to enable further capital investment in critical infrastructure.

Launch a new Commission on Taxation

It has been over 11 years since we had a Commission on taxation. In a rapidly evolving tax system we need a new comprehensive review to ensure we have a taxation model that is fit for purpose, simple and effective. This measure will cost €1m based on previous commission's work.

- We will establish a Commission to report within 12 months. We will then review and respond to all recommendations in the report.

Secure fair pay and conditions for public sector workers

Our public service workers play a crucial role in delivering key services. These ordinary workers deserve fair and competitive compensation. We will recognise the hard work and contribution of the public service. Part of unallocated sum within the available financial resources will be used as the negotiating space for future public sector pay agreements.

We will:

- Fully uphold existing pay agreements.
- Establish a new Public Sector Pay Commission to prepare the basis of a new pay agreement.
- Negotiate a new Public Pay agreement based the recommendations of Public Sector Pay Commission and incorporate new entrants pay in that new agreement.
- Seek to include Retired Public Servants in future pay negotiations.
- Target future pay rises on low and middle-income workers.
- Use the ERSI to verify productivity outcomes from pay agreements and independently verify the costs of pay and pension increases.

Creating a strong SME sector

Ensuring that a strong economy supports a strong society

Ireland is a small open economy that looks outwards in its ambitions. We have thrived and prospered by fully engaging with the EU and international trade. Our capacity to sustain a thriving SME sector and remain a key destination for Foreign Direct Investment will be vital to our future economic success. Ireland cannot become over reliant on multi-nationals at the expense of cultivating our indigenous SME sector. Furthermore, SMEs face a crisis in accessing affordable insurance.

The last decade has seen the Government let its policy focus on SMEs drift in priority compared to multinationals. The OECD review of government SME policy clearly shows that Irish SMEs have low start up and productivity rates; poor uptake in management training and adoption of digital technologies, while underachieving in share of R&D business. Most damning of all, our indigenous enterprises are not active in international markets, with only 6% of Irish SMEs directly trading across borders. We will change this and allow the 250,000 indigenous businesses located in every village, town and city nationwide every opportunity to prosper.

Building a strong economy is the basis for a strong society. This means creating decent jobs with decent pay across the whole country. Our economy must be founded on jobs that give workers a decent wage to raise a family, own their own home and lead a dignified life throughout all of Ireland not just a small part of it. Fianna Fáil is committed to building a framework that promotes balanced regional development,

develops a thriving SME sector, continues to attract Foreign Direct Investment and sustains decent employment standards.

Our goals

- A strong SME sector
- A tax system that encourages SME enterprise and innovation
- Addressing the Insurance crisis

Over the next five years we will:

Reduce CGT from 33% to 25%

Investment is vital to enabling companies to grow and expand or for start-up companies to get off the ground. Reducing the CGT rate will help to incentivise investment and free up more money to be put into new companies, creating more jobs and broadening our tax base.

- We will reduce the CGT rate from 33% to 25%. This measure will cost €267m.
- We will increase the lifetime limit of Entrepreneurial Relief to €15m. This measure will cost €84m.

Equalise the tax treatment of the self-employed

Self-employed people who have started their own small business are still discriminated against in the current tax system. Unlike PAYE workers they do not receive the full benefit of the €1,650 Tax credit. Their hard-earned income is subjected to an even higher effective tax rate, ignoring the impact they have on the broader economy and community. We will build on the progress Fianna Fáil secured on this over the past several budgets and fully equalise tax treatment.

- We will equalise tax treatment for the self-employed by extending the earned tax credit to €1,650. This measure will cost €35m

Enhance the employment and investment incentive scheme

Ensuring access to competitive funding sources is a key enterprise priority. The employment and investment incentive scheme (EIS) incentivises private investors to put equity into SMEs. However, the current €250,000 cap on investments is hindering further funding to

qualifying companies under the scheme. In the UK, the limit on investors is £1 million under their equivalent EIS scheme. As another Brexit competitiveness measure and to further promote entrepreneurship,

- We will increase the annual current EIS ceiling to €1m as an initial policy measure. This measure will cost €0.86m.

Reform the R&D Tax Credit and the Key Employee Engagement Programme for SMEs

It is essential to intensify uptake in R&D (research and development) activities by Irish SMEs. Developing new products and pioneering innovation is key to continued jobs and investment. However, there is a deficit in R&D activity by domestic SMEs with multinationals dominating the arena.

We will:

- Introduce a pre-approval mechanism for the R&D tax credit specifically designed for micro and small businesses. This will reduce the risk facing SMEs and match the offering in the UK.
- Include a review of the KEEP scheme along with the SME tax environment as part of the Commission on Taxation.

Introduce an ambitious National SME Masterplan to 2030

In the 1950s, Seán Lemass set out a radical plan for increased FDI that has benefited the economy to the present day. Irish small businesses now require the same strategic focus to be set out in a national SME masterplan. This will set out a new visionary long-term strategic blueprint to

recast SME policy in Ireland for the next decade, one which engenders pro-enterprise and pro-entrepreneur policies.

We will:

- Setup a SME Growth Taskforce including all stakeholders to design a National SME Masterplan that will map out an ambitious long-term strategic blueprint to 2030 for the sector.
- Revamp the Supporting SMEs Online website by introducing an easily accessible online business diagnostic tool to support all SMEs and entrepreneurs.
- Ensure SME representation on the National Competitiveness Council and in the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF).

Increase SME productivity and scale up exports

The productivity gap between SMEs and foreign multinationals is very pronounced in Ireland. Ireland's SMEs are the second lowest performing in the OECD. This is a glaring deficit overseen by Fine Gael over the last decade.

We will:

- Double the value of trading online vouchers up to €5,000 that LEOs provide to start ups and micro sized firms.
- Expand Enterprise Ireland's Exporter Development Department staff contingent to 20
- Strengthen InterTrade Ireland's vital Acumen and Elevate programmes, which support SMEs to develop cross-border business by increasing funding.

In total these measures will cost €4.9m.

Extend more social protection supports to the self-employed

We have strongly campaigned for a social safety net to be extended to Irish job creators if their business fails. It secures a measure of social justice and reduces the risk for those entrepreneurs who wish to start up their own businesses.

- We will expand more social protection supports to our entrepreneurs by ensuring that PRSI contributors are eligible for the carers' benefit. This will benefit in the region of 400 self-employed persons in the first year of take up. The cost of this measure is €3m.

Strengthen the Credit Union Sector

Credit Unions are non-profit member owned institutions. Credit Unions are trusted and relied upon by communities up and down the country. Over the last number of years, the Credit Union sector has been completely left out in the cold. Scare tactics by Fine Gael over the years have led to heavy restrictions being placed on Credit Unions and what they can do. The heavy regulations and the low interest rate environment have put the credit union model under severe pressure. Reform is needed if this vital community service is to be maintained throughout the country.

We will:

- Review the levy structure for Credit Unions with the aim of reducing the burden. There are a multitude of levies placed on credit unions including the Industry Funding Levy which was only just increased.
- Work with the Central Bank to reform the Capital Regulatory Requirements.
- Work to better enable Credit Unions to provide longer term more profitable loans such as mortgages and loans to SMEs.
- Work to establish an SPV model to enable Credit Unions to invest in Social Housing.
- Work to make 'It Makes Sense' loans to be made available in more Credit Unions to tackle moneylenders.
- Assist the credit union sector in providing additional services to attract younger members. This will include the introduction of debit cards and a move to online banking.
- Review the legislative framework surrounding the Credit Union sector.

Upskill & digitise SMEs

Irish SMEs are falling behind their multinational counterparts in terms of upskilling and training staff. If this is not addressed, their competitiveness will be severely damaged.

SMEs made up less than 2% of learners on the Skillnet Management Works Programme in 2017.

We will:

- Increase Skillnet Ireland funding to the following programmes. These measures will cost €6.5m.
- Double the funding to the SME upskilling scheme as a productivity measure, which will target an additional 1,200 owners/managers.
- Increase funding of the Digital Skills Initiative to provide in the region of 2,150 more training places to over 900 companies

Ensure SME lending spurs business growth

Access to affordable finance is crucial for SMEs. However, the OECD report on Irish SME policy is damning on this issue. Irish SMEs have few alternatives to banking finance, while SME loan rejections and SME interest rates are double the EU average. We have allocated €0.1m to these measures.

We will:

- Commission an independent impact assessment and cost benefit analysis on establishing a new non-for-profit bank for SMEs and Agri-Food business, which focuses on business expansion lending. Such an assessment would also examine the role of and additional capacity of credit unions to contribute to the SME lending space.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the revised SME credit guarantee scheme and consider further enhancements.

Implement the Living Wage across Government departments

Establishing a Living Wage is an important measure in ensuring that works pays at all levels. An adequate living wage, which has been estimated at €12.30 an hour, is vital to attracting more people in the workforce and ensuring them has a decent standard of living. The government, as the largest employer in the country, should lead the way in this regard. This will set a broader standard without placing an undue legislative burden upon employers struggling to keep down costs.

- We will implement the living wage across all government departments at a cost of €9.9m.

Greater flexible working arrangements

Ensuring work-life balance is vital for individuals and families to live fulfilling lives. Existing employment laws need to be updated in order to cater for greater flexible working arrangements to help families and commuters with work-life balance.

We will:

- Amend current employment legislation and introduce a right to request flexible working arrangements for workers in order to facilitate better work-life balance.
- Clamp down on exploitative bogus self-employment contracts.

Tackling Insurance Costs

Insurance costs are driving too many businesses out of operation. Exorbitant premiums driven up by fraud, large compensation awards and a lack of competition are jeopardising Ireland's business community and consumers. Fianna Fáil will tackle this problem to save small and medium businesses across the country.

We will:

Tackle costs

- Fully establish the Judicial Council to provide guidance on personal injury claims.
- Regulate claims management companies and claims harvesters.
- Review the balance of "Duty of Care" in legislation.
- Strengthen the Solicitors (Advertising) Regulations of 2002.
- Reform the PIAB by making it an offence to not fully co-operate with it.

Get tough on insurance fraud

- Establish a publicly funded Garda Fraud Unit.
- Ensure that fraudulent claims are forwarded to the DPP.
- Increase the penalties for fraudulent claims.
- Publish insurance fraud data.
- Make fraudulent claimants pay the legal expenses for defendants.
- Make it an offence to knowingly provide false information to PIAB.

Increase Transparency, tackle anti-competitive behaviour and foster competition

- Give the Competition regulator (the CCPC) effective enforcement powers to punish and deter anti-competitive conduct.
- Establish a Public Liability and Employer Liability price index.
- Establish a National Claims Information Database for employer liability and public liability to track the level of claims.
- Establish a databank within the Central Bank for new entrants.
- Prioritise establishing a fully functioning European wide single insurance market.
- Work to remove dual pricing from the market.

Genuinely Affordable Childcare

Giving every child an equal start

The early years of a child's life are critical in their long-term development. Fianna Fáil is committed to building a childcare system that keeps costs for parents down while giving children quality care and support.

Fine Gael's approach to childcare has been characterised by fanfare and promises with little actual delivery. Their flagship National Childcare Scheme has been bogged down in delays. Exorbitant costs and a shortage of places are continuing to cripple parents and place pressure on families.

Fianna Fáil will revamp the childcare scheme with increased subsidy levels and price transparency to ensure parents benefit from lower costs. We will provide a tax credit for registered childminders to give parents greater choice in terms of childcare. Statutory entitlement to maternity and paternity leave will be extended. Stay-at-home carers also play a crucial role that must be recognised, and we will increase the Home Carer Tax Credit to support these parents.

We will expand Ireland's childcare sector by investing in providers, supporting staff, and reducing core operating costs. This will ensure high quality care for children and affordable fees for parents.

Our goals

- Affordable childcare across the country
- Statutory entitlement to more time off with children
- Value the role of stay-at-home carers
- Support for families who use childminders

Over the next five years we will:

Increase the National Childcare Scheme subsidy for ordinary workers

The National Childcare Scheme has been mired in protracted delays and missed deadlines. Even as the scheme finally comes into operation, ordinary families receive a measly subsidy of €20 per week. Providers are free to increase their fees well above subsidy levels. The subsidy level needs to be increased to middle-income workers who need support with their childcare costs.

- We will invest an additional €81m to increase the universal childcare subsidy from €20 per week to €80 per week.
- We will consider introducing fee caps for childcare services if costs to parents are not reduced.

Establish a Childminders Tax Credit

Parents know what is best for their children. While this is often creches, many other families choose to use childminders. This should be supported. We will directly support working parents with a progressive tax credit worth €2,000 for average income households who rely on non-relative registered childminders. We will work to increase the number of registered childminders by introducing fit-for-purpose regulations.

- We will introduce a tax credit for registered childminders of 0-3-year olds worth €2,000 for average income households at a cost of €26m.

Increase the Home Carer Tax Credit

- Many parents wish to stay at home full-time with their children. This is a vital contribution to their family, and we wish to extend further support to these families by increasing the Home Carer Tax Credit to €2000 per year.
- We will increase the Home Carer Tax Credit to €2000 per year at a cost of €30m.

Expand the ECCE Scheme to 40 weeks

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme provides for a programme of early learning for children before commencing primary school. We will strengthen the scheme by expanding it out to 40 weeks so that all children will be entitled to 80 weeks of ECCE services.

- We will expand the ECCE scheme from 38 to 40 weeks at a cost of €17.2m

Ensure price transparency in childcare facilities

For many parents the subsidy from the state is being swallowed up by increased childcare costs that leaves them no better off. We will introduce legislation to require all registered childcare providers to display a full list of prices in their establishment as well as on websites and other pages they operate, and to submit their price data to a central price register that is similar to the residential property price register.

- We will introduce a childcare price register.

Facilitate Au Pairs

It is estimated that 20,000 families use au pairs as part of their childcare. The au pair experience can be a deeply enriching experience for au pairs and their host families, when managed well. At present, there is no legal definition of au pairs, and a series of Workplace Relation Commission cases have ensued.

- We will provide legal certainty and help ensure families can continue to use Au Pairs into the future on fair terms.

Expand Maternity benefit from 26 to 30 weeks and allow parents to share leave

- In order to give parents the option to spend more time with a child during their special first few months, maternity leave should be increased to 30 weeks. We recognize that not every family is the same, and to give families increased choice, we will allow parents to share these weeks, if they so wish.

We will:

- Expand Maternity leave to 30 weeks at a cost of €38.8m.
- Protect the first 14 weeks of leave as core maternity leave and 4 weeks as core paternity leave and allow parents to share the remainder of paid and unpaid leave as they choose.

Expand Paternity Benefit to 4 weeks

The creation of paid paternity leave is an important step in enabling fathers to play an active role in the formative months of a child's life and moving towards greater equality in familial responsibilities.

- We will double paternity leave to give fathers the opportunity to spend precious time with their newborn at a cost of €11.2m.

Launch a new round of capital expansion of childcare facilities

The expansion of the childcare sector is vital to giving parents choice. This will require substantial capital investment to build the kind of facilities required and help expand places. The state has an important role to play in co-operation with private and community childcare providers.

- We will ensure full investment in expanding childcare facilities.

Create a Commercial Rates relief fund for childcare providers

Childcare providers must currently pay substantial commercial rates on their facilities. These extra costs are then passed onto parents. Furthermore, this creates a perverse incentive to maintain smaller inappropriate facilities.

- We will address this with a €10m relief fund for commercial rates.

Develop a new range of child care apprenticeships to attract staff

Attracting additional, committed staff into viable long-term careers is crucial to building a viable sector. Solas should broaden out the scope of its apprenticeship programmes to encompass childcare provision.

- We will create 1000 Childcare apprenticeships at a cost of €9.9m.

Reform Tusla

Too many children are failed by Ireland's child protection and care system, which needs urgent reform.

We will:

- Expedite the review of the Childcare Act and bring forward necessary amendments.
- Review Ireland's management of retrospective abuse allegations to bring it up to best international practice.

Securing a fair & decent society

Safeguarding standards of living for all citizens

Inequality is a pressing problem of our age and is fraying the edges of Irish life. We need a strong state that can press its thumb on the unbalanced scales to give people a fair chance. Our welfare system should support those who cannot provide for themselves due to age, incapacity or economic difficulties. It is the guarantor of the basic level of decency that we set as a country and is the embodiment of national solidarity with fellow citizens. Our taxation and social transfer systems are crucial in creating a decent society that avoids the worst excesses of inequality that would undermine our democracy. Fianna Fáil is committed to protecting and strengthening a decent society by making our social protection system fit for purpose for the challenges of the years ahead.

An effective social protection system reaches across various age groups from adequate income supports for pensioners to targeted payments to parents. We will ensure that the State Pension continues to form the bedrock of older people's income and the age threshold is based on fairness, recognition of a lifetime of work and sustainability. These are the building blocks of a fairer society where no-one is allowed to slip through the cracks, families get the help they need and our older people can enjoy their later years in well-deserved comfort. Fianna Fáil will work to ensure every citizen enjoys a decent standard of living in our Republic.

Our goals

- A strong state pension that sufficiently provides for older people
- Adequate supports for young families
- A caring society that looks after its most vulnerable citizens
- Reduced child poverty

Over the next five years we will:

Reinstate the State Transition Pension and initiate a Commission on pensions

Fianna Fáil recognises that it is inherently unfair for people having worked all of their lives to be forced to sign on the dole. The increase in the State Pension age to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028 will exacerbate this issue. Fine Gael has been in government for almost a decade and in that time did nothing to address this issue and failed to prepare the public for the changes ahead.

We will:

- Reinstate the State Pension (Transition) as an interim measure which will be paid to people aged 65 & over who retire but are not yet entitled to a State Pension at a cost of €150m.
- Establish a Commission on pensions.
- Defer the pension age increase in 2021 at a cost of €217m.
- Progress our bill which we introduced in the last Dáil to outlaw contracts that stipulate retirement at 65.
- Encourage employers to facilitate employees who wish to work beyond the age of 65.

Protect Defined Benefit pensions

Decisions by profitable companies to eschew their pension obligations is fundamentally unfair. Legislation is required to ensure workers are protected from any such moves.

- We will legislate to ensure no solvent company can wind up their pension without permission from the pension authority.

Developing a more flexible Social Welfare System

Fianna Fáil recognises that the social welfare system as it currently stands does not in many instances work for the people who need it. Often inflexible and bureaucratic it frustrates rather than facilitates those accessing supports. In government Fianna Fáil will work to create a more flexible social welfare system. Within existing resources, we will explore the feasibility of:

- Reducing the hours of work required to qualify for the Working Family Payment from 19 hours to 15 hours for lone parents.
- Extending the jobseeker's transitional payment for lone parents until their youngest child reaches 18 years of age.
- Allowing lone parents in employment whose children are aged between 7 and 14 years of age to receive both the jobseeker's transition payment and the working family payment.
- Reforming the child maintenance system.
- Reviewing and simplifying the social welfare application process to reduce the number of payments awarded on appeal.
- Reforming the Wage Subsidy scheme.

Independent Living for Older People

The number of people over the age of 65 is due to surge in the coming years. How we respond to this will be both a policy and moral challenge. Fianna Fáil is committed to help ensure that older people can live in their own homes for as long as practicable.

We will:

- Increase the state pension by €25

Fianna Fáil successfully increased the state pension by €15 a week over the past four years. In government we will go further to move the state pension towards 35% of average weekly earnings. We commit to achieving a €25 per week increase by 2025. This will cost €710.4m

- Secure fairness in the pension age

Reinstate the State Transition Pension, initiate a Commission on pensions and defer the increase in the state pension age.

- Increase Home Adaptation Grants

Enabling more older people to remain in their own home will require additional resources in making those homes fit for purpose. We will increase Housing Adaptation grants by €20m.

- Provide five million additional Home Help hours

Home Help is crucial to supporting older people who need some assistance to remain in their homes. We are committed to clearing waiting lists by investing in an additional five home help hours. This will cost €260m.

- Protect the Free Travel Scheme

We will protect funding to the Free Travel Scheme as a core service to older people.

Establish a Basic Income Commission

The global economy has changed immensely since the Beveridge report set out the basis of the modern welfare state. The transformative impact of technology and rise of Artificial Intelligence will create a fresh challenge to our welfare system. The concept of a Basic Income payment to every citizen is a new approach that is committed to underpinning a dignified life for all citizens. Fianna Fáil believes we should explore this idea as a future general policy to meet the challenges we face as a country in the 21st century.

- We will set up a Basic Income Commission. The evidence drawn will then be used to shape Social Welfare policy into the future. This will cost €1m based on similar models.

Safeguard CE & Tús Schemes

CE and Tús Schemes are central to many communities the length and breadth of the country. Not only do they provide employment in local communities, but they also allow people who cannot access jobs in mainstream employment to work. Fianna Fáil is committed to safeguarding these schemes.

We will:

- Rebalance the focus of these schemes so that they once again have a dual role of social inclusion and activation.
- Protect the schemes and ensure that they stay within the Department of Social Protection.
- Revise the eligibility criteria for these schemes, particularly taking into account the needs of older participants and people with a disability.

Double Child Benefit Payment on the birth of a first child

We recognise that the arrival of a first child is a joyous but expensive time for new parents. The cost of travel systems, nappies and other necessary items can place a considerable financial burden on new parents. In recognition of this we will provide a single additional monthly child benefit payment to parents on the birth of their first child. Therefore, the first Child Benefit Payment will be once-off payment of €280.00.

- We will double the Child Benefit payment on the birth of a first child. This will cost €3.5m.

Extend Maternity Benefit for Multiple Births by an additional 8 Weeks above current levels

CSO data from 2016 indicates that there were 1,215 instances of multiple births in Ireland, representing 1.9% of all births. According to the CSO the ‘twinning rate’ in Ireland has increased significantly over the last 25 years. Fianna Fáil recognises that having a multiple birth brings its own set of challenges and that mothers in such circumstances may require additional support.

- We will increase Maternity Benefit for those who have a multiple birth by an additional 8 weeks above current levels. This will cost €700,000.

Tackle Child Poverty

We need to ensure each child gets a fair chance at life. Child poverty is snuffing out that immense potential before it has the opportunity to flourish. We will target measures to directly alleviate child poverty and live up to the best founding ideals of our republic.

We will:

- Increase the Qualified Child Increase in each age bracket by €5.00
- Increase expenditure on the school meals programme by 10%.

These measures will cost €85.9m.

A Healthcare system for all

Building a healthcare system that delivers for all citizens

In the last nine years the health service has been allowed to get worse. The Fine Gael Government has made many promises but failed to deliver any improvements.

Waiting lists are the longest in Europe. There are older people in our communities left without home helps and the overcrowding in the country's emergency departments is worse than ever. There were over 118,000 patients treated on trollies in 2019 alone. The embargo on staffing has made it impossible for frontline staff to maintain standards. The all-party Sláintecare report was meant to provide a pathway for the next ten years on how the health services should be delivered. Instead, Fine Gael has hidden behind its recommendations. It has been over two years since it was published but implementation has been slow.

In contrast delivering better and improved care for patients will be Fianna Fáil's priority in government. We will be ambitious and deliver on credible short, medium and long-term commitments. We fully support building up our public health system, funded by general taxation. Fianna Fáil is committed to moving definitively towards fair and equal access to a high-quality universal single-tier system.

Our goals

- Reduced Emergency Department waiting times
- Increased frontline healthcare workers
- Transparent, reliable and adequate Health budgets
- More investment in community care

Over the next five years we will:

Tackle overcrowding in Emergency Departments

In 2011 the former Taoiseach Enda Kenny vowed to bring an end to the overcrowding crisis. However, 9 years later the problem is worse than ever with record-breaking numbers of patients enduring hospital overcrowding all year round. 2019 had the worst overcrowding since records began and 2020 has started on a similar basis.

We will:

- Increase bed capacity and aim for four-hour target wait for Emergency Departments.
- Ensure there is an emergency medicine consultant present in EDs on a 24-hour basis.
- Improve access to diagnostics for Emergency Departments and GPs with a new minor capital grant fund.
- Target staffing allocations of additional consultants and nurses to critical areas in Emergency Departments.
- Commit and resource the 2,600 additional hospital beds recommended under the Capacity Review.
- Significantly increase home care support hours to alleviate delayed discharges.
- Examine how the district hospital network can be utilised to provide step down facilities.

These measures will cost €310m in additional spending above pre-committed levels.

Reduce waiting lists and waiting times

Fianna Fáil believes that prescribed waiting time guarantees are a prerequisite for ensuring that waiting lists and waiting times come down. The National Treatment Purchase Fund offers

patients who are waiting longest a choice to secure treatment by using spare public hospital capacity in private hospitals. We will ensure that far more patients are treated.

We will:

- Double the National Treatment Purchase Fund to €200 million.
- Put the emphasis on reducing waiting times.
- Ensure that anyone waiting more than six months for a procedure will be able to apply to the National Treatment Purchase Fund.
- Publish monthly waiting times for diagnostic scans as with other waiting lists.
- Negotiate to ensure diagnostic scans are made available in public hospitals seven days a week.
- Introduce a minor capital and diagnostic equipment fund.

Improve Management & budgetary accountability

We will reform how healthcare is provided to ensure money goes where it is needed.

We will:

- Put in place an Office for Budget Responsibility in the Department of Health to oversee health spending and ensure reliable forecasts.
- Ensure that the HSE Board makes a difference in delivering reform and accountability.
- Implement the new regional structures proposed under Sláintecare.
- Implement Mandatory Open Disclosure.

Recruit extra consultants

Ireland has one of the lowest numbers of consultants on a per capita basis. There are almost 400 vacant and unmatched posts across all specialities and this is one of the reasons for the long waiting lists.

We will:

- Negotiate a new contract with consultants that will encompass addressing pay equality for post-2012 entrants as part of a new public sector pay agreement.
- Recruit 1,000 extra consultants over five years at a cost of €223m.

Recruit more nurses

Recruiting more nurses is essential for addressing problems in hospitals and for the expansion of primary and community care. Nurses will be given extended roles to improve services to patients. A significant increase is required especially for Emergency Departments and for Community Intervention Teams.

We will:

- Recruit 4,000 additional nursing staff over the next five years.
- Within this number we will ensure that GP's practice nurse numbers are increased by 300 and Public Health Nurses by 350.
- Implement the safe staffing framework in all hospitals plan.
- Target increased numbers to decrease the overreliance on agency staff.

This measure will cost €212m.

Strengthen the ambulance network

As first responders, the ambulance network and EMTs play a critical role in saving lives. There are several issues that need to be addressed to reach the service's full potential such as replenishing the fleet and bolstering staff numbers.

We will:

- Provide an additional 20 emergency ambulances and 200 extra staff. This measure will cost €25.4m
- Maintain standards and target times to ensure all citizens across Ireland have a responsive and adequate ambulance service.
- Ensure the full retention of ambulance services provided by Dublin Fire Brigade across Dublin.
- Protect key Helicopter Emergency Medical Services.

Enhance dental and oral health services

Oral health has long been regarded as the poor relation of general health and has generally been overlooked. While a new national oral health policy has been published, we believe it is flawed and inadequate.

We will:

- Consult with the dental profession on how the new oral health policy can be improved and implemented.
- Bring forward a reformed new policy that will have an implementation plan.
- Replace and improve the 1985 Dentists Act.

Improve Maternity Services

The Fine Gael-led government has failed to deliver many of National Maternity Strategy recommendations as no extra funding was allocated in 2019. The provision of accessible,

safe and high-quality obstetrician-led maternity services to all mothers and babies, regardless of where they live must be a core objective of public health policy.

We will:

- Implement the National Women & Infants Health Programme.
- Recruit more obstetricians and midwives as part of our recruitment campaign of frontline healthcare workers.
- Support the relocation of the four stand-alone maternity hospitals in Dublin and Limerick to new hospitals on the campuses of adult teaching hospitals.
- Ensure that anomaly scans are available in all maternity hospitals to provide high quality maternity services.
- Provide financial assistance to couples needing fertility treatment.
- Ensure that ownership and governance issues in the new Maternity Hospital on St Vincent's site are open, transparent and that the facility is state owned.

These measures will cost €5.5m above pre-committed levels.

Support General Practice in rural and urban areas

The GP is at the centre of primary care. Fianna Fáil will ensure that GPs are properly resourced. We will protect vulnerable rural GP practices.

We will:

- Expand free GP care on the basis of means in line with Sláintecare's goals and in alignment with an expansion in capacity. We will negotiate with GPs to achieve this on a phased, agreed basis.

- Implement the recently agreed changes to the GP contract and include provisions for its continuous assessment and improvement.
- Negotiate a new contract to underpin General Practice for the next 30 years to include issues such as Women's Health Programmes, Out of Hours Services and Services to patients in Nursing Homes.
- Increase GP training places to 274.
- Protect rural GP practices by increasing the allowance to €30,000.

The total costs of these proposals is €300m

Increase home care supports

The demand for home care support continues to grow and waiting lists for services have become a feature. There is a clear need for more home care and home help to be provided.

We will:

- Provide an additional five million hours of home care support. This measure costs €260m
- Deliver a 'Carers Guarantee' proposal that will provide a core basket of services to carers across the country regardless of where they live. This measure will cost €3.4m.
- Develop a statutory system of home care.
- Review the outsourcing of home care to the private sector and promote social innovation so that a wider range of social supports and care services become available

Support residential care and the Fair Deal scheme

While Fianna Fáil will strive to ensure that as many older people as possible receive care in their homes, there will always be a cohort of older people who will require long-term care.

We will:

- Increase Fair Deal funding by €225m.
- Develop a national strategy for the long-term care of our older people that includes current and future plans for the funding and financing of the statutory system of home care for those who need it.
- Ensure that no Fair Deal resident is charged for services they do not use.
- Commit to expand the availability of a model to support housing for older people.
- Implement the proposed Fair Deal changes for farming families.
- Introduce an independent appeal process for nursing home providers under the Nursing Home Support Scheme.

Improve dementia care

Most people living with dementia and their families want to have their care at home. We are committed to ensuring this is possible and will increase the provision of intensive home care packages to achieve this.

We will:

- Ensure that home support to be adaptable and responsive especially for conditions such as dementia.
- Put in place a further 15 dementia advisers so as to ensure one in each Local Health Office area at a cost €1.1m.

- Provide a dementia key worker to coordinate care in each Community Health organisation area at a cost of €0.6m.
- Examine the case for inclusion of dementia in the chronic disease framework.
- Ensure that anyone diagnosed with dementia should be allowed to apply for home helps or home care packages, including intensive packages within allocated resources.
- Ensure new build Nursing Homes include a Dementia Unit.

Enhance Neuro-rehabilitation services

The demand for neurorehabilitation services is growing, with our ageing population and with increased survival rates of people with neurological disability but services are completely insufficient to meet current needs.

- We will Establish community neurorehabilitation teams in each of the nine CHO areas. This will cost €5.2m.

Protect Medical Card coverage

Fianna Fáil will ensure compassion in the provision of discretionary medical cards. More should be done particularly for children with disabilities.

We will:

- Implement the Budget 2020 increase in the thresholds for the over 70's.
- Ensure that those experiencing financial hardship due to very serious illnesses such as cancer will receive a discretionary medical card.

Reduce Health Costs

Families who are not eligible for Medical Cards or only have a GP visit card are penalised by hefty drug costs. The current drug payment scheme is not enough to help families already struggling with costs. Reducing the financial impact of medicines necessary to deal with a variety of illnesses is an important part of cutting costs for families.

We will:

- Reduce the Drug Payment scheme threshold to €100. Cost - €14.3m
- Reduce the Drugs Payment Scheme threshold for single households to €72. Cost - €8.3m
- Abolish prescription charges. Cost - €68m
- Remove car park charges in hospitals. Cost - €12m

Restore confidence in the Screening Services

The scandal that happened in Cervical Check must never happen again. The incredible and avoidable stress that the women and their families have had to endure, as well as too many serious delays in treatment, have quite rightly been a major concern for the Irish people since the first details of this scandal emerged.

We will:

- Implement the recommendations of the Scally Report and the RCOG reports.
- Introduce HPV primary screening.
- Make open disclosure a reality.

Support Cancer Care

In government Fianna Fáil implemented sustained improvements in cancer care which helped thousands of people. We are committed to building on that legacy. Our measures will cost an additional €6.5m in funding.

We will:

- Fully implement the National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026.
- Increased investment in cancer research, including clinical trials;
- Provide a clear plan and timeline for the delivery of at least one Comprehensive Cancer Centre.
-

Boost community pharmacists

Community pharmacists are keen to play a greater role in healthcare in Ireland. Pharmacists in other countries routinely offer a wider range of vaccination and other medical services. We need to expand their remit.

- We will negotiate a new contract with pharmacists and expand their role.

Invest in infrastructure

Fianna Fáil is committed to the implementation of the capital investment programme in the National Development Plan as expeditiously and efficiently as possible. We are adding a further €50m in addition to pre-committed levels.

We will:

- Complete the National Children's Hospital.
- Support the relocation of the Dublin maternity hospitals.
- Commence the construction of four new elective hospitals.

- Provide a minor capital programme for equipment provision and replacement.

Promote public health

Promoting healthy lifestyles is vital to tackling long-term health costs and enabling people to live long, active lives. A holistic approach to healthcare must start long before lifestyle illnesses become apparent. We are committed to making Ireland a tobacco free society. Equally we accept that we need to implement robust policies to reduce alcohol dependence.

We will:

- Establish a new primary school healthy eating education programme to help cultivate lifelong healthy cooking and eating habits.
- Commit to a cross-departmental and cross-sector approach to deal with childhood obesity through a bold long-term strategy.
- Issue National Planning regulations to create “No Fry” zones for new Primary and secondary schools.
- Aim to make Ireland a tobacco free society by 2030.
- Introduce increases in excise duty on tobacco products.
- Ban vaping and e-cigarette products for under 18’s and ban child focused flavours.
- Implement the Public Health (Alcohol) Act.
- Introduce Minimum Unit Pricing in conjunction with Northern Ireland.

Parity for Mental Health

Giving Mental Health a priority

Quality mental health services have been a consistent priority for Fianna Fáil in health care provision. We believe mental health should be on a par with physical health in policy development.

The need for strong mental health supports is ever growing, especially among younger people. Many parents have great concerns about the wellbeing of their children especially in a world of social media interaction. We will work to develop 21st-century skills such as teamwork, empathy, and resilience in school and youth settings.

Fianna Fail is committed to reducing the burden of mental illness and to promote mental health well-being. This will be achieved by closing the gap between what is available and what is currently needed to those seeking help, by providing a strong suite of measures of early intervention and by programmes designed to prevent mental ill-health developing in the first place.

We are committed to implementing a “Vision for change” and have allocated the €200m in additional spending required by that policy to finance the specific measures included in this section.

Our goals

- Address the crisis in children’s services
- Increased community services
- Access, quality and integration in mental health services

Over the next five years we will:

Improve Children and Youth Mental Health Services

Mental health services for children and adolescents remain well short of what is required with long waiting times for services.

We will:

- Prioritise recruitment in Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) with a special focus on areas such as the south east counties and south west Dublin where less than half the required staff are in place.
- Develop a dedicated Vision for Change for Children style strategy.
- Ensure multi-annual funding for Jigsaw, the National Centre for Youth Mental Health to build on their existing network of early intervention and prevention services and supports.

Support Older People's Mental Health

We have a growing number of older people and the related increased level of age-related mental health problems and dementia. Many psychological problems arise for the first time in later life. Yet Psychiatry of Later Life teams are running at less than two-thirds of the level recommended. In an ageing society this level of deficit is likely to grow.

We will:

- Make it a priority to reach a full complement of staff within five years
- Endeavour to the greatest extent possible to ensure that, as with other services for older people, they can receive care in their own home.

Ensure Strong Community Supports

We have a growing number of older people and the related increased level of age-related mental health problems and dementia. Many psychological problems arise for the first time in later life.

We will:

- Ensure that any new contract with GP's contains specific provisions for mental healthcare.
- Improve health outcomes for people with dual/multi diagnosis by ensuring greater collaboration between drug and alcohol services and general mental health services
- Support community groups and employers that aim to destigmatise mental illness, provide support and information mental health awareness and that aim to provide inclusive opportunities so that people with mental illness can develop their talents and skills in a community based and understanding manner.
- Support the development of 21st-century skills such as teamwork, empathy, and resilience in school and youth settings, working with stakeholders including Social Innovation Fund Ireland.

Strengthen Mental Health supports for people with Intellectual Disabilities

The need for nationwide specialised mental health services dedicated to the needs of people with Intellectual Disabilities was outlined in 2006. Yet in 2019, Adult Mental Health Intellectual Disability teams stood at 32% of the recommended levels and the CAMHS-Intellectual Disability teams were at just 9%. Within our €200m in additional funding for

Mental Health we will progressively expand the teams to provide 29 for Adult MHID to and 17 for CAMHS-ID.

We will:

- Provide 29 for Adult Mental Health Intellectual Disability teams
- Put in place 17 teams for Children and Adolescents.

Deepen rights and inclusion at the heart of policy

Fianna Fáil believes that a strong rights culture must exist and be encouraged within mental health services. It is also vital that programmes be aware be culturally sensitive to groups groups such as LGBTI+, travellers and the deaf community.

We will:

- Ensure that HSE mental health services are proactive in outlining to service users how they can make a complaint and encourage both negative and positive feedback.
- Conduct a nationwide needs assessment for independent one-to-one advocacy services for mental health service users.
- Provide mental health policy implementation acknowledges and highlights the link between mental health, sexual orientation and sexual health and the compounding of risk factors for mental wellbeing in circumstances of co-existing vulnerabilities.
- Ensure that the development of future services and the expansion of existing services is proofed by way of an impact assessment, to ensure that services are delivered in a LGBTI+ and gender understanding manner

Strengthen suicide Prevention

Overcoming stigma and preventing the tragedy of suicide taking so many lives must be at the core of any mental health policy.

We will:

- Work closely with the National Suicide Prevention Office and the Mental Health Evidence Research Team to develop specific suicide prevention policies and to ensure a whole of government approach to suicide prevention.
- Ensure that there are effective non-stigmatising plans to prevent unnecessary early deaths by suicide.

Expand recruitment and retention

Recruitment of mental health staff has simply not been given the priority it deserves. There is a strong case for clinical and frontline recruitment being carried out at a local level rather than nationally as is the case currently.

We will:

- Review current recruitment practices with a view to streamlining them and ensuring faster recruitment.
- Carry out a pilot scheme for local recruitment in a specific CHO and if successful extend it to all areas.

Target Homelessness and Mental Health

Fianna Fáil recognises the relationship between homelessness and physical and mental ill health.

We will:

- Ensure that people who are homeless are named as a target group in health and mental health policies and strategies.

- Develop in conjunction with the Department of Housing a specific housing policy for persons with mental illness to include housing first and assisted living policies.
- Aim to provide a dedicated Community Mental Health Nurse in each CHO area to support the needs of people who are or at risk of homelessness.

Tackle eating Disorders

Eating disorders have the highest mortality and morbidity risk of all the mental health disorders. An estimated 188,895 Irish people will experience an eating disorder at some point in their lives. However, care services are underdeveloped. Fianna Fáil is committed to providing that care.

We will:

- Ensure we can treat people with eating disorders within our own mental health services
- Work to provide 16 specialist eating disorder services teams – half of them for CAMHS - across the country.

Introduce political and administrative Changes

For services to be given priority there needs to be sustained political action and pressure.

We will:

- Establish on a permanent basis a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Mental Health.
- Appoint a Chief Psychiatrist in the Department of Health.
- Review the decision to discontinue the position of Director of Mental Health Services in the HSE.

Update Mental Health laws

Many of the laws and regulations covering mental health need urgent updating yet the outgoing government brought forward no such measures over the past four years.

We will:

- Expand the powers of the Mental Health Commission to regulate service providers and to ensure compliance.
- Amend the Criminal Law (Suicide Act) 1993 to make it an offence to coerce or incite another person to take, or attempt to take, their own life.
- Change the law to end discrimination suffered by families when a loved one dies by suicide by limiting so called “suicide clauses” in life insurance policies.
- Update the 2001 Mental Health Act consistent with the recommendations of the expert review report.

An inclusive Republic for people with disabilities

Ensuring that all citizens can participate in society

In Government Fianna Fáil was the first party to bring forward policies and legislation to advance the rights of people with disabilities. Fianna Fáil is committed to creating a more inclusive society and to removing the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in society.

In addition, we need to recognise and support the invaluable work of carers across Ireland. We will ensure that strong supports are rolled out to assist in this underappreciated but crucial work.

Our goals

- Enhanced supports of people with a disability
- Recognition of the additional cost of disability
- Support for carers in their crucial work

Over the next five years we will:

Introduce a €10 Disability payment

Fianna Fail will introduce a cost of disability payment. This innovative step towards improving income adequacy for those with a disability will for the first time recognise the extra costs a person with a disability can experience in their everyday life. This payment will be paid to those in receipt of Carers Allowance; Carers Benefit; Disability Allowance; Illness Benefit; Blind Pension & Invalidity Pension.

- We will top up payments to people with disabilities by €10 to recognise the unique costs they have to pay. This measure will cost €167.8m.

Increase Personal Assistance hours

Personal Assistance hours are enormously important to allow people with a disability to enjoy equal and independent lives in the same way as other people.

- We will increase personal assistance hours by 1.5m. This measure will cost €36.6m.

Increase Housing Adaptation Grants

Housing Adaptation Grants are vital in helping to ensure homes are fit for purpose. People with a disability need further assistance in refurbishing houses to make them suitable, safe and comfortable homes.

- We will boost funding for Housing Adaptation grants by €20m.

Fully utilise an expanded National Treatment Purchase Fund to tackle assessment waiting lists

The NTPF has a crucial role to play in addressing serious waiting list times as a short-term measure while we expand capacity in the publicly funded health sector.

- We will use the expanded €200m NTPF to help cut down on waiting lists that are hampering early assessment and treatment.

Strengthen Community Employment scheme participation

Fianna Fáil is a strong supporter and advocate of Community Employment Schemes. The work facilitated by employment support schemes makes a valuable contribution to communities across Ireland. CE schemes have given people with a disability the opportunity to learn new skills, add something to their communities and thrive.

- We will remove the restriction on the maximum amount of time (currently 7 years) that a person with a disability can spend on a CE scheme.

Reform the Wage Subsidy Scheme

The Wage Subsidy Scheme provides financial incentives to private sector employers to hire people with a disability for between 21 and 39 hours per week under a contract of employment. We will examine possible changes that if implemented could improve employment outcomes and remove barriers to employment for persons with disabilities.

We will:

- Examine the operation of the Wage Subsidy Scheme including the feasibility of increasing the Wage Subsidy Scheme for persons with a disability from 55% of the minimum wage to 70% of the minimum wage level.
- Also examine the possibility of reducing the minimum number of hours worked under the Wage Subsidy Scheme from 21 hours to 15 hours.

Improve take up of the Reasonable Accommodation Fund

Tied to our policy of improving access to mainstream Activation Measures is promoting the employment of people with disabilities and raising awareness of schemes that are available both to employees and employers to support and retain people with disabilities into employment. It is evident from the low level of expenditure that significant efforts need to be made to not only promote the employment of people with disabilities but to also raise awareness and encourage the take-up of the scheme. This measure will cost €70,000.

- We will review the effectiveness of Reasonable Accommodation Fund with a view to improving outcomes and increasing the uptake of grants available under the scheme.

Roll out Disability Awareness Training for all Intreo Staff

Fianna Fáil will ensure that all staff working in Intreo offices are given disability awareness training. This training is essential from a disability inclusion perspective and will ensure that people with disabilities accessing Intreo Centres are treated appropriately, and with dignity and

respect. The full cost of providing disability awareness training for all staff in Intreo offices is in the region of €90,000.

- We will roll out disability training for all Intreo staff.

Extend the Free Travel Scheme to children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance

Children with a disability face a specific set of circumstances. Transport costs are a major part of that. In order to further support these families transport costs should be reduced.

- We will extend the Free Travel Scheme to children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance at an estimated full year cost of €5m.

Support the Disability Voluntary Sector

The independent and voluntary sector makes an invaluable and indispensable contribution to the provision of health and social care services especially for people with disabilities. Without them many services would cease. The Independent Review Group, established to examine the role of voluntary organisations in health and social services, found that two thirds of disability services are provided by the sector. Yet they are enduring a funding crisis that is fuelling concern about the viability of many organisations.

We will:

- Address this funding deficit and provide €20m annually in additional funding.
- Exempt the disability sector from the 'efficiency' cut imposed in January 2020 at a cost of a further €20m.

- Develop appropriate national standards for services in the list of essential services, where these do not already exist.
- Undertake a full mapping of all voluntary organisations providing personal social care services receiving public funding.
- Draw up a Charter to give official recognition to the legally separate status of the voluntary sector and to reflect its public service role in the provision of health and social care services.
- Establish a Forum to facilitate regular dialogue between State representatives and voluntary sector.

Recruit more therapists

Waiting times for both assessments and services for essential therapies are unacceptable. This covers a wide range of groups including children with speech and language needs, physical therapists for stroke victims and occupational therapists for people with life challenging conditions. It is essential that children with speech and language difficulties have access to therapy prior to going to school.

We will:

- Recruit an additional 800 therapy staff. This will cost €40.9m.
- Expand early intervention teams in schools within these resources.

Enhance Respite Services

The need for increased respite availability is widely acknowledged and needs to be addressed. Yet there was a drop of some 26,523 respite overnights for people with disabilities between 2015 and 2018 and the number provided in 2019 fell well below target as well. Demand for respite is not going to fall and we

need to address the current shortfall and ensure that these overnights are delivered to those who need it.

- We will provide €10m of increased funding year on year to enhance respite services.

Boost Adult Day Services

The number of school leavers with disabilities is set to continue increasing over the next five years and services will need to be expanded to provide for them.

- We will provide €20m of increased funding year on year to provide extra adult day services.

Develop Autism Support Services

Fianna Fáil is committed to boosting the rights and the life experiences of people with autism. However, action on implementing the review of services for individuals with autism spectrum disorders has been slow.

We will:

- Develop an Autism Empowerment Strategy with parity of access to public services as the underpinning goal of any such Strategy, with measurable targets and the tools to oversee their delivery and impact.
- Work to autism-proof services and raise awareness.
- Ensure the recruitment of additional therapists has a real impact with an emphasis on early intervention.
- Allocate a further €2m.

Reverse cuts to the Rehabilitative Training Allowance

The allowance, which is a mere €31.80 a week per student, is designed to help people with disabilities develop life, social and basic work skills so that further education and employment options are more accessible to them. We believe this decision is short-sighted and cruel. It will affect the most vulnerable the most and the savings will be minimal. We will reverse this decision at a cost of €3m.

- We will reverse cuts to the Rehabilitative Training Allowance.

Strengthen Adult safeguarding

People with a disability are acutely vulnerable and we have a responsibility to ensure that they are adequately protected.

- We will legislate to provide for mandatory reporting by certain professionals and others where an adult has suffered abuse or harm, is suffering abuse or harm, or is at risk of suffering abuse or harm.

Put Disability inclusion at the heart of government

Ireland finally marked the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with a disability in 2018. This was an essential step towards achieving our goal of ending discrimination and achieving equality for all our citizens. It now needs real political leadership to achieve it.

We will:

- Place a Minister of State for Disability within the Department of An Taoiseach to take the lead on disability.

- Establish a formal Oireachtas committee to monitor the implementation of the UN Convention.
- Sign up to the optional protocol of the convention.

Support Assistive technology

Assistive technology has the potential to have a massive positive impact on the lives of people with a disability. It needs a new focus to realise this potential.

- We will introduce an Assistant Technology Passport at a cost of €1.5m and assign a co-ordinating responsibility for supports in this area issue a cross departmental statement on assistant technology.

Implement hate crime legislation against people with disabilities

Violence against people with a disability needs to be addressed. Stronger legislative actions will help to protect this vulnerable group.

- We will legislate to tackle hate crimes against people with a disability.

Enhance transport accessibility

Fianna Fáil recognises the importance of making public transport accessible to people with disabilities.

We will:

- Work for equal access to all public transport services.
- Set minimum accessibility standards in the issuing of licenses to private bus providers.
- Ensure passenger information is available on disability access

Recognise and support the work of carers

Carers in Ireland have been completely undervalued by this government, despite providing essential supports to their loved ones at a substantially reduced cost to the State. We will undertake a series of actions to reverse this policy and provide critical supports to carers.

We will:

- Increase disability payments by €10 including carers payments at a cost of €167.8m
- Publish a new Carers Strategy. Despite a Government commitment in 2012 to revisit the first Carers Strategy when the economy improved, this has not happened.
- Increase the income disregard from €332.50 for a single person and €665 for a married couple to €450 and €900 per week respectively. Cost - €55m.
- Deliver a 'Carers Guarantee' proposal that will provide a core basket of services to carers across the country regardless of where they live
- Increase the capital disregard for means purposes from €20,000 to €50,000. Cost - €2.5m.
- Extend the free travel scheme to include children in receipt of Domiciliary Care Allowance
- Expand more social protection supports by ensuring that PRSI contributors are eligible for the carers' benefit.



Owning your own home.

Owning your own home

Delivering 200,000 new homes by 2025 and ending long-term homelessness

Fianna Fáil is the party that builds homes. The housing crisis is a social and economic emergency and is one of our main priorities if elected to government. Fine Gael has consistently failed to get to grips with the scale of the problem. Tenants face unaffordable rents, homelessness continues to grow unabated and a generation of young people are unable to buy a home. Fine Gael has abandoned supporting home ownership as a core objective and left an entire generation at the mercy of a rip off rental market.

Our central goal in government will be to build homes and ensure people can own the roof over their heads and tackle homelessness.

Our goals

- Increased home ownership rates.
- Build 200,000 new homes including 50,000 new build social housing units & 50,000 new affordable units.
- Ending the rip off rental market.
- Eliminate long-term homelessness.

Our policy has 6 central strands to get bricks and mortar into the ground.

1. Strengthening Home Ownership
2. Cutting construction costs
3. Penalising hoarding and underuse of land and property
4. Build social and affordable homes
5. Helping Generation Rent
6. Ending Homelessness

Over the next five years we will:

Strengthen Home Ownership

Introduce a 33% top up Special Savings Incentive Scheme for over 125,000 first time buyers over the next five years

Fianna Fáil is committed to supporting first time buyers in securing a good quality home to start their families. We will introduce a First Time Buyer's saving scheme to help people starting out get the money together for a deposit on their new home. This involves a 33% top up on an individual's special deposit savings account. For every three euro you save, the State will add another euro to help you meet your deposit up to a maximum of a €10,000 top up. The scheme will be capped at our target of 25,000 households per annum with appropriate limits on savings. We have estimated the maximum cost at €250m per annum. All homes not just new builds will be eligible. All homes will be eligible subject to a €500,000 cap.

- We will establish a 33% top up First Time Buyers Special Savings Incentive Scheme

Retain & expand funding to the Help to Buy scheme

To ensure stability in the property market and as part of our commitment to strengthening home ownership we will retain and expand the Help to Buy scheme. We will expand funding and ensure recipients are also eligible for the First Time Buyers SSIA scheme.

- We will retain the Help to Buy scheme and expand its funding by €100m.

Build 50,000 new affordable homes by 2025

Building more affordable homes is crucial to boosting home ownership levels. Our policy will be focused on increasing supply with at least 200,000 new homes including 50,000 more affordable homes for average income workers. We will ensure the rapid implementation and expansion of the Affordable Home scheme up to 2025 to build homes available for purchase for below €250,000. This will be significantly increased with a €2.5bn fund, some €2.2bn above current commitments over five years and will operate in conjunction with the new Land Development Agency. The estimated full year cost is €500m.

- We will ramp up and deliver 50,000 homes available to buy at below €250,000 across Ireland.

Help First Time Buyers by reforming the planning system for Cuckoo Funds

The increased number of Cuckoo Funds snapping up whole housing estates and apartment blocks is creating an unprecedented level of competition for first time buyers. These are largely concentrated in Dublin and are effectively pushing first time buyers out of buying their own homes.

- We will introduce legislation to ensure that no single buyer can bulk purchase entire developments unless they are designated Build to Rent in the Housing strategy.

Cutting construction costs

Reduce Development Levies on condition of construction being completed within 3 years to stimulate construction

Providing incentives for accelerating construction will play an important part in ramping up construction levels to reach the 20,000 new private homes per annum level required to tackle the housing crisis. We need a “Dunkirk” style approach encompassing small and medium builders not just large ones. A targeted development levy reduction directly linked to completed construction within a three-year time frame will help ensure developers move forward quickly with new construction projects. This scheme will be subject to a €5,000 cap this will cost some €111m per annum.

- We will reduce development levies to stimulate construction.

Streamline regulations to make it easier to convert above the shop spaces

There are thousands of above shop unit properties in town and city centres across Ireland that are underutilised. We will enable the expedited development of certain classes of residential developments including those requiring change of use conversion from commercial or industrial to residential and residential refurbishment in upper floors and in older structures. It is intended the ‘One-Stop-Shop’ Approval system will streamline regulatory hurdles to the conversion and refurbishment of existing structures in urban areas to residential use, without compromising on quality and safety.

- We will establish a special planning and building control approval process in each planning authority.

Enhance skills and capacity in construction sector by increasing training places for apprentices in construction and electrical sectors

The construction sector will need significant extra capacity to build at least 40,000 units per annum. This will require significant additional numbers of skilled workers. We will increase the number of apprenticeship places to ensure there is a steady flow of capable workers working in the construction projects. To meet the labour and skills demands of the ramped-up home building targets we will provide for 10,000 apprenticeship places.

We will:

- Target 10,000 apprenticeship places in the construction sector per annum. This will cost of €45.5m in further spending.
- Introduce a new shared apprenticeship model where employers band together to hire trainees.

Reform and expand Home Building Finance Ireland

Access and cost of securing funding for development projects is a major barrier to achieving required output levels. A heavy reliance on cash reserves is constraining the capacity of the industry to expand and ramp up building output. We need a “Dunkirk” style approach to building that encourages small and medium builders to undertake housing projects. This would also assist in increasing the number of apprenticeship places. Small builders would be enabled to jointly take on an apprentice, making it more feasible for many of these SMEs and increasing apprenticeship places.

- We will reform and expand Home Building Finance Ireland to provide finance to small scale developers unable to access banking or bond finance.

Address probate delays

Probate takes too long in Ireland. This delays the sale of family homes left to relatives. Some 30,000 people pass away every year in Ireland with up to 86.6% of them owning a home leaving some 26,000 homes affected by delays in probate. This may contribute to our relatively high vacancy rate of 183,000 homes across Ireland. We will work to streamline the probate system with the aim of reducing waiting times and lowering the legal costs involved. This will involve:

- Improved access for lay applicants
- Simplified structure for low threshold inheritance claims
- Simplified Revenue Inheritance Tax claims forms

Directly build Social and Affordable rental Homes

Directly Build 50,000 new social housing units by 2025

Fianna Fáil is committed to building 50,000 new social housing units by 2025. The average cost of building a two-bedroom social housing unit is €250,000. The key task facing the next government is replacing the spin obsessed cynicism of Fine Gael with a renewed focus on actual new build units rather than turnkey, leasing and acquisitions. This means utilising a fresh range of measures to remove barriers to supply and ensuring targets are met.

- We will directly build 10,000 new social housing units per annum at an additional cost of €570m per annum above current spending levels.

Cut through Local Authority Red Tape

Faced with an unprecedented housing crisis we need to ensure Local Authorities have the powers and resources to get building again. Fine Gael has refused to remove red tape that means social housing proposals have to jump through hoops before they are shovel ready. Rather than blaming local authorities, we will work with them on a root and branch reform of the process to get social housing construction moving.

- We will raise the discretionary spending threshold from €2m to €6m.

Introduce a new model of State Supported 'Affordable Rental Housing' for middle income households

Developing sustainable communities must involve a broad range of households. The current application of sustainable community guidelines is restricting the capacity of Local Authorities and Voluntary Housing Associations from developing significant scale housing estates. A new Affordable Rental system will change this and increase access to affordable rental units for ordinary households. Nobody should pay more than one third of their net income on housing needs. We will accelerate the roll out of the current pilot project. This will be done through the existing Serviced Sites Fund and a further €50m investment to build over 1,000 affordable rental units per annum.

- We will roll out a cost rental model for average income households.

Develop Housing Association Finance

Housing Associations are a key vehicle in delivering more units to meet social housing demands. They are currently restricted by limited access to finance and a lack of economies of scale and new Eurostat rules that places them on-balance sheet. We will establish a Special

Purpose Vehicle in line with Central Bank approval to facilitate Credit Union investment in large scale Housing Associations around the sector.

- We will work to get Housing Associations off balance sheet and enhance access to finance.

Introduce a new Vacant/Derelict Home Refurbishment Scheme

The total available Local Authority housing stock has been eroded by the large number of vacant homes across the country. Local Authorities should allow families on the waiting list to move into these homes and refurbish them. We will replace the failed Repair & Lease and Buy & Renew schemes with a new €50m fund that cuts through red tape.

- We will launch a new €50m Vacant Fund to bring vacant and derelict homes back into use.

Penalising the underuse of land and property

New Taxation measures to ensure best land use

Effective taxation tools are needed to incentivise proper development and the maximum use of land. The Vacant Site levy introduced by the government is far too limited to genuinely drive on development and does not cover underutilised lands. We need to strengthen it by increasing the penalty on land hoarding to help stimulate development.

- We will reform and increase the Vacant Site Tax to 14% to ensure it tackles land hoarding and penalises speculation.

Reform and consolidate planning & Compulsory Purchase Order laws

The current legal framework for planning is dispersed and fragmented making it increasingly difficult to decipher. In addition, CPO laws are slow and cumbersome preventing Local Authorities from assembling appropriate sites for development.

We will:

- Clean up the legal landscape of planning and ensure the effective operation of our planning system so that more homes can be provided in a faster manner.
- Clarify laws and Local Authority powers on compulsory purchase orders of vacant properties.

Restrict short-term platforms

AirBnB has helped to open the tourism industry and generate additional revenue for home owners. However globally it is having a negative impact on rent levels as more and more units are shifting into short-term lets rather than secure rental tenures. Fine Gael has not backed up its press release politics with actual resources for Local Authorities to enforce new regulations. We will back up local authorities with specific staff for enforcing new rules. In addition, a standardised approach to enforcement will be rolled out nationally and unit ownership identification strengthened.

- We will allocate €10m to fund some 200 staff to tackle the problem across Ireland.

Ensure Pyrite & MICA funding is fully drawn down

We will maintain existing allocations of funding for the Pyrite Remediation scheme and MICA redress scheme over the next five years. We

will ensure the details of the MICA scheme are expedited, easily accessible to affected households and funding is fully drawn down.

- We will protect and maintain MICA & Pyrite funding

Put in place loan funding to help address apartment defects

The remit of Home Building Finance Ireland should be expanded to encompass loan finance to Owner Management Companies who are undertaking remedial work on defective buildings. These owners who purchased in good faith deserve additional support. Furthermore, rogue builders should have no place in our construction sector.

We will:

- Revise the remit of HBF to expand funding to Owner Management Companies including clarity around access and conditions.
- Place a bar on the awarding of publicly-funded construction project tenders should be introduced to prevent such contracts from being awarded to developers/builders or associated construction professionals found to be in serious breach of building standards or fire safety regulation.
- Put in place a €10m latent defect scheme as an initial allocation to address legacy issues in certain developments.

Helping Generation Rent

Launch a new deal for renters

The rental market is where the housing crisis is at its worst. The sector remains overwhelmingly the primary source of homelessness. Average rent levels have long since passed boom time peaks and are far outstripping wage levels, creating

great hardship for low- and middle-income workers. It is also a major issue for our economic competitiveness, as employees cannot find affordable places to live. FF will launch a new deal for renters, with the priority goal of dramatically increasing the supply of affordability of rental accommodation, enhancing tenant certainty and security.

We will:

- Introduce a €600 Rent Tax Credit for all private renters.
- Strengthen implementation of Rent Pressure Zones.
- Overhaul the RTB by doubling its resources to undertake active investigations into breaches of tenancy laws.
- Create a National Rent Deposit Scheme with a “life time deposit” that moves with the tenant until they withdraw it.
- Roll out a national Affordable Rent Scheme.
- Improve quality of accommodation with a Local Authority Quality Certificate.
- Ban Co-Living.

The total full year cost of these measures is €214.6m.

Keep landlords in the system

Many landlords are leaving the rental system which is further reducing supply and driving up prices. We need to attract and retain decent landlords in the rental market. In the short-term this is crucial to get to grips with the rental crisis while helping renters save up for their own place.

We will:

- Treat Local Property Tax as a deductible expense to help keep landlords in the system. This will cost €20m.

- Strengthen the complaints system and penalties for rogue tenants including giving the RTB eviction powers for antisocial behaviour.

Ending Homelessness

Ensure new social housing units form part of the Home First Policy

The ongoing failure of the Fine Gael government to resolve the homelessness crisis is an affront to the basic decency of our country. Their record of missed targets and the continued plight of families in hotel rooms is a damning indictment of government policy. Achieving some 50,000 new social housing units by 2025 will address the long-term issue of supply of affordable units for households. It is vital that local authorities co-ordinate to ensure that these homes are made available for vulnerable households who have slipped through the administrative cracks and under severe pressure ended up homeless. The “Home First” strategy remains vital to underpinning a long-term solution to the complex factors behind many families and individuals becoming homeless.

We will:

- Ensure that the required number of the 50,000 new social housing units are made available as part of the “Home First” strategy.
- Allocate adequate funding to address rough sleeping on our streets as a matter of priority by increasing homeless funding to €250m per annum.
- Launch a Housing First for Families pilot project within Homeless funding.
- Ensure young people at 18 leaving State and Foster care have fully resourced AfterCare and Transition plans so they don’t end up experiencing homelessness.

- Develop and launch a National Youth Homelessness strategy to tackle the specific problems associated with increase in young people becoming homeless. This is especially true for young people leaving foster or state care.

- Set up a Homelessness Prevention Unit with the Department of Housing to develop and support effective prevention actions.

The costs of these measures are €84.5m in additional spending combined with the €570m extra in spending on building homes.

Increase Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment supports

Combined with the range of measures around supply, a Home First focus and rent certainty additional short-term measures are required to stem the growth the homelessness. Rent and Housing Assistance Payments must be regularly reviewed to ensure they reflect the rental market reality. Rolling reviews of these vital rental supports, particularly in high pressure urban areas, will help keep households on the edge from falling into homelessness.

We will:

- Increase rent supplement levels nationally by 10% to support vulnerable households. This increase will be targeted in Dublin and other high cost rental areas. This will cost €59.1m.
- Establish a new regular review structure will be implemented to ensure the payment system is adapted to market reality.

End Rough sleeping

Ending the rough sleeping of homeless people on our streets is a moral and social imperative. Unfortunately, this group of people has not been a priority under Fine Gael governments. Many rough sleepers do not want to go into

emergency accommodation, such as hostels, due to security and substance abuse concerns. These issues must be addressed, and the quality of hostel accommodation improved dramatically, in order to encourage people off our streets and into emergency accommodation. These are only short-term measures and must be combined with a well-resourced Home First policy to ending homelessness.

We will:

- Give HIQA a mandate to inspect standards in hostels and other emergency accommodation and implement quality improvements.
- Increase funding for Drug Free Hostels.
- Increase funding to hostels to reduce shared accommodation and ensure every guest can be given the dignity and security of their own space with a locked door.
- Work with stakeholders, case workers and homeless people on a suite of measures to encourage rough sleepers off the streets and into emergency accommodation.

Establish a “Preventing Homelessness” fighting fund

The best way to tackle homeless is to prevent it. Renters in repossessed Buy to Let units are acutely vulnerable to eviction and homelessness. We need a rolling fund to purchase units, transfer them to Approved Housing Bodies and prevent evictions to ensure it does not exacerbate the homelessness crisis.

- We will set up a rolling acquisition fund in the Housing Agency to purchase repossessed units and keep those tenants in place. At current repossession numbers we will allocate €168m to purchase all repossessed Buy to Let units.



**Building Strong, Vibrant &
Safe Communities across
Ireland.**

Keeping families and communities safe

A fresh start for justice in our communities

The series of crises that have engulfed An Garda Síochána over the past number of years risk undermining the credibility and capacity of the force to tackle crime. The mishandling of a wide range of issues by the Fine Gael government is limiting the State's ability to modernise the justice system and ensure the Gardaí are equipped to address modern crime in its multiple facets.

Communities across Ireland feel unsafe and neglected. Rising antisocial behaviour is intimidating people while complacency on drug policy has allowed more problems to take root. Sadly, towns all over Ireland have massive drug problems with illegal drugs being sold, bought and injected openly on our streets and on public transport. Gangland criminals are operating with contempt for law and order and are destroying the fabric of communities.

We need a fresh start, with a victim centred policing service. Boosting Garda numbers, re-equipping frontline Gardaí, fundamentally re-organising the policing and security apparatus will help to focus our resources in addressing the various threats of 21st century crime. We will introduce new laws to combat calls to riot on social media. We will also equip the Gardaí to monitor social media activity to prevent criminal activities being planned. Fundamental reform of the organisation of An Garda Síochána and a re-shaped, focused Department of Justice should be pillars of a justice system that protects all citizens.

Our goals

- A justice system that is fit for purpose and commands public trust
- A 16,000 strong, reformed Garda force
- Strengthened antisocial behaviour powers to protect communities
- Root out gangland crime

Over the next five years we will:

Increase Garda numbers to 16,000

Boosting Garda numbers is vital to ensuring families are safe in their homes and communities. Our national police force needs to be seen on the beat on our streets. As the population of Ireland grows it is important that An Garda Síochána is capable of meeting the increasingly complex challenges of interacting with diverse communities and tackling modern crime. Additional Gardaí will allow extra resources to be directed towards critical areas such as Community Gardaí and the National Road Policing Bureau. Office work should be done by civilian staff where possible, and we will speed up civilian recruitment. We need to take more Gardaí from behind desks and put them out in our communities.

- We will increase Garda numbers to a minimum of 16,000. This measure will cost €115m.

Increase the Garda Reserve to 2,500

The Garda Reserve has an important function in assisting the work of the main force and interacting with local communities. It also allows citizens to make a positive contribution to their communities. The Garda Reserve is not being used to optimum effect. The reserves provide a cost-effective means of generating greater operational efficiencies, and, importantly, of improving overall visibility of An Garda Síochána. A revitalised Garda Reserve can work in co-operation with the main force to free up resources which can then be re-directed towards other pressing areas.

- We will increase the Garda reserve to 2,500 members. This measure will cost €2.5m

Strengthen the National Cybercrime Unit

Cybercrime is the new front line of unlawful activity. Combatting illegal, harmful and predatory use of the internet must be a priority for the Gardaí and they must be properly equipped to combat it. We must police the internet like we police our streets.

- We will double staffing levels within the Unit and roll out regional cybercrime hubs as part of our expansion of force numbers.

Invest in CCTV, Garda IT and vehicles

The An Garda Síochána Modernisation and Renewal Programme 2016 to 2021 encompasses a suite of measures to help ensure the force is sufficiently equipped to deal with the challenge of modern crime. A wide range of steps are required to overhaul and improve the PULSE system. In addition, renewing and upgrading the fleet must continue to be a priority to help the Gardaí tackle organised crime gangs especially in rural Ireland.

- We will ensure the capital allocations for An Garda Síochána are fully drawn down.

Tackle the national Drugs and gangland crime problem head on

Tackling the country's crippling drug problem requires major reform in terms of our approach. Every day we hear stories of individuals, families and communities around the country that have been devastated by drugs and the violence that it generates. Yet the response from government is inadequate and underwhelming. Last year all nine former ministers who have held responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy came together to call on the government to act to reinvigorate drugs policy as the situation is now at epidemic proportions. We agree with this assessment and will take urgent action to restore confidence in the national drugs strategy.

We will:

- Bring forward laws similar to those that were brought in to deal with the Provisional IRA. Under new laws, the belief of a Chief Superintendent as to the involvement of an individual in gangland activity will be admissible in evidence.
- Introduce legislation that will severely punish those who purchase drugs from children and those who use minors as cogs in their distribution network.
- Increase funding to drugs taskforces by €6m over the next two years and then review the situation further.
- Undertake a major education campaign on the hazards of casual drug use for which we will allocate €3m.
- Appoint representation at a senior level from the Department of the Taoiseach to the National Oversight Committee (NOC) of the National Drugs Strategy.
- Review the methadone treatment protocol as more than 10,000 people are currently on a methadone treatment programme.
- Fully implement the National Drugs strategy.
- Ensure additional Garda resources are targeted at key areas.

Establish Community Safety Networks in every part of the country

Building strong links between An Garda Síochána and the community in every part of the country is vital to building a safe society. Active links and communication will help to target Garda resources more effectively and fully respond to the individual needs of each community.

- We will establish community safety networks in every area comprising local gardaí, local communities and other relevant stakeholders including the new Town Teams and restored Town Councils.

Support victims of domestic abuse across the country

Fianna Fáil is committed to tackling domestic violence in all its forms. Protective Services Units will be rolled out across the country. We will progress legislation to ensure that victims are provided with legal advice during the investigation stages of sexual offences.

We will:

- Introduce Domestic Homicide Reviews in Irish law to allow a review of the circumstances of a victim's death when that death was caused by a relation of the deceased.
- Ensure there is consistent and sustained funding provided to rape crisis centres and increased capacity at domestic violence refuges. We will allocate €4.7m to this measure.

Implement new Garda powers and antisocial behaviour measures

Too many homes and communities live in the shadow of intimidation at the hands of an antisocial few.

We will:

- Increase powers to An Garda Síochána to deal with antisocial behaviour including new “Public Space Protection Orders”, “Disperse Orders” and “Community Protection Orders”.
- Introduce powers to compel parents or guardians to attend parenting courses when the child has been involved in persistent antisocial behaviour. Parents who fail to comply with orders to attend courses will be fined or have their social welfare stopped.

Strengthen powers to evict tenants for extreme antisocial behaviour & set basic standards for the upkeep of properties

The vast majority of tenants are diligent neighbours. However, a tiny minority can inflict massive hardship and frustration on an entire community. Fianna Fáil has introduced legislation to allow anyone affected by antisocial tenants to file a complaint with the RTB and not just in respect of direct neighbours. This will help to avoid neighbours being intimidated for making a complaint. In addition, Fianna Fáil will introduce an amendment to the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 allowing for the termination of tenancies without notice in extreme cases of antisocial behaviour. Tenants will be expected to maintain a basic upkeep of the exterior of the house to avoid it and the surrounding neighbourhood being ruined by unsightly rubbish.

We will:

- Amend legislation to allow third party complaints against antisocial behaviour by tenants.
- Empower the RTB to evict tenants without notice in extreme cases of antisocial behaviour.
- Introduce laws setting basic standards of property maintenance.

Crack down on knife crime

The epidemic of knife crime across the country illustrates how carrying a knife has become culturally acceptable in certain areas. The brutal nature of knife attacks and their devastating impact on victims underlines the need to stamp this practise out and help protect communities. We need to eradicate this scourge and take back our streets for all people, day or night.

- We will introduce a mandatory minimum 12-month sentence for the carrying of a knife in public.

Set up a Public Transport Police section

Reports of assaults and incidents of antisocial behaviour on public transport have risen over the past year, terrorising innocent passengers trying to make their way home. The prevalence and threat of violence is deterring users of public transport and is causing serious delays to public transport.

- We will introduce a specific public transport police within An Garda Síochána to protect public transport users. This new section would be tasked with a mandate to ensure a comfortable, safe and punctual experience for all public transport users.

Empower Gardaí to seize and destroy scramblers & quad bikes engaged in antisocial behaviour

The scourge of loud, intimidating scramblers and quad bikes on public roads and parks is destroying the quality of life in many estates throughout the country. Streets and parks that should be local amenities are being transformed into no-go areas by dangerous driving on scramblers and quad bikes. Gardaí have called for additional powers to deal with this issue.

- We will implement legislation to allow Gardaí to compulsorily seize scrambler bikes and

quads on suspicion of antisocial behaviour. These bikes will then be destroyed if they are not backed up by appropriate ownership verification.

Develop a Family Law and Children's Court complex

The Family Law Courts are tasked with resolving a myriad of issues arising from relationship and marital breakdown. Victims of domestic abuse and children at risk regularly appear before the Court to seek protection and for decisions as to whether they are going to be taken into care. The most vulnerable members of society need a Court facility that is suitable for hearing these sensitive cases.

- We will construct a purpose built complex to deal with these cases. The complex will also house a new Children's Court to deal with children charged with committing criminal offences, many of whom are also in the care system. Support and intervention services will be co-located at the facility so to prioritise early and effective intervention. This will be drawn from pre-committed capital resources for the Court service.

Ensure Victims are at the centre of the justice system

Victims of crime need to be properly supported by the criminal justice system.

We will:

- Implement the Parole Act in full keeping serious criminals behind bars for longer and ensuring that serial offenders do not get early parole.
- Implement legislation to prevent people found guilty of manslaughter and murder from benefiting from the estate of their victim.

- Strengthen our bail laws. It is unacceptable that high proportions of crimes are committed by convicted criminals who are on bail for other offences.
- Increase penalties for crimes committed against the elderly and emergency workers.
- Introduce a mechanism whereby the cost of criminal legal aid can be recouped from a person charged and convicted of an offence if that person's financial means substantially changes.
- Set up an Ombudsman for victims of crime. Cost €2.8m.

Address Rural Crime

Many people living in rural Ireland are living in fear. We need a series of specific actions to address the distinct threat in our rural communities.

We will:

- Establish a Rural Crime Bureau as a new special Crimes Unit.
- Restore a strong Garda presence as part of our expansion of Garda numbers.
- Cut through red tape to ensure that communities can draw down funds to establish community CCTV.
- Ensure that CCTV is installed at strategic positions on motorway entry and exit points to catch criminals using the motorway network to get away.

Reform Direct Provision

Ireland has a strong and proud tradition of offering a warm welcome to visitors and has a deep historic connection to the plight of emigration from famine and fear. Our asylum system must reflect our values and our obligations to maintain the integrity of our borders. The current direct provision system fails to do that and is alienating communities across the island.

We will:

- Re-focus funding away from privatisation of direct provision towards state led provision.
- Ensure that the “National Standards for Accommodation” are reviewed at least every five years.
- Provide €7m for increased resources for the hearing of asylum applications and appeals to ensure that asylum applications process times are expedited.
- Extend the remit of the Ombudsman so that he will have the power to assess why the asylum application process is taking so long and what can be done to speed it up.
- Broaden the right to work of asylum seekers by reducing the waiting period from 9 months to 6 months.
- Put in place a new €5m community integration fund that local groups can apply to with proposals to help new arrivals engage in local life.
- Enable asylum seekers to access driving licences.
- Prioritise the use of the Community Sponsorship Programme as a route of housing and integrating refugees into our communities.

Drive on reform in An Garda Síochána

Fianna Fáil is committed to implementing the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Policing but will retain the Policing Authority as a statutory body to oversee the work of An Garda Síochána.

- We will continue to support the work of the Effectiveness and Renewal Group in their ‘Transformation Programme’ for the Department.

Safe and socially responsible gambling

Fianna Fáil is committed to implementing regulation for socially responsible gambling. This means setting out clear regulations to prevent the sector doing harm. After a decade of delay Fine Gael has no credibility on this serious problem that is silently destroying lives. We need effective regulation for this industry to give those who work in the sector certainty through socially responsible gambling. We are committed to working with the industry to build this new framework but the time for delays has long since passed. Legislative action is now needed.

- Establish a Gambling Regulator, financed by an industry levy, covering both online and in person gambling

A regulator is essential to overseeing a rapidly evolving sector. The regulator will cover the industry, issue fines, conduct research and operate a Social Fund funded by the industry to help individuals suffering from gambling addiction.

- Introduce age restrictions, gambling limits and cooling off periods

Vulnerable gamblers need additional protections particularly in the age of online gambling. Limits to the amounts available and strict cooling off periods will help prevent serial gambling abuse.

- Ban credit card gambling

Debt based gambling is clearly unacceptable and should be entirely banned.

- Create whistle to whistle bans on live games

Sport should not be overwhelmed by the influence of gambling. In game betting promotes reckless behaviour and should be stamped out.

- Set out strict controls on gambling advertisement

The ubiquity of gambling advertising risks seeping into vulnerable users and children. It should be confined to appropriate post-watershed times and tackled online.

- End Loot Box gambling

Children are being drawn into gambling through online video games that use loot boxes. We will empower the new regulator to tackle this insidious practice.

Building a world-class education system

Creating ladders of opportunity for future generations

Education is the primary driver of social equality. Creating fresh opportunities to young people and those wishing to re-skill is both an economic and civic imperative. Improving our education system has been a core objective of Fianna Fáil since its foundation.

Fine Gael's approach to education has been characterised by divisive cut backs and a complete lack of imagination. Ongoing issues around teacher's pay and insipid curriculum reform have undermined the vitality of the education sector.

Fianna Fáil has a proud record of expanding free education and transforming the lives of generations of Irish people. We need that same visionary drive to equip new generations to face the challenges of a rapidly changing, volatile modern world. Fianna Fáil will prioritise education and place it at the very heart of its government strategy.

Our goals

- Small class sizes and intimate learning environments for children
- Progress towards a genuinely free education system
- A competitive university system

Over the next five years we will:

Reduce Average Class Sizes to 20 by 2025 in Primary Schools

Currently, there is an average of one teacher for every 26 pupils at primary level. Average primary class sizes in Ireland are about 24, the second highest in the EU after the UK and significantly ahead of the EU average of 20.

Fianna Fáil secured an initial reduction in the pupil teacher ratio to the historic low of 26:1 in Budget 2018. We will build on this progress to reduce Ireland's class sizes to below the EU average. Schools will be instructed to use the extra resources to prioritise smaller classes for infant pupils, where it makes the biggest difference in their development.

- We will reduce the average primary school class size to 20:1 by 2025. This measure will cost €86.4m.

Invest in DEIS

The reductions in the pupil teacher ratio achieved in recent years by Fianna Fáil has not been translated to a reduction for DEIS band one schools. We believe this must be urgently addressed. We will prioritise DEIS band one schools to ensure that they receive priority for future reductions in class sizes.

- We will reduce the DEIS band one pupil teacher ratio to 18:1. This measure will cost €17.4m.

Launch an Edible Playground grant to transform school yards into gardens

Connecting school children with how their food is grown has proven benefits in terms of tackling childhood obesity and increasing environmental

awareness. We will establish a new national project to provide students with this new type of learning experience.

- We will roll out a €5m grant to Local Authorities and the Department of Education for an “Edible Playgrounds” campaign in every county initially focusing on DEIS schools.

Protect Small Schools by Reversing Staffing Schedule Changes

Across rural Ireland small schools are under pressure due to the staffing schedule changes introduced by Fine Gael. These measures need to be rolled back in order to secure schools' long-term future.

- We will return posts back to their 2011/2012 levels at a cost of €2.6m

Invest in better Sports Facilities for Schools

Our education system will play a vital role in addressing the increasing problem of childhood obesity.

- We will prioritise new investment to upgrade existing school sport facilities, to construct new sports halls and to provide for improved sports equipment.
- We will invest a further €25m in capital investment in sports funding for schools.

Invest in School Infrastructure

A lack of funding over the seven years Fine Gael have been in power has left a large number of schools in need of investment. This needs to be urgently reversed.

We will:

- We will place the Minor Works Grant on a permanent footing. The scheme will be put on a multi-annual basis with a €30 million core allocation to ensure schools can plan ahead. This will ensure that each school is financed to deal with depreciation, not left behind struggling with inadequate infrastructure and equipment.
- Establish a value for money unit within the Building and Planning unit to ensure the quality of demographic projections and achieve best value for money.

Increase Primary and Secondary School Capitation levels by €20m

As a result of chronic underinvestment, many schools are leaning on parents to provide “voluntary contributions” to help finance their schools. This places undue pressure on low- and middle-income families struggling to make ends meet. Boosting capitation levels to pre-2010 levels and beyond will help to ensure that this practise is ended.

- We will increase capitation levels by €20m.

Restore a Full Guidance Counsellor Service

Restoring guidance counsellors was a key Fianna Fáil objective in this Dáil. We successfully secured the restoration of 500 of the 600 posts that were cut. In order to ensure students, have the academic, career and general support they need we will complete this work.

- We will hire an additional 100 guidance Counsellors to fully reverse the Fine Gaels cuts to this vital service. This measure will cost €6m.

End Teacher’s Pay Inequality

The ongoing retention and recruitment crisis in teaching is now having a negative impact on services for students. The single biggest move which could be taken is to end pay inequality.

- We are committed to the establishment of a pathway towards an end to pay inequality as part of our steps towards a new public service pay agreement in 2020.

Support School Secretaries

Secretaries employed directly by the Department of Education can earn double or even triple that of those employed directly by schools. It is manifestly unfair that two people, doing the same job, with the same qualifications and to the same standard should be on vastly different wages. It is even more unfair that some should be forced to sign on each summer.

- We are committed to engaging with and constructively establishing a pathway to ending this disparity as part of our steps towards a new public service pay agreement.

Re-establish the Modern Languages Initiative

Brexit represents an economic and cultural challenge to Ireland. The loss of our key trading and diplomatic partner means that we will have to cultivate fresh links across the world and develop new opportunities. We will undertake a series of steps to secure this aim including reestablishing the modern languages initiative namely:

- Primary Schools: Re-establish the Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative at a cost of €15m per annum.

- European Languages and Culture Course: Task the NCCA to design a new course on the Junior Cycle that centres on European languages and culture in light of Brexit.
- Mandarin: Roll out Mandarin as a full Leaving Certificate curricular exam subject and award additional points to learners taking it at Higher Level.

Support children with Special Needs

As a result of continued failure within our education system, some children with special needs are experiencing a system which seems focused on containment rather than education.

Fianna Fáil believes a concerted effort to identify where the education system is failing for children with special needs is needed. To that end, we are calling for the publication of an annual report on the number and circumstances of students with special educational needs, the number whose needs are not being met by the education system and why.

We will:

- Introduce legislation banning the inappropriate use of reduced timetables.
- To reform the NCSE so that its primary function is to ensure each child with a special education need has an appropriate school place in line with their constitutional rights.
- Prioritise the construction of special schools on the Department of Education and Skills project list.
- Produce a five-year forecast of the current and future need for special needs education places in the catchment area of each school and to communicate this demand to schools within each area.

Establish a new Department of Higher Education and Research

The time has come to consider the separation of Higher Education and Research from the broader education system. Our first and second level system is facing rising demands which differ greatly from those of higher education. If we are to truly grasp the nettle of higher education reform, we must do so with a level of focus and dedication which has not been evident to date. Competing priorities mean that higher education is often marginalised, and not given the focus it needs as a driver of social change. Fianna Fáil is committed to developing a new relationship between our third-level intuitions through this department by providing the leadership and dedicated funding to address the crisis at the heart of Higher Education.

- We will establish a new Department of Higher Education & Research

Provide an additional €100m per Year for Higher Education Funding

The 2016 Cassell's report highlighted the scale of the financial challenge facing our higher education sector. Four years later, and with no major changes to the funding of higher education the decline in our universities status in international rankings illustrate the systematic underinvestment by previous Fine Gael governments. Pending the findings of the ongoing work of the European Commission, we will provide an interim funding model that can sustain the sector into the future and ensure it is an engine of economic growth and opportunity. A comprehensive funding commitment is vital to reduce staff/student ratios, enhance student outcomes and improve research.

We will:

- Commit to an additional €100 million of exchequer funding per annum pending the result of the Commission's ongoing review.

Freeze Student Fees

Ensuring both high quality and broad access to third-level education is vital to both our economic success into the future and to broadening out educational opportunity. We will freeze student fees to ensure working families are not penalised with onerous charges for third-level. Combined with our clear commitment on funding for Higher Education Institutions this will ensure financial certainty for the universities and ITs.

- We will freeze student fees.

Ensure Full Restoration of Postgraduate Grants

Expanding educational opportunities is at the heart of Fianna Fáil policy. Fianna Fáil has already secured a partial row back on those measures, but further action is needed. We are committed to opening postgraduate qualifications to all students, regardless of income backgrounds and will completely reverse the Fine Gael cutbacks.

- We will fully restore postgraduate grants. This measure will cost €44.1m.

Increase the Undergraduate Maintenance Grant by 20%

The maintenance grant is a key tool to help students and alleviate the pressure on parents assisting them. The Cassells report specified the need for an additional investment is needed to deliver a more effective system of student financial aid.

We will:

- Increase the maintenance grant by 20% at a cost of €34m.
- Increase Student Assistance Fund by €4.9m.

Enhance Gender Balance for Senior Academics

Fianna Fáil support efforts to tackle the gender gap for senior posts in third-level institutions. We believe that this should be further enhanced through a review of the existing boards.

We will:

- Undertake a review of selection boards to identify further reforms required to progress towards gender equality in senior roles.

Rebalance Science Foundation Ireland

At its core, the value of science is not solely about commercial applications, but in its contribution to humanity. Fianna Fáil believes that this must be reflected in the supports offered by the State. Science Foundation Ireland has shifted from a both academic and industrial focus to instead having a far greater focus on industry. Fianna Fáil would correct this shift through the passage of new legislation which would see the board of SFI reformed to give equal prominence to both academic and industrial fields. This rebalancing would take place in conjunction with stakeholders in order to the needs of all organisations.

- We will implement legislation to reform the board of SFI.

Securing Endangered Subjects

Fianna Fáil have consistently campaigned for the restoration of History at Junior Cycle. Despite commitments made by Fine Gael, the restoration is not yet complete.

We will:

- Deliver the full restoration of History.
- Task the NCCA with a review of Geography in light of the vital role education will play in tackling climate change.

Establish a One Stop Shop for Divestment information

The potential divestment of schools has been a subject of controversy in recent years. In some cases, unfounded claims have been made by campaigners which have created confusion for parents. These divisive and unhelpful debates have distracted from the important issues which need to be discussed in the context of divestment.

- We will provide a one-stop information platform within the Department of Education to provide clear, non-biased information on the consequences of divestment and to provide responses to specific claims.

Cut down on initiative overload

In recent years schools have been snowed under by circular after circular driving reform without providing additional supports. We will review circulars issued by the Department since 2011 with view to reduce the number issued and to ensure they are issued at the most appropriate time for schools.

- We will let teachers teach by cutting down on initiative overload.

Teanga beo. A vibrant national language in a vibrant republic

Our national language is an invaluable cultural asset that all Irish citizens share. It is a unique part of our collective heritage and at its best helps form a social glue for our people. Fianna Fáil is committed to protecting and promoting the language in all its cultural facets.

We will:

- Fully implement the 20-year Strategy.
- Ensure the Údarás na Gaeltachta board is democratically elected.
- Boost Údarás Na Gaeltachta Funding by €10m.
- Increase Foras Na Gaeilge funding by €3m.
- Increase TG4 funding by €6m.
- Protect Irish as a core subject in our secondary school curriculum.
- Enhance Irish as a working language of the EU.
- Ensure the Irish Language Commissioner office is adequately resourced.
- Strengthen the Official Languages Act and ensure a clear deadline is set in the recruitment of Irish speakers to the public service.
- Restore direct funding to Gaeltacht Improvement schemes for infrastructural development. Cost €4.2m.
- Increase funding to An Comhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscoilíochta by €1m.
- Review the current patronage system and procedures for the establishment of Gaelcholáiste for second level education through Irish.
- Draw up an Irish language policy for third-level education.

Protecting Rural Ireland

Ensuring all parts of the country benefit from economic growth

Achieving balanced regional development will be at the heart of Fianna Fáil policy in government. Too many communities feel left behind by economic progress in urban centres. The M50 mentality of Fine Gael and Leo Varadkar risks alienating rural Ireland and creating a wedge deep in the heart in the country between rural and urban communities.

Fianna Fáil believes that centre ground politics must deliver for every community from the city centre to the townlands.

Our vision is a vibrant rural life where families can live and work locally in sustainable communities. To achieve this, we need a set of policies that will breathe fresh life into towns and villages across the country and ensure that all communities have access to key state services. We will focus state agencies in their efforts to attract and retain jobs across the regions, while support initiatives that assist home working.

Our goals

- Spreading prosperity to all parts of the country
- Building sustainable communities in rural Ireland
- Ensure access to quality public services

Over the next five years we will:

Expand Rural Transport

This government has all but closed rural Ireland. People living outside of the M50 have no public transport options, and it is harming quality of life.

We will:

- Provide subsidies to rural hackney drivers to help them meet insurance costs at a capped cost of €6.5m.

Expand the Local Improvement Scheme for rural roads

The Local Improvement Scheme was an important source of funds for isolated, neglected roads and lanes not taken in charge by the Local Authority. For communities in marginal areas the growing degradation of these important connections requires a small but important investment.

- We will re-invest in the Local Improvement Scheme to fund improvements in local roads and lanes at a cost of €15m annually, a €5m increase.

Increase LEADER funding & fully re-start CLÁR funding

The LEADER Program forms an integral part of the community sector across rural Ireland providing vital services such as child care, rural recreation and enterprise supports. However, it's massive budget cut and new delivery model introduced by Fine Gael is failing to deliver approved project funding promptly to rural communities. The CLÁR Program was the engine behind infrastructural development into otherwise unfeasible isolated areas.

We will:

- Expedite LEADER funding over the remaining course of this RDP programme and negotiate to retain EU funding post 2020.
- Increase the total national exchequer LEADER contribution to €200m over the next 7-year RDP period. This will cost €15.3m annually.
- We will work with communities to return the autonomy of the LEADER Programme by removing their alignment with local authorities.
- Fully restart the CLÁR Scheme to strengthen rural infrastructural investment at a cost of €18m.

Set up a new specialist IDA, Enterprise unit for rural investment

Regional Foreign direct investment (FDI) investment has been severely skewed towards Dublin and major cities. The IDA & Enterprise Ireland should jointly establish a new unit that will develop and pilot test an approach to attracting and intensively supporting small scale sector appropriate FDI to small rural towns. This Unit will have a steering committee made up of representatives of IDA, Enterprise Ireland and a representative of the County Council Managers. This will help re-balance investment across the country in a sustainable manner.

- We will set up a new specialist IDA, Enterprise unit for rural investment.

Address Rural Crime

As outlined in our plans for the justice system many people living in rural Ireland are living in fear. We need a series of specific actions to address the distinct threat to our rural communities.

We will:

- Establish a Rural Crime Bureau as a new special Crimes Unit.
- Restore a strong Garda presence as part of our expansion of Garda numbers.
- Cut through red tape to ensure that communities can draw down funds to establish community CCTV.
- Ensure that CCTV will be installed at strategic positions on motorway entry and exit points to catch criminals using the motorway network to get away.

Strengthen the right to live in rural Ireland

Rural Ireland cannot be left behind in future construction. Local people have the right to own a home in their community and raise their family there. Fianna Fáil is committed to defending local people's right to build and own their own home in their own community. New Rural Housing guidelines will reflect recent European Court of Justice Judgements on the matter. A new shared sites initiative will provide land in each local area for people who contribute to the local area to build their own homes.

- We will strengthen the Planning and Development Act to protect this core right and place an onus on local authorities to provide a clear, transparent route for local people from a community to build and own there.

Increase regional spread of civil service and state agencies

The State must act as a role model and lead by example in creating an equitable geographical spread of state employment. While some mistakes were made in previous rollouts, the redeployment of civil servants and state agencies outside of Dublin has proven to have created real economic value to regional communities. It has brought sustainable employment to rural towns and surrounding areas with over 3,400 civil servants from government departments and agencies relocating to counties outside of the capital. It is estimated that the proportion of civil servants working in Dublin currently is approximately 50%.

We believe it is now time to examine the huge potential to relocate further staff to the regions in a considered and proportional way that has buy in from all stakeholders, and which builds on the lessons learnt from the past.

We will:

- Continue the roll out of the Civil Service Mobility scheme to more administrative grades.
- Review the location of existing state agency jobs and assess the feasibility of relocating a number of bodies to regional and rural towns.

Deliver High-Speed Universal Fibre to the home broadband

Fine Gael has signed a contract for a disastrously expensive broadband plan that will not deliver for rural Ireland. Its costs have exploded from €500m to over €3bn and rising and is years behind schedule without a contract being signed. In 2020 only 2% of rural homes will be connected. It will take another seven years at least before the remaining homes and businesses

are connected. We will uphold our contractual obligations and ensure it is delivered as quickly as possible.

Improve Mobile phone coverage

Parts of rural Ireland are blighted by poor mobile phone coverage. This impairs communications, undermining business and social links.

- We will fully implement the recommendations of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to ensure all parts of the country have quality mobile phone coverage.

Protect and maintain the post office network

The local post office lies at the heart of rural communities and towns. It plays both an economic role in providing social welfare payments and an immeasurably important social link for residents in isolated areas. In order to survive and flourish into the future Post offices must provide a broader range of services.

We will:

- Support post office plans to broaden out their range of services including state services.
- Introduce a Public Service Obligation to maintain core standards for the Post Office Network.

Increase funding for rural water supplies

Equity of treatment for both urban and rural dwellers in the level of state support they receive towards their water supply is a key priority for Fianna Fáil. We are committed to ensuring a balance in the level of support given regardless of where a family lives.

We will:

- Earmark an additional €2m per annum to the Clár scheme to fund the expansion of group water schemes into isolated areas.
- Protect funding to group water schemes.

Support Rural Schools

Fianna Fail believes in the immeasurable value of maintaining fully resourced small schools. They are an integral facet of the fabric of rural life.

- We will restore the staffing schedule for small schools to pre-2012 levels, which would cost €2.6m annually.

Support the Community, Voluntary and Social Enterprise Sectors

Volunteering is embedded in the national culture and Ireland has an international reputation as being a nation that gives. Ireland depends on volunteers in areas across our society. Social Enterprise is an innovative model of using business acumen to achieve broader social goals. With sufficient state supports and prioritisation, the sector has enormous potential to expand and grow employment numbers.

We will:

- Increase to €2m (€0.8m increase) the annual budget for the implementation of measures in the Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities strategy.

Fighting for our island communities

Fianna Fáil is committed to the Islands and their communities as demonstrated by our strong record of achievement between 1997-2011. If returned to Government, we will re-commence our work on behalf of island communities.

We will:

- Provide a strengthened annual infrastructure fund for the development of Island infrastructure by increasing capital funding by €3m.
- Develop a new Islands Programme which will provide funding for non-Gaeltacht Islands.
- Continue the support of Co-Op Offices on Gaeltacht Islands.
- Examine incentives to ensure adequate island housing.
- Fully implement legislation put forward in the Dáil by Fianna Fáil to ensure same day voting on islands as on the mainland.

Supporting Irish Towns

Strengthening towns and local sports clubs

Towns across Ireland have suffered from a Dublin centred government. We need to put in place new mechanisms and financial supports to help revitalise towns the length and breadth of Ireland. Linked to strengthening towns is deepening the roots of local democracy. In recent years local democracy in Ireland has been systemically weakened by Fine Gael and our country now has one of the weakest systems of local government in the democratic world. The financial resources and powers of local authorities have been whittled away. Fine Gael has developed a habit of blaming Local Authorities for issues that they were responsible for themselves. This is critically undermining the first tier of democracy in the state and further distancing local people from local decision making. This is part of a deeper democratic malaise that needs to be addressed to restore citizen's faith in democracy and centre ground politics.

Our towns should be hubs of activity and centre points for local cultural life. Local government should be a laboratory of new ideas and a testing ground for new leadership. With global governance growing increasingly complex we need to ensure that people have a strong voice in shaping their home areas. New innovative mechanisms for local government are crucial in strengthening those local links. This is a core part of our plans to build vibrant, inclusive communities across the country.

Our goals

- Revitalise Irish towns
- New mechanisms to empower citizens in their communities
- Stronger supports for local volunteer groups
- A vibrant sports club network
- A new decision-making infrastructure for local communities

Over the next five years we will:

Set up Town Teams and revitalise town and village centres

Each town has its own distinctive problems and priorities. Implementing a one size fits all approach will not work in restoring the vibrancy of towns across the country. A town team drawing on political, community group, business, Garda and government department representatives should be established across all Irish towns. These groups should be tasked with drafting an economic plan encompassing a clear timeframe to revitalise town centres. The Town Team should be charged with a “Red Tape Assessment” of the burden of regulation facing their towns.

- We will establish Town Teams to lead the way in revitalising towns across the country.

Increase funding for the Town & Village Renewal Scheme

The current scale of the scheme is spread too thinly over 200 towns and villages. Funding to this scheme should be ramped up to €25m per annum in order to ensure it can have a real impact across the county. This will help communities generate and implement their own ideas.

We will:

- Increase the Town and Village Renewal scheme to €31m per annum and link it to the Town Teams initiative. This will cost €16m.
- Review the current limit of only 12 applications allowed per local authority to scheme, which is limiting prospective applicants.

Introduce Commercial Rate relief for rural businesses

The commercial rates system has to encourage start-ups and regional development not penalise them. A reformed system will secure the foundations of local authority finance and help promote enterprise into the future. Our measures are targeted to help business and revitalise town centres across Ireland within the existing financial envelope of local authorities.

We will:

- Establish a Rate Holiday for start-up and small rural businesses
- Introduce an “Inability to pay” clause for struggling businesses
- Limit increase in commercial rates revaluations and allow them to be spread over a number of years
- Introduce long-term reform of Commercial Rates on a revenue neutral basis

Bring residents back into town centres with a one-stop-shop for planning permissions

As outlined in our “Owning your home” section there are thousands of above shop unit properties in town and city centres across Ireland that are underutilised. We will establish a special planning and building control approval process in each planning authority. This will enable the expedited development of certain developments including those requiring change of use to enable them to become residential. It is intended the ‘One-Stop-Shop’ Approval system will reduce regulatory hurdles to the conversion and refurbishment of existing structures in urban areas to residential use.

- We will establish a special planning and building control approval process in each planning authority.

Establish Town Councils across towns with a population of over 7,500

The abolition of town councils was wrong and robbed towns of their local representation. The government's abolition of town councils has drastically increased the population to councillor ratio to 1:4800 by far the highest proportion in the Western World. It is possible to have local representation without significant costs for representation.

- We will establish formal town councils in every town with a population of over 7,500 and previous rate setting Town Councils below that threshold, a total of 72 towns across the country. This will cost approximately €28m.

Supporting local and national independent Media

Technology has placed traditional local and national media under immense pressure and risks undermining an essential pillar of a functioning democracy. Having a strong functioning media is crucial to a healthy republic from both a local level to national and international matters by informing and engaging citizens in a fair, unbiased manner. Fianna Fáil is committed to actively supporting an independent media.

- Roll out a new Household Broadcast charge to replace the TV License & support public broadcasting

RTE has a special place at the heart of our culture. Public Broadcasting has an important role to play in our democracy. That role is being placed under pressure by commercial trends and content demand. A new Household Charge with

exemptions for low and fixed-income homes will replace the TV License fee at the same fee and boost revenues to protect and enhance public service broadcasting.

- Direct support for independent local radio

In local areas the radio forms an important strand of the fabric of local political conversations. This revenue from the Broadcast charge should be broadened out to accommodate a wider sense of broadcasting that contributes to the commonwealth while protecting the central place of RTE. Additional revenue from the new household charge should be opened to encompass this widened definition of public broadcasting.

- Set up a €1m Journalism Bursary Scheme

Good journalism is the bedrock of democratic oversight. The state needs to support and uphold this crucial role. This support should encroach upon the non-negotiable principle of independence of the media. We will establish a multi-annual journalism bursary scheme for journalists getting started in their career, operated independent of the government, to promote and protect journalism in Ireland.

- Establish a €15m News Media Fund

Traditional media outlets are struggling to make ends meet as advertisement revenue and circulation drops. This is leaving a gaping hole in our democratic discourse. We will establish a €15m per annum Media Fund for local and national media organisations. It will be independently operated by a new Print & Online News media unit in the Broadcasting Authority.

Create a new voluntary Community Council structure

We will create a new community council model. This system operated on a voluntary participation basis and with no expenses. This will form the bedrock and first tier of our vision for a new local government structure. The model builds upon the existing, relatively informal, structure of Community Councils across the country. Giving them a formal legislative role with clear duties and rolling them out across communities throughout the country marks a real devolvement of power to the citizen. This roll out will be within existing local authority resources.

- We will establish a formal Community Council structure.

Establish a Community Investment Fund to own community assets

Community assets such as pubs, halls, Swimming pools, football pitches, stadiums, etc. all form part of our community and sense of place. Losing these assets are a major blow to any village or town. Communities should be given the chance to buy and operate these assets as a co-operative rather than permanently lose them.

- We will establish a Community Investment Fund drawn from an initial earmarked fund of €15m to allow local groups, community councils and co-ops to cheaply borrow to buy local assets.

Create a Community Right to reclaim land

Across the country and cities substantial amount of unused and vacant land is held by state bodies such as government departments, local authorities and the OPW. This land could be used for housing or public parks rather than lying

idle. Communities and individuals should have the opportunity to buy and use that land more effectively.

- We will establish a community right to reclaim unused state land. Under this mechanism a council, Voluntary Housing Association or community sports group may put forward a Community Right to reclaim request to the Minister for Housing, Community & Local Government for a decision.

Introduce Directly elected mayors

As a European capital, Dublin is in direct competition with other European cities, but it does not have a clear advocate for its needs. Fianna Fáil believes a new Directly Elected Mayor for Dublin would drive forward transport, planning, investment plans and municipal services in a clear coherent manner. The decision by Fine Gael to create a Citizens' Assembly on the issue is an unnecessary delaying tactic. Dublin needs a clear focus on Dublin issues. A plebiscite should be held on the issue as soon as practicable. This will cost €4.1m to undertake.

- We will hold a vote on a directly elected Dublin Mayor.

Boost tourism across the regions

Our remarkable natural heritage and rich cultural life has been a strong tourism product. We need to ensure our success in attracting tourists is replicated throughout the country and sustained into the future.

We will:

- Boost funding to Fáilte Ireland & Tourism Ireland by €25m.
- Launch a new advertising campaign emphasizing the regions within this funding

- Work with airlines to enhance access to our island
- Introduce a new Tourism industry career programme in conjunction with Solas to attract and retain workers into the sector starting with 1,000 new apprenticeships at a cost of €6.9m.

Keeping sports at the heart of communities

Sports clubs and community groups are the lifeblood of Irish life across the country. The spirit of volunteerism that inspires so many people to spend time as coaches, directors and a wide host of other roles is the glue that keeps our communities together. Fianna Fáil will assist local authorities to assist those people to ensure clubs reach their full potential and as many people as possible can access sports facilities.

We will:

- Establish an annualised Sports Capital Grant of €50m

The deep spirit of volunteerism that sustains clubs has helped to build a vibrant society we can all be proud of. The Sports Capital grant has been a key component in developing sports grounds across Ireland to allow these clubs and organisations to grow and flourish. We will increase funding by €22m above Budget 2020 levels to create a €50m fund.

- Create a new €5m per annum Playground Building fund

Playgrounds are the liveliest part of any community. However too many parts of the country are still neglected by a lack of investment in this key local amenity. A new Playground fund worth €5m per annum which local authorities can apply for is a clear route to boost building of playgrounds across the country. This is an increase of €4.6m.

- Protect grass roots soccer

Ordinary grassroots players and supports at all ages have been let down by the scandals in the FAI. We will work with UEFA to build a consensus on how to protect jobs and ensure that Irish soccer has the support and administrative capacity to thrive and prosper into the future. We will ensure that the FAI is fundamentally reformed to give taxpayers value for money and secure a bright future for soccer in Ireland that we can all take pride in.

- Ensure development directly supports local sports groups

Local sports and cultural groups are the backbone of our communities and bring out the best of people across the country. We will revamp the development levy system to require all major construction projects to give a contribution to locals sports clubs such as land or monetary contributions.

- Ensure funding is linked to increased female participation in sports

We will set out statutory guidelines to ensure the allocation of sports funding is linked to criteria enhancing female participation in sports.

Ensuring a fair price for farmers

Creating a sustainable agricultural sector

The agricultural industry is the beating heart of rural Ireland. Our largest indigenous industry forms an integral part of the economy. The Agri-Food sector is uniquely placed to be a core component in delivering economic prosperity to every part of the country, addressing the widening rural urban divide that Fine Gael has neglected.

A strong Agri-Food sector is crucial. We are committed to a number of policies to boost this essential sector. We will deliver policies that will protect the 137,500 family farms across the country and secure a fair price for the primary producer. Fianna Fáil will protect Ireland's interests in CAP negotiations, work to ensure farming is a viable business and develop new market opportunities.

Our goals

- A fair return for farmers
- An economically, socially & environmentally sustainable agricultural sector
- Quality affordable food for Irish consumers

Over the next five years we will:

Defend CAP funding & ensure sustainable farm incomes

CAP is a cornerstone of the EU. It secures the livelihoods of farmers across the continent including 137,500 family farms in Ireland. CAP ensures that over 510 million people have a safe, secure supply of food and ensures farming families survive and progress. We will defend and uphold CAP payments in these deeply uncertain times.

We will:

- Work with our European colleagues to ensure a fully funded, fair, and simpler CAP that safeguards direct payments.
- Negotiate for a fair income for farmers in the new CAP post 2020.
- Secure national ceilings at EU level on individual CAP payments and restrict them to €60,000 in Ireland to safeguard the family model of farming.
- Introduce a complementary redistributive income support for smaller and medium-sized farms in the next CAP.
- Fight to ensure the next CAP accommodates Ireland's 3,500 "Forgotten Farmers" (farmers under 40 years, who commenced prior to 2008).
- Establish an Independent Agriculture Appeals Review Panel in legislation that will have farmer representation.

Work to amend EU rules to provide greater supports for the Agri-Food and Fishing sectors

Brexit presents a major threat to the Agri-Food and fishing industries as we have deep economic trading links with the British Market. The sector is acutely vulnerable to sterling fluctuations that

jeopardises profitability. In addition, the prospect of trade barriers or transportation impediments will directly hit the profit margin on agricultural goods.

We will:

- Work with our EU colleagues, to seek approval at European level for flexibility around state aid rules to allow schemes to help protect the most exposed sectors such as the Agri-Food sector.
- Seek that contingency supports and market disturbance funding is provided at EU level for farmers and fishermen in order to mitigate against the harmful impact of Brexit.
- Ensure adequate Brexit supports for Enterprise and Food Promotion Agencies.

Establish a National Food Ombudsman

The future of the family farm unit and the long-term food security of the country is reliant upon producing goods at a profit. Farmers are struggling to make a sustainable income because of the ongoing price erosion by large multiple retailers. A fair price for their produce is a core priority of Fianna Fáil's agriculture policy and is vital to the long-term survival and success of the horticulture, beef, sheep, liquid milk, pig, horticulture, tillage and poultry sectors.

We will:

- Establish a new state independent authority called the National Food Ombudsman (NFO), to protect primary producers in national law and ensure fairness and equity in the food supply chain. This will cost €2.3m.
- Designate the new NFO as the independent public authority in Ireland to enforce new EU wide rules (EU Directive (2019/633)) on

prohibited unfair trading practices in the food supply chain. The NFO will have the statutory power to issue penalties for those who breach regulations.

- Enhance price transparency for farmers by designating the NFO as the responsible state body to capture price and market data in Ireland.
- The NFO will also be required to produce regular price reporting at wholesale and retail level in the food supply chain as required under new EU regulations.

Ensure a suckler cow payment of €200 per head

The beef industry is the cornerstone of Irish agriculture and employs more people than any other sector. While the beef data genomics scheme plays an important role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the Irish beef herd, the administrative burden and low returns of the government's scheme continues to undermine this vital industry.

The sector requires targeted payment supports that are accessible to all farmers; that contribute to environmental objectives, while avoiding an administrative black hole.

We will:

- Reform and simplify the existing scheme and ensure a €200 per head payment on the first 20 cows. The approximate cost of this measure will be €46m in additional funding.
- Ensure that the Beef Environmental Efficiency Pilot (BEEP) scheme remains a permanent suckler support scheme.
- Support the work of the Beef Market Taskforce and associated actions regarding beef specifications.
- Work to ensure that processors and supermarkets pay proper prices for quality

Irish beef as part of the broader efforts to increase price transparency and strengthen profitable farming.

- Fully support the setting up of Producer Organisations (POs) for primary producers in the beef sector.
- Actively seek EU approval of protected geographical indication (PGI) status for Irish suckler grass fed beef to enhance promotion as a premium priced product.
- Continue to develop and support live exports.
- Support the sheep welfare scheme as a key income support for sheep farmers.

Increase resources to the market access unit

Access to international markets will be critical to the future development of the Agri-Food industry and vital exports in Irish meat and dairy product. We will work with embassies across the globe, the Department of Agriculture & Food to co-ordinate new market access initiatives. The recently established Market Access unit was advocated by Fianna Fail in its 2016 manifesto. However, it only has 6 staff members. More is needed to develop local relationships to grow new markets.

We will:

- Increase resources and staff to the specialised Market Access unit in the Department of Agriculture & Food to at least 20 staff in order to spearhead access to new markets for Irish Agri-Food produce. This will be drawn from existing resources.
- Support the dairy sector to continue adding value to high quality product in line with national food strategies.

Increase Areas of Natural Constraints and biodiversity payments

The Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) scheme is important to help maintain the continued use of agricultural lands by farmers. Additional financial resources are necessary to ensure that farmers on the most disadvantaged lands are maintained and that lands do not fall into disuse and disrepair. This will underpin a more regionally balanced and sustainable farming system across Ireland.

We will:

- Allocate an additional €50m above 2020 levels to bring the ANC scheme funding to €300m per annum.
- Enhance biodiversity management of lands by fully restoring the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) Farm Plan Scheme with an additional €4m in funding.
- Ensure the NPWS completes a Threat Response Plan for the conservation of Hen Harriers on designated land.

Expand Farm Assist

State supports are vital to making family farms financially viable. Measures such as Farm Assist and the Rural Social Scheme combined help support low income farmers make a living and keep farming their lands. These schemes also have an important part in providing direct supports to marginal farming families in rural Ireland.

We will:

- Expand Farm Assist means testing rules to disregard the first €3,000 of income and means test the remainder at 50% at a cost of €18m annually. This will encourage more enterprise and increased production from small farmers.

Review the Climate Action Fund and work with Teagasc to identify further abatement measures

Climate Change represents a fundamental challenge to food production across the globe. Farmers are intimately aware of the consequences of volatile climate conditions and challenges. Ireland is one of the most environmentally efficient food producing countries in the world. Taking progressive steps now will help to secure the long-term future of the sector, safeguarding the vibrancy of the rural economy for future generations.

We will:

- Ensure the Climate Action Fund is targeted to help prepare the sector for Ireland's transition to a low carbon economy.
- Work with Teagasc to identify further measures regarding carbon abatement potential over the decade ahead for the agriculture sector.
- Reduce ammonia emissions by introducing 100% capital allowances for the uptake of 1,500 units of Low Emission Slurry Spreading Equipment annually by farmers over a four period. This measure will cost €3.4m.

Launch a new strategy on sustainable waste processing

It is in Ireland's interests to enhance our climate change credentials in the Agri-Food sector. It is increasingly important in the market and forms a central part of our national efforts to address the challenge of climate change. Anaerobic digesters offer a process to transform farm waste into valuable bio-gas. The successful example of Lisheen and the potential of the bio-economy must be expanded nationwide to create rural jobs and reduce GHG emissions. Working with stakeholders we can develop and advance this model across the country.

We will:

- Draw up a national strategy for Anaerobic Digestion (AD) and the agricultural sector to exploit the full potential of bio-gas production and bio economy in rural Ireland as a key economic stimulant of future jobs in rural areas.

Secure Ireland's place as the global leader in the Equine industry

Horse racing and breeding is a strong indigenous industry with a long historic tradition on this island. We must maximise the economic impact and job potential of this enormous resource and consolidate its position as a first in class leader in the global industry.

We will:

- Secure the long-term funding of the horse racing sector to ensure its prestige and credibility as the global leader is fully maintained.
- Draw up and implement a national plan for the development of the equine industry factoring into account the ramifications of Brexit.

Increase Animal Welfare funding

We strongly support improvements in animal welfare and made significant achievements in this area when last in Government.

- We will double animal welfare funding by €3m for bodies and charities annually provided by the Department of Agriculture.

Support Tillage, Organic & Horticulture farmers

Tillage like other farming sectors is experiencing increased price volatility and lower profit returns. Horticulture farmers are facing an income

crisis as a result of unfair trading practices, Meanwhile, the organic sector of Irish farming contributes to Ireland's green image and the sector needs continuous support through the RDP programme.

We will:

- Establish a new National Food Ombudsman, to protect primary producers in national law and ensure fairness and equity in the food supply chain for tillage & horticulture farmers.
- Set ambitious targets to bring new land into organic production in the successor strategy to FoodWise 2025.
- Work to secure increased funding for Organic farming schemes in the next RDP.
- Work for a new Knowledge Transfer Scheme in the next CAP.

Create a sustainable Forestry sector

Forests cover 10.5% of the country's land area against the EU average of 38% showing the substantial progress that must be made. Afforestation is a vital tool to reduce our carbon footprint. The inclusion of land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) within the scope of the new EU 2030 climate change framework is welcome and will broaden the tools available for Ireland by reducing GHG emissions, through carbon sequestration. It is paramount that we incentivise the planting of native trees with a balanced regional afforestation policy.

We will:

- Update the legislative mandate of Coillte Teoranta so it will also have a specific remit for supporting the delivery of climate change commitments and biodiversity protection.
- Request that the Climate Action Council carry out a thorough review of State forestry policy with respect to climate change

mitigation and carbon sequestration and incorporate the findings into the next National Forestry Programme (2021-2027).

- Work at EU level to get recognition of the estimated 660,000 km of hedgerows throughout the Irish landscape as a carbon sink.
- Restore the annual forest premium rates to pre-2009 levels for Grant and Premium Categories (GPC). A priority will be put on broadleaves in order to incentivise the planting of native species. Cost €5.8m.
- Ensure the next CAP prioritises and incentivises the planting of trees on farms.
- Work towards achieving the 30% national target for broadleaf planting, which is a condition of EU state aid approval for forestry.
- Expand the NeighbourWood scheme for increased recreational tourism opportunities.

Secure a strong Fisheries sector

Fianna Fáil is committed to protecting our coastal and fishery communities. This will be particularly important in the aftermath of Brexit.

We will:

- Safeguard Irish interests in future EU-UK discussions by fighting for reciprocal access to fishing waters and protect Ireland's quota.
- Seek EU Commission Brexit Contingency funding to fishermen and a fully funded European Maritime and Fisheries Fund post 2020.
- Protect Marine Biodiversity and Enhancing Marine Tourism. This includes introducing an 'Oceans Act' to protect Ireland's seas, while working at an EU level to achieve the establishment of ambitious 2030 targets.
- Increase Marine Institute funding by €3m to boost research.
- Review the Sea-Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act.
- Introduce a fair penalty points system that meets EU obligations while safeguarding the rights of Irish fishermen.
- Prioritise traditional coastal fishing communities.
- Review the current implementation of the recommendations of the Report of the Independent Aquaculture Licensing Review Group.
- Simplify and consolidate all primary legislation regulating aquaculture.
- Protect Ireland's interests in the future review of EU Common Fisheries Policy including paying particular attention to the inshore fleet.
- Explore a more flexible and proportionate approach to inspections.

Arts for all the community

Boosting participation in arts across all of Ireland

Excellence in the arts is perhaps the strongest aspect of Ireland's international reputation; we have a strong tradition and exert global influence across creative disciplines. This must be fostered but we cannot lose sight of the role that the arts play in bringing communities and people together.

For too many communities, the arts are a peripheral affair rather than a core part of a good life. We need to open our cultural life to all communities. A key route towards achieving our aim of building strong, vibrant communities is creating an arts strategy that reaches into every corner of the country and society. Creating a space for communities to express themselves and for talented artists to thrive and flourish is an important responsibility of government.

We will build a 'Republic of Readers' that gives the invaluable gift of life long reading to all citizens. Alongside this we will invest in a cultural life across our island that each community can engage and take pride in.

Our goals

- Access to artistic facilities in every community
- A sustainable livelihood for artists
- Copyright protections for artists
- Build a "Republic of Readers"

Over the next five years we will:

Ensure an inclusive model of commemoration for the revolutionary period

Fianna Fáil is proud of our national struggle for independence. In setting out a programme of commemoration it is important to underscore that our national history belongs to no one party. The recently planned RIC Commemoration event was inappropriate and broke with the consensual approach taken to marking key events from a critical time in our history.

- We will return to an inclusive state commemoration mode, building on cross party support that recognises and appreciates the triumph and tragedy of the era that defined our country.

Establish core guiding principles for our arts policy

We need to re-energise our approach to arts and put it in its proper position at the heart of communities. Arts strategy will revolve around three key guiding principles:

- Protecting the independence of the arts community;
- Ensuring a stable, sustainable and secure funding model for the arts;
- Enabling full community engagement

Expand the Creative Schools Initiative

Schools should be hubs of artistic creativity and appreciation. Arts programmes in schools are too fragmented, spread too thinly and are too dependent on enthusiastic individuals within schools taking the initiative to apply. We are committed to ensuring arts support provision in schools is for all schools.

- We will use the Creative Schools initiative as the blueprint for a national scheme so that all schools are supported in delivering arts initiatives, rather than only those who apply. In the first instance, we will roll this out to all secondary schools. This will cost €2.7m.

Re-establish the autonomy of Culture Ireland

Culture Ireland should be restored to complete independence to strengthen its capacity to promote Irish arts and culture on the global stage. Our culture is a unique selling point and immense gift to share with the world.

- We will restore the autonomy of Culture Ireland.

Enshrine the independence of the artistic institutions

The arts sector thrives when it is free from political interference. We will protect the “arm’s length” principle by ensuring that the transparency of funding to artists and arts organisations is preserved. Funding decisions must be left to independent bodies (such as the Arts Council and Screen Ireland).

- We will protect the independence of artistic institutions.

Protect Arts Council funding

The Arts Council is the engine of promoting arts and culture across the country. It must be equipped to take the lead in developing and expanding our artistic footprint in the coming years.

- We will fully protect Arts Council Funding.

Boost funding for the Heritage Council by €5m

The Heritage council has a special role in protecting and advancing our rich inheritance across the country. Additional funding will ensure that the Community Grants Scheme is protected.

- We will boost Heritage Council funding by €5m.

Protect Creators and Publishers' value

We need an even playing field between publishers, content creators and the platforms that hosts them on the internet. The prevailing business model of data value extraction by large tech firms is not sustainable and ultimately will damage democracy, the media and the creative community. Content creators deserve and need to be adequately compensated for their work. The undermining of the financial basis for publishing, music and film will eventually suffocate those sectors and remove core pillars of a democratic society.

- We will work with our EU colleagues to uphold and strengthen the recent EU Copyright Directive.

Launch an annual Irish Town of Culture

Drawing on the European Capital of Culture concept and the annual success of the Fleadh Ceoil we will launch a national Town of Culture competition. Towns will bid for the title each year and host a series of events encompassing local, national and international culture. We will put aside €5m each year to support the competition.

- We will create a new National Town of culture competition.

Secure the future of our Orchestras

The orchestras are a national treasure. They have developed a tradition of musical excellence that has been built up painstakingly over decades and are a key part of our national cultural life. Fianna Fáil is committed to ensuring at this vital crossroads that the two orchestras are protected.

- We will support the recommendation of the Boaden Report that the National Symphony Orchestra would be established as a national cultural institution in it's own right.

Build a Republic of Readers

A love of reading is an invaluable lifelong gift. Ireland is blessed with a profound and rich heritage of literature that encompasses some of the leading lights of global writing. Furthermore, a deep ecosystem of reading clubs across the country offers a great example of grassroots organisation. Building a Republic of Readers means encouraging lifelong reading from childhood to old age. Evidence shows reading plays a central role in improving the life-long chances of children and tackling loneliness in older age.

- Create a National Book Gifting scheme

Parental engagement is crucial to cultivating lifelong reading. Working with existing charities we will create a national free book scheme for children. Each child will receive a free book four times a year from the age of six months until they turn five. This scheme will cost €3.1m.

- Ensure every child automatically gets a local Library card when they start school

Our library network forms a vibrant base for learning and cultural enrichment across Ireland that cultivates the treasure of lifelong reading. We will ensure every child gets a library card when they start school. This will cost €0.3m.

- Set up a new Literature Bursary & Translation Fund

Young readers should have the opportunity to move into writing as a viable career. Irish writing is a vibrant but fragile scene. We can support writers by assisting with translation through a new central fund that will enable writers to access foreign markets. In addition, a new Bursary for writers based in the Arts Council will help direct financial supports to fledgling writers. We are allocating €0.3m to this measure.

- Encourage Book clubs for Older People to tackle loneliness

Reading is key to addressing the loneliness epidemic that too many older people experience. We will increase funding to libraries and community groups to facilitate an expanded network of book clubs across the country.



**Delivering our climate
change targets.**

Addressing Climate Change

Placing Ireland on a just transition to a low carbon future

Climate Change is the single greatest threat facing humanity. It represents a clear challenge to our collective obligation to pass on our remarkable world to the next generation in the same condition we inherited it. From both a domestic and global perspective Ireland has a clear responsibility to play its part in achieving the Paris Climate Change agreement target of keeping rising temperatures to below 2 degrees Celsius. Achieving a just transition that unites people behind our ambitious climate change agenda is critical to its success.

This means certain parts of the country or particular social groups cannot be expected to bear the burden of proposed changes alone. Our response to climate change must be effective and fair with real buy in across the country. Fianna Fáil is committed to achieving such a just transition with a suite of measures designed to help us meet our emissions targets and our broader global obligations.

Our goals

- Commitment to a low carbon future
- Secure a just transition
- Investment in climate proofed infrastructure
- Ireland a world leader in addressing climate change

Over the next five years we will:

Create a competitive Local Environmental Innovation Fund

There is a wealth of civil society groups and local authority potential that needs to be tapped into in order to tackle climate change. A new innovation fund which will be issued by competitive tenders should form a new way to draw out this reservoir of ideas and energy.

- We will establish a new €10m Local Environmental Innovation Fund as an initial allocation.

Region and social proof our environmental policies

Tackling climate change presents a particular geographic and social problem. For our strategy to succeed it must enjoy buy in from all areas and sections of society. All policies put forward by Fianna Fáil in government will be subjected to a rigorous region and social proofing. The new Climate Action Council will develop a set of criteria on regional and social indicators in analysing the impact of proposed climate change mitigation measures.

- We will task the reformed Climate Action Council with region and social proofing environmental policies.

Continue on a pathway to a €80 per tonne carbon tax by 2030

The Carbon tax is a proven mechanism to change behaviour. It should be continually increased over the coming years in line with the All Party Oireachtas committee recommendation of €80 by 2030 subject to investing it to ensure a Just Transition in all regions.

- We will continue on a carbon tax pathway.

Ringfence finance for the Just Transition Fund

The proceeds of carbon tax should be specifically spent on a national pathway to a Just Transition. Building on the steps Fianna Fáil secured in Budget 2020 the new Just Transition Fund will help to ameliorate the impact of climate change measures on vulnerable regions and sectors. Specific areas should be addressed as part of the Just Transition Fund such as:

- Protecting those on low incomes
- Tackling fuel poverty
- The retrofitting of social housing
- Peatland restoration
- Rural areas

Ensure warmer, more energy efficient homes with a new Green Homes Agency

Fianna Fáil is committed to driving a national retrofit programme in order to respect our climate commitments. First and foremost, we must be clear on the scale of the challenge.

There are about 1.5 million residential homes in Ireland that need to be retrofitted. This task will require significant access to funding. Furthermore, we need a simplified streamlined system rather than an alphabet soup of funds.

We will amend the role of the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, to develop a Green Homes Agency. This will be the national simplified body to undertake retrofitting homes. It will be tasked with accessing European Green Deal funds as well as private finance. The agency will be tasked with financing a new simplified, easy access scheme across all tenure types that will

revolutionise home energy usage in Ireland. The agency will undertake work across a number of areas.

It will be financed with an initial government funding of €200m and use this to leverage additional finance outside of budgetary resources similar to the SCBI Brexit Loan scheme.

We will:

- Task the SEAI Green Homes Agency to provide low cost loans to private homeowners and landlords to incentivise investment in green initiatives on their homes. The primary funding behind the scheme is a pay as you save mechanism where reduced energy bills will be used to repay the original loan taken out.
- Ban the installation of new fossil fuel-based heating systems in public buildings unless necessary.
- Ensure the Office of Government Procurement facilitates the public sector's retrofitting program by procuring the main energy related investments and services.
- Establish a one-stop shop in each local authority to engage in outreach and to act as a repository for information for communities on retrofitting, local intermediaries and contractor, as well as on available finance options.

Lead Ireland's Renewable Energy Transformation

Fianna Fáil recognises that transformation of Ireland's energy system is required to put Ireland on a zero-carbon pathway. We are committed to reaching a 70% target for electricity from renewable energies by 2030. In order to achieve this, we will continue phasing out of fossil fuels

combined with a dramatic increase in energy efficiency and the large-scale adoption of renewable energies.

We will:

- Drive forward the rapid development and deployment of offshore wind energy by prioritising necessary changes in planning law, licencing and regulations.
- Support sustainable onshore wind and solar energy development through revised planning and grid connection policies together with fair and early consideration of any local concerns. Community engagement will be key in this process.
- Ensure that community benefits and investment are both mandatory for all new large-scale developments.
- Introduce legislation to ensure that renewable energy developers offer communities comprehensive benefit schemes.
- Introduce legislation to boost microgeneration.
- In conjunction with the CRU and the ESB, facilitate the rollout of the smart metering programme.
- Implement appropriate planning regulations on solar PV panels so as to enable greater solar generation from households, schools, farms and small businesses in keeping with an ethos of community engagement.

Safeguard our biodiversity

Climate action and biodiversity protection are two sides of the same coin that can support green jobs, clean water and sustainable development. Fianna Fail is committed to protecting and enhancing the rich biodiversity of species. Ireland is facing an unprecedented

loss of nature and the damaging effects of climate change. It is essential that we tackle the biodiversity emergency also facing Ireland.

We will:

- Deliver the 119 targeted actions in the National Biodiversity Plan.
- Initiate a new €10m Biodiversity Fund to protect our natural heritage and support environmental NGOs.
- Increase the budget for the National Parks and Wildlife Service by €25m by 2025, so that it has sufficient resources to advise and support the National Biodiversity Action Plan and tackle areas of non-compliance.
- Launch a national re-wilding plan across OPW and Local Authority parks.
- Ensure the public sector leads by example in biodiversity by protecting and rewilding green spaces in all public sector premises. The Oireachtas will lead the way re-wilding Leinster Lawn and re-introducing a green space in Kildare street.

Phase out Fossil Fuels

By far the best way to improve Ireland's energy security is to significantly increase indigenous renewable energy, reduce demand and promote energy efficiency and storage while protecting are existing interconnections.

We will:

- Maintain a national ban on fracking in Ireland.
- Establish a pathway to phase out all fossil fuel exploration licences in Irish waters with an appropriate and transparent sunset mechanism for those already in place.

Improve Air Quality

Fine Gael's decision to reject the introduction of a nationwide ban on smoky coal is having a major impact on pollution and on public health, particularly for those with asthma and other respiratory problems. It is disturbing that Fine Gael appears to be more concerned about legal challenges over public health.

We will:

- Introduce a nationwide ban on the burning of smoky coal.
- Introduce a new Clean Air Act to improve local authorities' role in enforcement and monitoring of air pollution across all sectors based on WHO air pollutant limits.
- Seek to ensure that air quality and air pollution levels are reported as part of the national weather forecast.

Establish a new Climate Action Council and Oireachtas Committee

The challenge of climate change demands a coherent government response. In line with the Special Oireachtas committee recommendations a new Climate Action Council to supersede the existing Climate Advisory Council should be established. This should be accompanied by an Oireachtas committee to hold Ministers and government departments to account.

We will:

- Revamp the Climate Advisory Council to give it real teeth.
- Establish a dedicated Oireachtas committee for ongoing political accountability on climate action.

Launch a Trees in Towns campaign

Trees are natural towers that help define our landscape and bring nature directly into our urban areas. We will launch a national campaign to support expanding the number of trees in every town and village across the country.

- We will establish a new €5m Trees in Towns fund for local authorities.

Set up an open anti-litter fund to tackle dumping and dog fouling

Littering and illegal dumping ruins neighbourhoods and spoils our countryside. Ireland is a beautiful country and we have an obligation to protect it. In addition dog fouling undermines our park infrastructure and needs to be tackled.

- We will launch a competitive €5m fund for local authorities and civic groups to vie for with new ideas to address littering and dog fouling.

Allow Local Authorities to implement Car Free Zone days

Car Free days are growing in popularity across the globe as a way to highlight public transport and other sustainable transport routes. It can also be used to facilitate community festivals.

We will:

- Empower Local Authorities to launch car free days in specified parts of their area.
- Allow Local Authorities to implement “no idling” laws in co-operation with local schools.

Carbon Cost Government Policy

The state must take the lead in addressing climate change beyond rhetoric towards real action. This means setting out in detail what the cost of an individual policy is in terms of the future consequences of climate change of the carbon created or displaced by the policy. This should be integrated in the regulatory impact analysis undertaken on legislation. This mechanism will allow the Oireachtas to take fully informed decisions on policies with regard to what the long-term carbon impact of each measure will be.

- We will task the new Climate Action Council with undertaking a carbon cost analysis of any new proposals put forward by government departments.
- Task the Council to undertake a review of existing policies carbon cost to help inform future policy.

Introduce a series of measures to boost E-Car usage

E-Cars have the long-term potential to slash carbon dioxide emissions and help Ireland reach its 2030 targets. We will implement a series of measures to promote E-Car usage levels and transition away from diesel and petrol cars. The public sector will take the lead in this regard. We will review these measures after three years to assess their impact and if targets have been met.

We will:

- Accelerate roll out of fast charge points.
- Continue SEAI grants to boost E-car sales.
- Waive the VRT for E-cars.
- Implement free charge points for E-cars.
- Ensure 25% of the car fleet purchased by the state should be EVs
- Ban diesel cars from Irish cities from 2030

- Aim for a complete removal of fossil fuel cars by 2035

The total cost of these measures is €118.4m.

Reduce Food Waste

Startling levels of food wastage highlight gross inequalities across the world. Retailers, catering sector and consumers binning edible produce means energy, water and other resources have been squandered on food that is simply thrown away. We are committed to the goal of halving food waste by 2030 in line with UN Sustainable Development goals.

- We will work to develop an EU wide common food wastage policy to help reduce wastage along all points of the food supply chain.

Move Towards Banning Non-Recyclable Single Use Plastics.

Phasing out single use plastics such as coffee cups and other unnecessary plastic use will help to reduce waste and costs for businesses.

- We will phase out the use of some single use plastics by 2025

Create a Special Park Development fund

There are almost 4,000 acres of park space in the Dublin city area alone. These are vital green oases in the middle of a busy city. We need to protect these existing spaces and identify and develop new spaces in urban areas. Fianna Fáil is committed to ensuring that every citizen has easy access to a quality green space. Particular emphasis will be placed on re-developing derelict spaces throughout our cities.

- We will set up a €25m Park Development Fund for each local authority to bid on to finance development new sites into parks and mini parks.

Ensure investment in Flooding Infrastructure

Many communities are vulnerable to volatile weather and flooding. We need to invest in our flooding defences and take a pro-active approach to prepare for the future.

We will:

- Fully invest in Flood Risk management plans to help protect communities across Ireland.
- Review insurance issues in affected areas to protect homeowners and businesses.

Establish a National Infrastructure Commission for 30-year decarbonisation planning

Fianna Fáil believes that there should be an overarching long-term plan for development and capital expenditure in infrastructure. This is an integral aspect of our approach to addressing the challenge of climate change. To achieve this Fianna Fáil has proposed that a new National Infrastructure Commission should be established tasked with planning ahead over a 30-year period beyond the current limited cycles of capital plans. The capital section of this manifesto also details aspects of this proposal based on the successful New Zealand model.

The Commission would draw from a reformed Transport Infrastructure Ireland and the National transport Authority to set out a new framework for the development of infrastructure in Ireland over the coming years and decades. Taking the existing capital plan as its starting point the priority of the Commission would be to oversee the long-term plans for:

- Decarbonising Ireland;
- A strong transport network that balances the economic needs of the country and the development of the rural regions;
- Making Ireland an IT nation with proper telecommunications connectivity; and
- A secure, balanced energy mix.

The Commission's reports would be laid before the Oireachtas and subject to scrutiny. The commission would also stress test specific proposals to ensure value for money. The cost of the commission will be an estimated €5.9m based on the UK model.

Building a connected Ireland

Putting in place a strong public infrastructure for a sustainable future

Our transport network has suffered from systemic underinvestment over the past nine years of Fine Gael in power. This failure to invest is evident across all transport modes. Increasing commuting times, a crumbling road and rail network and treacherous cycling infrastructure in our towns and cities bear testament to that failure. To ensure we reach our climate change targets and build sustainable communities we need to invest in our transportation system.

Fianna Fáil is committed to investing in key transport infrastructure, improving regional connectivity, strengthening our public transport system and creating a new national cycleway programme to boost sustainable transport. We will also ensure value for money across these key investment programmes.

Our goals

- A next-generation public transport network
- High-quality road network
- Wider access to cycling infrastructure
- Strong links across every region
- Transport as a core component of a low carbon, sustainable future

Over the next five years we will:

Build the M20

Overall road usage is above its previous peak in 2008 and issues with regard to congestion and level of service are evident in urban regions. We are committed to ensuring all the roads included in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 are delivered on time and within budget. The M20 from Cork to Limerick is a crucial project in enhancing that regions connectivity and will help to drive on economic growth. This project is in the pre-committed capital resources.

- We will build the M20.

Start DART Underground

The DART Underground project has been described by the NTA as the “missing link” in the country’s rail infrastructure. We believe that the DART Underground project is essential for the future economic health and liveability of the capital city and in the next government, Fianna Fáil is committed to recommencing the project as a matter of priority. This is a long-term capital project.

- We are committing to an initial capital cost of €200m over the next five years as part of the full implementation of the DART Underground.

Expedite congestion alleviation measures on the M50

The M50 motorway was upgraded in stages between 2008 and 2010 between the M1 and Sandyford. Congestion is already occurring in certain sections particularly at peak hours and the number of incidents is increasing. The 2014 M50 Demand Management Study identified Variable Speed limits as a measure to reduce congestion and get the M50 moving.

- We will expedite the legislation needed to enforce variable speed limits.

Invest €50m into N40 & M11 Traffic Management measures

The N40 and M11 are key arterial routes into Cork and Dublin respectively. Strengthening regional connectivity and providing a clear physical framework for economic growth must involve helping to tackle congestion in these areas. The Department of Transport has identified outstanding issues that need to be addressed on these specific roads. We will invest in traffic management and capacity measures such as variable speed limits on these routes.

- We will allocate €50m to traffic management measures along the N40 and M11.

Build the A5

This new road is an integral part of building a stronger cross-border economy between Derry and Donegal. However, the project has been beset by financial delays and planning hold ups. Over the course of the next government we will ensure this project is implemented.

- We will prioritise working with the British Government and Northern Executive to ensure the A5 is built and its full potential across the border is realised. This is even more important in the context of Brexit.

Explore the feasibility of Metro South West

Ensuring our capital city is efficient is critical to the quality of life its citizens and the economic prosperity of the region.

- We will strengthen public transport and undertake a feasibility study into constructing Metro South West as a potential key future project. We will allocate €19m for this detailed study.

Expand the role of the C&AG on infrastructure spending oversight

Ensuring that taxpayers get sufficient value for money is crucial to maximising the impact of the proposed ramping up of infrastructure investment. The IMF has identified Ireland's efficiency gap at 23 percent, compared to 15 percent for the broader European Union (EU).

The C&AG has a strong track record of delving into the details of public spending. Given the scale and importance of major infrastructure projects its remit should be explicitly expanded to ensure there is an automatic audit of such investments. This will avoid cost overruns and ensure best practise is followed.

- We will mandate the C&AG to automatically review major infrastructure projects that breach certain limits.

Establish a new National Infrastructure Commission and rigorously implement the National Development Plan

As outlined in our climate change section, we are committed to establishing a new National Infrastructure Commission. This Commission will be responsible for setting clear targets and ensuring that proposed projects meet them.

- We will uphold plans and obligations under the current national development plan and use it as a starting point for the work of the new commission.

Support Commuters

Several steps can be taken in the short-term to address congestion and long commuting times. This will make it more attractive for people to leave the car at home and use public transport.

We will:

- Provide better Information Systems with a €5m investment
- Revise Ireland's legislation to support carpooling
- Promote mixed work place starting times
- Pilot Bus Lanes on Motorways and National roads with an initial €1m investment
- Roll out new Park and Ride facilities with a competitive €10m fund for transport companies to avail of.

Increase Roads maintenance by €147m

The 2017 IMF review of Ireland's infrastructure has found maintenance funding to be well below generally accepted norms and is likely to lead to early degradation of public infrastructure. Spending on local and regional roads from 2013 to 2019 reveals that the allocation has been on average 44% below what is needed to keep roads in a good condition, according to the steady state estimates from the Department. The evidence of the neglect of our roads with systematic underinvestment is evident in the proliferation of potholes in roads all across Ireland. The Department's own review of needed investment suggests that €147 million more is needed for local and regional roads maintenance each year.

- We will increase Roads maintenance by €147m.

Establish a new “Fix my Pothole” app and fund

Using the example of the “Street Bump” app in Boston we will roll out an app that helps identify pot holes across the country using people’s smartphones and alerts the relevant local authority of their location.

- We will put aside a specific €5m funding pot to ensure potholes are quickly identified and filled. We will roll out a pilot project across selected local authorities to test the process.

Increase the urban National Cycling strategy by €50m

Cycling is a key sustainable transport mode. We need a renewed ambition to build cycle-friendly cities and towns that makes getting on your bike a viable commuting option for more people. Within this extra €50m investment we will:

- Expand safe, segregated cycling infrastructure
- Allow for priority signalling for cyclists
- Improve access to the bike to work scheme by reducing time limits
- Increase the provision of secure bike storage
- Establish a bike register to tackle bike theft

Invest in the public transport system

The existential challenge of climate change heightens the pressing need to developing our public transport infrastructure which is vital to curbing emission and placing our future development on a sustainable path. We will invest in public transport services and increase the Public Service Obligation subvention. This will cost €30m annually in additional spending.

- We will increase the PSO by €30m.

Prioritize rail electrification

Electrifying rail lines helps to increase frequency and comfort while reducing journey time and carbon emissions.

- We will prioritize the electrification of rail lines around the country, particularly on commuter services as part of rail investment within the capital spending envelope.

Make Public Transport more reliable, affordable and attractive

Fianna Fáil is committed to promoting public transport, walking and cycling as primary modes of transport. In order to achieve this, we need a public transport system across the country and within our cities that is reliable, affordable and attractive to use. We will use our public transport investment and PSO increase towards these aims.

We will:

- Ensure Reliability through targeted Investment in bus corridors and removing ‘pinch points’, priority signalling at junctions and RTPI as part of pre-committed resources.
- Introduce a “Kids go free” scheme on public transport for U.18 at a cost of €27m.
- Increase Attractiveness via Easy Mobile/ Online Fare Payment platforms
- Create a Transport section within An Garda Síochána to crack down on antisocial behaviour.
- Ensure Bus Connects takes on board the outcomes of a comprehensive community consultation process.

Fully implement the Greenways Plan and plan for the future development of greenway networks

The series of Greenways built across Ireland have been substantial boosts to local tourism and health living. Fianna Fáil is committed to building on the success of that initiative and will ensure full further funding to fully realise the immense potential of the project.

- We will ensure that all new roads that are being designed must consider the possibility of a railway and/or greenway being later built alongside the road.

Regulate E-Scooters

Currently E-scooters are effectively illegal to use on Irish roads. Yet e-scooters present an innovative new means of technology that should be embraced. We need to set out clear standards for the use of these vehicles, which ensures that all road users are safe. These regulations should also allow for the introduction of scooter-sharing schemes.

- We will implement legislation to regulate E-Scooters

Support Learner Drivers

We support measures to increase road safety, but the government has failed to put supports in place to help young drivers meet these requirements. For many people living in rural Ireland, driving is not optional.

- We will create a new €1m pot of money to help schools provide elements of driving training through schools starting with a pilot project in selected rural schools.

Expanding Rural Transport

This government has all but closed rural Ireland. People living outside of the M50 have no public transport options, and it is harming quality of life.

We will:

- Provide subsidies to rural hackney drivers to help them meet insurance costs at a capped cost of €6.5m.

Create a Digital New Deal

Making technology work for you and your family with a “Clean Data” approach

Technology plays a central part in our day to day lives. However, regulation lags far behind making the area a modern-day Wild West. We need to ensure that the standards we expect in the real world are not abandoned in the digital world that now occupies so much of our economic, political and social lives. “Clean Data” means regulating technology in an ethical manner that recognises that individual data should be subject to both privacy rights and the common good. It marks a shift away from the unregulated laissez faire approach that has characterised much of the advance of technology to date. The state has a far greater role to play in ensuring technology has a positive role to play in our lives and society on a whole. This will form the foundation of our Digital New Deal.

Fianna Fáil is committed to working with our EU colleagues to ensure that large scale technology firms are not exempt from social concerns. We will work to ensure that we draw from the best of technology in bringing people together and opening up new business opportunities. This will be balanced by tackling market concentration and preventing the exploitation of vulnerable people such as children from the worst aspects of technology.

Our goals

- A Digital New Deal
- New international regulation system
- Adequate protections for young and vulnerable web users
- Protections for the use of personal data

Over the next five years we will:

Promote a “Clean Data” ethos in technology regulation

The growth of surveillance capitalism as the core business model of technology firms is bad for society and the economy. Secretly collating, analysing and selling data to the highest bidder on users has had a negative impact creating consumer and political echo chambers.

Fianna Fáil believes Europe should continue to lead the way in “Clean Data”, an ethically grounded view of how consumer data should be used. Working with our EU colleagues will build on the roll out of GDPR to copper fasten consumer rights, protect creators’ content, place an onus on businesses to take responsibility and create a sustainable web.

- Working with our EU colleagues we will create a new corporate obligation for tech companies to process data with the best interests of consumers

Safeguard our Democracy

Around the world, elections have been compromised through unfair and false political content that is circulated online. We cannot become complacent about our democracy, and it is clear that steps are needed to prevent similar events unfolding in Ireland. We will take steps to strengthen traditional media and rein in unfair online practices. Political advertising online is essentially unregulated, in contrast to the restrictions that have been placed on broadcast media.

- We will implement an Online Political Transparency Bill to ensure micro-targeting is ended.

Enact new Laws to tackle Online Hate Crime and Revenge Porn

Specific legislative measures are needed to strengthen An Garda Síochána’s hand in tackling online hate crimes. Social media has enabled many cowardly actors to stoke up hate and directly attack individuals and their reputations. We need to treat online abuse as seriously as attacks on the street.

- We will introduce measures to legally tackle online and other forms of online harassment such as revenge porn.

Stamp out Violence and Riots that are Organised Online

Technology is being increasingly exploited to organise acts of vandalism and criminality.

- We will amend public order legislation to penalise online organisers of vandalism and mass theft to address this problem.

Create a new EU Digital New Deal

We will protect and strengthen citizen’s rights in the digital age. A new Digital Deal will set out a comprehensive list of what each citizen in the EU can expect as part of our efforts to democratise the internet. We will work with our EU colleagues to achieve this.

This will include:

- High-Speed Broadband Access
- 4G & 5G Access
- Protection for children and vulnerable adults
- The right to transparency and consent regarding personal data

Limit Big Tech firms market dominance

The concentration of market power in the hands of a handful of tech firms represents a political and economic challenge. Firms that in effect are monopolies due to the nature of the sector need to be effectively regulated similar to other public utilities. This can only be done effectively at an EU wide scale. Any firm reaching a multi-billion threshold should be treated as public utility and regulated accordingly. Mergers should be sanctioned on a severely restricted basis, unwound where required and platform dominance avoided. We need distinct regulations for each sector to ensure that the long-term interests of consumers and citizens are protected. The EU Commissioner for Competition remit should be expanded where necessary to undertake this new role.

- We will work with our EU colleagues to strengthen competition law to tackle Big Tech market dominance.

Roll out 5G Across the EU

In keeping with our Digital New Deal we will ensure the EU is at the cutting edge of technological innovation. EU funding should help ensure 5G networks are rolled out securely across the continent in keeping with broader security objectives to underpin the next generation of tech progress.

End Unfair Geo-Blocking

The EU has made progress on geo-blocking with new rules coming into force from December. We will ensure these rules are rigorously implemented and kept under review to ensure the unfair practice of Geo-Blocking for consumers in the EU comes to an end.

Protect Creators and Publishers' value

We need an even playing field between publishers, content creators and the platforms that hosts them on the internet. The prevailing business model of data value extraction by large tech firms is not sustainable and ultimately will damage democracy, the media and the creative community. Content creators deserve and need to be adequately compensated for their work. Undermining the financial basis for publishing, music and film will eventually suffocate those sectors and remove core pillars of a democratic society. We will uphold and strengthen the recent EU Copyright Directive.

Protect Children from Online Pornography and Gambling

Online pornography, which experts say can damage a child's development and decision-making, has been seen by 65% of 15 to 16-year-olds and 48% of 11 to 16-year-olds, according to a UK NSPCC report in 2016. The study also found that 28% of children may have stumbled across pornography while 19% had searched for it deliberately. Some reports put the age that children first view porn at 11. To make sure that children are as safe as possible online and help parents take more control, we need to put limits in place. We cannot allow the internet to continue as an unregulated Wild West that leaves children vulnerable.

We will:

- Publish legislation to expand on existing parental control options to make it mandatory for Internet Service Providers to offer control options to parents and for mobile service providers to allow content to be blocked on phones.
- Establish a new Digital Safety Commissioner. The Commissioner's general function would be to promote digital safety, including an important educational role to promote positive digital citizenship among children and young people, in conjunction with the Ombudsman for Children and all the education partners. The cost of this new office will be €9.6m based on the Australian example.
- Work at EU level and through our Digital Safety Commissioner to place a Duty of Care on online providers to ensure adequate protections are put in place to prevent children from accessing unsuitable sites such as pornography and gambling.

Giving every citizen an equal chance

Promoting equality & diversity

Tackling Gender inequality and protecting diversity is a core challenge in a 21st century Republic. Ireland has made immense progress over the past several decades rolling back unfair laws and strengthening the rights of each citizen. This hard-won progress needs to be advanced and deepened in all sectors of society to fully realise the rich potential of our country.

If we are not proactive and recognising Ireland's new-found diversity and celebrating it, there is a danger we will walk into segregation and tension which we see in our nearest neighbours. We are not doing enough to integrate newly-arriving migrants in our societies: Ireland's national action plan against racism has not been renewed or updated since 2008. Fianna Fáil is committed to realising the full ambition of the founding ideals of our Republic and ensuring that all citizens regardless of gender, race or sexuality are empowered to live full lives. We will progress key initiatives to broaden out political participation in order to consolidate and strengthen our democracy. In addition, we will end workplace discrimination and tackle hate crimes head on.

Our goals

- Greater levels of female participation in local and national politics
- Progress towards eliminating the gender pay gap
- Enhanced integration of ethnic minorities
- A fair and equal society for members of the LGBTI community
- Equality of treatment for members of the Traveller community

Over the next five years, we will:

Implement mandatory Gender Pay gap transparency legislation

Fianna Fáil believes that legislation should be enacted that requires employers to publish information relating to employee pay, for the purpose of improving the gender pay gap. Shining a light on pay differentials within companies will help to advance efforts to reduce the gender pay gap.

- We will implement mandatory reporting on Gender Pay differences for companies with more than 50 staff.

Initiate gender quotas at local elections

Increasing female representation in political life has been a slow process. While strides forward have been made, much more work needs to be done. All politics is local and we need to ensure more women are present at key decision making processes from the bottom up. Setting a floor on the number of women that a political party in receipt of state funding can put forward will directly tackle this deficit of representation.

- We will implement a 30% gender quota system for local elections candidates for political parties.

Launch a new minority political engagement initiative

Developing clear engagement and integration policies for migrants is a growing challenge across the EU. Political engagement in our democratic processes is a key component of ensuring new communities are drawn into and attached to their new home states. In Ireland we have had disappointingly limited and potentially damaging levels of democratic connections. Despite having a very broad policy in terms of eligibility

for running for local election (any person who is ordinarily resident within the State), currently only 9 of the serving 949 local councillors come from a migrant background. Local Authorities, as the closest tier of government to people, has a key role to play in leading the way in integration strategies but many have failed to do so to date.

- We will introduce financial penalties for Local Authorities which fail to have in place in date migrant integration strategies including political engagement.
- Launch a public awareness campaign to encourage the migrant population to engage in politics.

Introduce hate crime legislation to tackle racism

Those involved in representing minority communities have been highlighting concerns in recent years over the rise in the number of hate crimes occurring in Ireland. A hate crime occurs when a person commits a crime because they are motivated by hatred of the personal characteristics of the victim. Currently Ireland does not have any legislation in place to deal with this problem. Ireland is one of the only Western democracies that has not made hate crime illegal. We need to stamp these heinous crimes out and ensure there is no space for racism in Irish life.

We will

- Bring forward legislation and promote activities towards positive integration so that all immigrants can be treated with dignity and fairness.

- Update the Incitement to Hatred Act 1989 so that it reflects the realities of modern Ireland and in particular the impact that social media has had on this issue.

Strengthen LGBTI Rights

2018 marked the 25th anniversary of the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Ireland. Fianna Fáil's Civil Partnership legislation was followed by the marriage referendum. There are still areas in which progress is required: We will:

- Bring forward legislative proposals to provide for adoptive leave and benefit for male same sex adoptive couples.
- Progress legislation to govern Assisted Human Reproduction and regulate surrogacy for both opposite sex and same sex couples.
- Review the Employment Equality and Equal Status Acts to ensure that transgender, people have explicit protection within the equality grounds

Boost Traveller education and housing supports

There are serious issues with educational disadvantage for children from the Traveller community that demand action. We are committed to respecting the unique cultural heritage of the Traveller community, while ensuring that outcomes reach comparable levels to that of the settled community. Traveller accommodation issues must also be addressed with a substantial funding boost following major cutbacks from 2008.

We will:

- Undertake an audit of the application of 'limited/reduced timetables' on Traveller children and publish its report. The Inspectorate should also identify a mechanism to capture the use of 'limited/reduced timetables' when carrying out school inspections.
- Consult with national Travellers organisations in the development of Guidelines on Reduced Timetables.
- Publish disaggregated data on the basis of ethnicity in secondary schools (PPOD) to monitor participation and outcomes of Traveller students.
- Ensure that the inclusion of Traveller culture and history in school curriculum takes place in active consultation with Traveller organisations and acts as a precedent for further inclusion of all the cultures which are part of Ireland.
- Ensure that all funding allocated to Local Authorities for Travellers is spent on Travellers.



**Work for Ireland's values
on the global stage.**

Securing a Brexit Deal that works for Ireland

Ensuring a strong future with our closest trading partner

Throughout the entire first phase of the Brexit negotiations Fianna Fáil acted in the national interest and ensured via the Confidence and Supply Arrangement that the government had stability to conclude the first phase of the Brexit negotiations. The unanimity and solidarity shown by members of the Dáil on this issue played a central role in bringing the first phase negotiations to a conclusion.

While the possibility of a no deal Brexit may have subsided for now, the UK has committed to not extend the transition period beyond December 2020. If a future trading relationship is not agreed in that timeframe, without an extension, we may once again face a no deal Brexit. Therefore, across all sectors and in all areas, preparations must continue for all possible outcomes and also for a new trading environment, with the UK as a third country, outside of the EU. In any event, Brexit will have a negative impact on Ireland.

Negotiations on the future relationship will be arduous and complex. In government Fianna Fáil will ensure Ireland's unique interests are to the fore. The UK is our nearest neighbour and a major trading partner. Our countries are intertwined on a social, political and cultural level and we are of the view that a bad deal for the UK is a bad deal for Ireland. We will work to secure the closest trading and cooperation relationship possible and maintain our shared work as co-guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement.

Our goals

- Protect Ireland's long-term interests in future negotiations
- Maintain our trading links with the UK
- Build a strong future for Ireland at the heart of the EU
- Secure an all-Island economy
- Strong East-West and North-South links

Over the next five years we will:

Maintain political consensus in approaching Brexit

Progress on Brexit has been possible due to a collective approach by the main political parties. Fianna Fáil is proud of our role in ensuring political stability that protected Ireland's long-term interests. It is disappointing that Fine Gael have sought to exploit the issue for political gain. This crucial area cannot be undermined by partisanship. It is important to recognise the excellent work of our civil service and diplomatic teams who need to be fully resourced to continue their invaluable role.

- We will engage with all members of the Oireachtas to maintain a cohesive national approach to this critical issue.

Prepare Domestically for all Brexit Scenarios

In government Fianna Fáil will continue to prepare the country for all Brexit outcomes. A no deal Brexit remains a live possibility at the end of 2020. It is essential that no stone is left unturned in preparing domestically for this seismic event. To date, a considerable number of businesses are without an EORI number or a formal Brexit plan in place. Too many jobs and livelihoods are at stake to be ill-prepared for this.

We will:

- Continue to advance Ireland's unique position at EU level during the second phase of the negotiations
- Seek support from the EU for our most vulnerable sectors
- Engage intensively with businesses and SMES that have not taken steps to prepare for Brexit

- Review the eligibility criteria for Brexit supports that have a low take up
- Ensure that the public are fully informed about the potential implications of Brexit on their everyday lives.

Secure a Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement

Fianna Fáil will seek a comprehensive and ambitious future trading relationship. The reality is that Brexit will have a negative impact on our economy and the shape of the future trading relationship is of huge importance as it will determine the extent to which businesses, farmers, fisheries, SMEs and sectors such as Agri-Food are affected by Brexit

- We will work to secure a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the least disruption possible.

Secure a Level Playing Field

Securing a level playing field is crucial for Ireland's long-term economic fortunes and competitiveness. As a small open economy on the edge of Europe with the UK as our nearest neighbour we will fight against any move that could prompt a regulatory race to the bottom. Furthermore, significant divergence from EU rules and regulations could give rise to more checks and controls on goods crossing the Irish sea which could increase costs for businesses.

We will:

- Make maintaining a level playing field a central plank of the future negotiations.

- Push for agreement on ensuring that the UK maintain or stay close to EU environmental, social and labour standards, as well as state aid rules.
- Protect the all island economy

Achieve a Foreign Policy, Security & Defence Partnership

The EU is a driver of progressive social and economic change and a defender of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Terrorism, data protection, cyber-security, organised crime and the proliferation of nuclear arms are global issues that require global responses. The UK has been central to its foreign, security and defence policies and it is pivotal that the EU achieves a strong foreign policy, security and defence partnership with the UK as a third country.

- We will advocate for agreements across these areas that enable the EU and the UK to continue to work together and combine efforts to achieve the same common objectives. Achieving agreements in these areas is central to Ireland's security and to the security of the EU as a whole.

Establish New Formal Structures for Dialogue with the British Government

Both Ireland and the UK joined the then EEC in 1973 and it was this forum that enabled greater trust, rapport and cooperation to be fostered between our two countries. The UK outside the EU will remove opportunities for Irish Ministers to meet with their British counterparts.

- We will establish new formal structures for dialogue between the Irish and British governments, along the style of the Nordic Council of Ministers.
- Prioritise working together as co-guarantors of the Good Friday.

Protecting the Good Friday Agreement & strengthening North-South Links after Brexit

Realising the full potential of peace

Fianna Fáil believes that unity within a shared state would be to the social, economic and cultural benefit of all the people of our island. The achievement of this fundamental goal through peaceful means and founded on reconciliation remains a core goal for our party.

We are deeply proud of our role in securing historic progress in defeating sectarian violence and securing a broad national consensus behind the peace process. In government we led negotiations for the Good Friday Agreement, The St Andrew's Agreement and Stormont Castle Agreement which established and secured a broad consensus on how constitutional issues will be settled.

Over recent years the peace settlement has been damaged by many factors included neglect by the governments in Dublin and London and the dominance of party agendas. The recent three years suspension of the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement and the dysfunction of the years leading up to the suspension caused serious damage which must be repaired. Brexit presents a fresh set of challenges.

Following the welcome restoration of the institutions as part of the "New Decade, New Approach" the first priority must be to restore faith in the ability to deliver economic and social progress. This is work which is done through a determined daily engagement, rarely involving media events. In government we will immediately work to develop with the Northern Executive a new and ambitious agenda for the development

of shared services and critical infrastructure in the both Northern Ireland and the wider border region.

Our goals

- An active and strong Northern Ireland Executive
- Deeper and wider shared public services across North & South
- Strong British-Irish co-operation on Northern Ireland

Over the next five years we will:

Implement a six-point plan to deepen and strengthen North South links:

1. Build a shared Economy
2. Deepen Planning & Infrastructure links
3. Enhance shared Public Services
4. Strengthen North-South & British-Irish political institutions in the aftermath of Brexit and the “New Decade, New Approach” deal
5. Combat cross-border Crime
6. Work towards a consensus on Unity

Build a shared Economy

The Irish economy is deeply entwined with the UK and this is particularly evident in the border region. Ireland must work for a negotiated minimum change transition and avoid any return to a hard border. As one of the EU-27 member states engaged in the negotiations under the remit of the Commission Ireland should work towards securing minimum change new arrangements. Post-Brexit we will advance economic co-operation across joint trade initiatives and a cross-border economic development zone. Economic Development Zones are geographically delimited areas within which governments facilitate industrial activity through fiscal and regulatory incentives and infrastructure support are successfully used across the globe. We will:

- Make a 12.5% Corporate Tax Rate work for both jurisdictions.
- Increase Intertrade Ireland, IDA, Invest NI Joint Initiatives to attract international investment.
- Create a Border Economic Development Zone to foster growth in the border region. We will allocate €5m to this as an initial investment.

- Work to amend state aid rules to support SMEs affected by Brexit.
- Deepen tourism links.

Deepen Planning & Infrastructure links

The economic hubs of Dublin, Derry and Belfast should form an important part of the future of spatial planning on the island. Co-ordinated efforts to link up roads, rail and public transport connections are vital in stimulating growth and facilitating investment. All-island spatial planning will be emphasised by Fianna Fáil. Key infrastructural and tourist projects such as the A5 and Narrow Water Bridge will be prioritised by Fianna Fail in government. We will:

- Provide funding for the development of the A5 as outlined within existing resources.
- Work with N.I, UK and EU authorities to source funding to build the Narrow Water Bridge. We will provide an allocation of €12m as part of Ireland’s contribution to the bridge over the next five years.
- Use the Border Economic Development Zone to jointly plan infrastructure
- Ensure there is All island basis in the National Planning Framework
- Secure long-term EU-UK agreement on PEACE and INTERREG programme funding

Enhance shared Public Services

On an island with a population of just over 6m people there is immense potential for shared services to achieve real economies of scale. Rather than duplicating investment and resources we need a new way to make the most of the island’s health, education and public transport services. We will:

- Retain and develop shared Health services.
- Build Education links with Dundalk and Letterkenny IT as well as opening up universities to more students from across the border.
- Increase public transport co-ordination in rail and bus across the Border.

Strengthen North-South & British-Irish political institutions in the aftermath of Brexit

As a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement the Irish state has a special role in protecting the peace process. The political stagnation that has characterised Northern Ireland over the past number of years punctuated by crisis after crisis is a failure to realise the potential of peace. Fianna Fáil will fully engage with the UK and Northern Institutions to help tackle the underlying causes of the problems Northern Ireland. We will work to re-energise the Good Friday Agreement to help manage the delicate transition, a new focus on North South bodies, formal Brexit forum for advanced co-operation and extending the political presence of Northern Ireland in the political institutions of the Republic.

We will:

- Review and expand North-South bodies without any further delay.
- Require each government department to report and outline how they will increase their connections and work with their Northern Ireland counterparts.
- Establish a new British-Irish forum to replace lost diplomatic opportunities following Brexit.
- Ensure the systematic exchange of information between Dublin and Belfast including consultation on EU regulations and regulatory compliance insofar as they may impact on North/South trade.

Combat cross-border crime

Shocking examples of recent criminality underline the need for a distinct response to crime in the border region. This need is particularly pressing due to its specific set of requirements shaped by geography, history and its geo-political context. The cross-border criminal taskforce was envisaged to be similar in scope to the Criminal Assets Bureau integrating police forces from both sides of the border, revenue officials and Environmental Protection agencies. However, it is not on a statutory basis and lacks permanent staff.

We will:

- Establish a Cross border Crime Agency on a statutory basis
- Resource the Agency with permanent staff as part of our expansion of An Garda Síochána
- Establish new co-operation protocols to ensure information exchange continues

Work towards a consensus on Unity

We oppose the effort to ignore the clear approach to determining future constitutional issues outlined in the 1998 settlement. The future constitutional status of Northern Ireland cannot be allowed to become a party-dominated issue, exploited for short-term reasons. Fianna Fáil believes that the unity of hearts and minds cannot be achieved in an aggressive, partisan manner. We believe that the focus in the next few years must be a neutral and factual discussion of the impact of various approaches to Northern Ireland's future.

- We will establish within the Department of an Taoiseach a unit to lead a formal study and cross-community consultation on a Green Paper to outline how the Irish government should approach the handling of any unity referendum should circumstances arise where it can be called.

Supporting our Defence Forces

Recognise and build on our proud military heritage

Irish people take great pride in our Defence Forces and the contribution made by the Permanent Defence Force, the Reserve Defence Force and by Civil Defence. We all agree that the single greatest asset the Defence Forces has is its personnel. Yet the numbers serving has fallen well below 9,000 and morale among members is on the floor.

The Defence Forces is now seriously below strength and it is time now to significantly rebuild. The decline over recent years has left the force with just 8,751 members recorded as of 30th November 2019 – some 749 below the current agreed strength. Pay and conditions are one issue, but many members feel completely abandoned by government. In 2019 turnover reached an unsustainable level where it is now at close to 10%. This cannot continue. The retention crisis means Defence is experiencing significant underspend in its annual budgetary allocation despite the scale of the crisis. Fianna Fáil believes that Ireland needs to recommit to its Defence Forces and its defence capability.

In the event of any underspend on the pay budget in Defence the money will be retained for other Defence measures.

Our goals

- Fair pay and conditions for our defence fore personnel
- A strong retention policy and significant recruitment
- A defence force equipped for escalating and evolving threats

Over the next five years we will:

Establish a Defence Forces Pay Review Body

It is clear to Fianna Fáil that there is a need for a permanent and independent Defence Forces pay body to be established which would reflect the unique nature of military service in the broader context of pay and allowances. In the United Kingdom there is a statutory pay review body that is specific to the defence sector. The committee has access to the highest levels of Government, including the Ministry of Defence and its general staff, and of course all the members of the armed services in the UK. Affiliate membership of ICTU by members of the Defence Forces can be explored but it is important that military leadership is satisfied that this application is done without jeopardizing the State security or the ability of the Defence Forces to assist the state when there are prolonged national disputes.

- We will immediately establish a Pay Review body on Defence.

Create a Commission on the future of Defence

A comprehensive external and independent review of Irish defence policy and the Defence Forces needs to be conducted. We anticipate that this would be similar in scope to the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland undertaken in recent years.

We believe such a commission should contain external military expertise from countries similar in size to Ireland and, also from states that like Ireland are non-aligned militarily. We will consult widely on the terms of reference for such a commission and we will seek to have it established by summer 2020 with a mandate to report comprehensively within twelve months.

For our part we believe that such terms of reference should also include an examination of the role of the Department of Defence.

- We will launch a commission on the future of defence.

Enhance Defence Forces Strength and Deployment

Fianna Fail has long held that the optimum situation is to have a Defence Forces incorporating an All Arms Light Infantry Army in three territorial brigades headquartered in Dublin, Cork and Athlone, coupled with Air Corps and Naval Service components appropriate in strength and equipment to Ireland's island status. The current allowed strength of the DF at 9,500 stretches its ability to fulfil its national and international assigned roles and maintain a credible contingent capability. Fianna Fáil's goal over the next five years will be to at least reach the current 9,500 strength and a further increase to 10,500. This level will be required for the proper implementation of the working time directive. This will cost an additional €24m.

- We will ensure that the Army component of the Defence Forces will comprise three territorial based All Arms Infantry Brigades, including a re-established 4th Western Brigade and nine infantry battalions. A re-balanced Defence Forces footprint in the State will promote retention and recruitment. A Brigade Headquarters in Athlone will be re-established.

Strengthen national Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity, and its resultant insecurity, are potentially one of the greatest threats to State Security. Fianna Fáil will include within

the terms of reference of the Commission on Defence a recommendation to provide the pathway of transferring this important function to the Defence Forces/Department of Defence. Over the coming years, Ireland should aspire to establish a cyber command structure within the Defence forces to enhance Cyber Security and develop additional specialisation. A specific cyber reserve section of the Reserve Defence forces should be established where there are many experts in the public and private sector who could contribute and support this function.

- We will strengthen national cyber security.

Boost the Defence Reserve

The Reserve Defence Force in its many differing forms over the decades has served the State well and the service provided by the Reserve has often been unrecognised and undervalued. Fianna Fáil recognises the enormous social value the Reserve – and its spirit of volunteerism – provides to communities where there is an RDF unit. Fianna Fáil commits to giving the Reserve Defence Force a defined role which is essential for both its future development and indeed the morale of the organisation. We will work to ensure that Reservists are allowed to play a meaningful and worthwhile role in support to the Permanent Defence Forces and that members of the RDF to become an integral part in the decision-making process surrounding their activities.

We will:

- Devolve control of recruitment back to the Reserve Defence Force, with regular recruitment campaigns
- Enable RDF members to be permitted to serve overseas in appropriate roles. We will also legislate to ensure that members of the Reserve do not face any employment barriers to participation in the Force.

- Undertake a review of legislation and Defence Forces regulations governing the Reserve Defence Force.

Fully maintain neutrality and the Triple Lock

Fianna Fáil is dedicated to Ireland's policy of military neutrality. It is a policy which we have pursued both in government and out of it, and it has as a key defining characteristic non-membership of military alliances. This policy of military neutrality has gone hand in hand with strong support to international co-operation for peace and stability, as manifested in Ireland's participation in UN mandated peacekeeping operations. Fianna Fáil reaffirms its commitment to the retention of the Triple Lock of UN mandate or authorisation, Government and Dáil approval, prior to committing Defence Forces personnel on overseas service. Ireland has correctly conferred primacy to the UN since joining in 1955, working with other UN members in supporting international action in areas such as disarmament, peacekeeping across its full spectrum, humanitarian/development actions and human rights implementation.

- We will fully maintain neutrality and the triple lock mechanism.

Health Supports

Fianna Fáil believes that it is essential that a comprehensive range of health care services be available to members of the Defence Forces. However there have been regular deficits especially in relation to psychiatric services.

We will:

- Give consideration to joint appointments of consultants and specialists with the health service to support the medical corps in the Defence Forces.

Accommodation

The standards of Defence Forces accommodation have come in for justified criticism in recent years and needs to be addressed. Improvements here will also act a further retention measure.

- We will implement the recently announced infrastructure plan and will review progress at year end.

The Minister for Defence

Fine Gael in government has failed to value the components of our Defence establishments. Currently, while the Taoiseach is nominally the Minister for Defence the day to day responsibility for running the Department has since 2016 been assigned to a Minister of State.

Fianna Fáil believes that the restoration of Defence as a lead portfolio in Cabinet would be a clear affirmation of the value we as a State must place on our Defence Forces.

- We will restore Defence as a lead portfolio in Cabinet.

Fighting for the EU's values

Restoring the EU as a leading light of international co-operation

Fianna Fáil is deeply proud of our role in guiding Ireland into the EEC in 1973 and the immense contribution it has played in the betterment of Irish life. However, Brexit marks an unprecedented reversal of the most successful transnational union in the history of the world. The rejection by British voters of the EU is a deeply disappointing decision that raises fundamental questions about the role of the EU in ordinary citizen's lives.

Fianna Fáil believes in the EU and believes the EU can answer those questions. We need to strengthen the Union and ensure it has a positive impact on citizen's lives while respecting and working with the fundamental role of member nation states. Fianna Fáil is committed to building an EU that delivers for all its 500m citizens.

Our goals

- A democratic renewal of the EU
- Greater Irish engagement in EU institutions
- Consolidate the rule of Law across the EU

Over the next five years we will:

Put Irish citizens at the heart of European decision making

We need to ensure that Irish citizens make the most of the job opportunities at the heart of the EU institutions. We have a proud record of public service in the core EU bodies over the past half a century that we should continue to build upon.

We will:

- Promote an information campaign in universities about EU job opportunities such as the Stagiaire programme. This will cost €0.2m.
- Encourage secondments from the public service to EU bodies to build up experience and encourage a crossover of new ideas and expertise.

Embrace the EU Aid Volunteer Initiative

The Peace Corp in the USA has been a success in broadening horizons for hundreds of thousands of Americans and fostering US ideals while adding real value to the mission countries. The EU Aid Initiative has the same potential for EU citizens and values. Ireland should play a leading role in that drawing on our strong tradition of assistance to developing countries.

- We will promote the EU Aid Volunteer Initiative in schools, universities and workplaces to drive on Irish participation levels. This will cost €0.2m

Expand the free Interrail Initiative

The Interrail pass is a deeply enriching tradition for students across the EU that stretches back decades. It is an immensely positive way to see the continent and meet a wide variety of young

people from across the EU. It's important that as many Irish students as possible have access to this enriching cultural experience.

- We will work with our EU colleagues within the EU budget to expand the InterRail pilot program to enable more young people to enjoy this special experience. Additional steps should be taken to allow students with a disability to fully access the scheme.

Enhance EU Twinning Initiatives to encompass secondary schools

The Europe for Citizens programme has been successful in driving on twinning programmes between EU towns. This should be further deepened with a specific secondary school twinning programme to link young people together. This will promote a stronger sense of EU identity and language learning. An EU-wide information campaign to promote twinning should also be launched to encourage more towns and cities to participate across the continent.

- We will work with our EU colleagues to expand twinning initiatives.

Deepen Oireachtas links with the EU Parliament

The populist backlash against the EU has a wide range of causes. One major factor has been a growing sense of alienation from EU decision making. Deeper engagement is needed so that we can tackle this widening gulf. Our Fianna Fáil team will ensure citizens are connected to their representatives and that the EU is working for them. Regular Oireachtas updates on the work of the EU will help to bridge that divide and enhance democratic oversight.

- We will strengthen EU/Oireachtas links.

Tackle international crime

Crime is global and cybercrime, sex trafficking and drug smuggling all spill across national boundaries. Furthermore, the threat of violent attacks from a disparate web of terror groups does not stop at borders. Defending the values that Ireland and the EU share from the encroachment of criminality and the direct assaults of terrorism means a connected, co-operative network of EU police forces. An Garda Síochána needs to be fully equipped and plugged into their international counterparts to identify and neutralise a multiplicity of criminal threats.

- We will support the reform of the Internal Security Fund to develop and strengthen cross-border operations, best practise exchange and quick information transfers.

Support the creation of a European Agency to protect Democracy

The EU is founded upon human rights, international co-operation and democratic values, and the rule of law. The Cambridge Analytica scandal, the use of fake news by Russia to manipulate foreign elections and the use of social media in stoking ethnic tensions in Asia all highlight the risk that social media can pose to democracies. Foreign agents or domestic threats can use the internet to wage asymmetrical digital war on the institutions that sustain our democracies. In a time of global uncertainty, the EU should take the lead in defending democracy. Fianna Fáil supports the creation of a European Agency for the Protection of Democracies to lead this critical challenge. This agency will be responsible for setting EU-wide standards on banning foreign money and influence in EU

member state elections. It will aid and assist in efforts to defend against cyber-attacks and digital manipulation.

- We will support the creation of an EU agency to protect democracy.

Link EU funding to upholding the rule of law in each member state

Democratic backsliding within the frontiers of the EU cannot and should not be tolerated. We must uphold the highest standards for member states in order to protect the core values that keep the Union together. Worrying developments including the erosion of judicial independence and the undermining of a free media in Hungary and Poland are reminders that vigilance must be constant. EU funding under Cohesion funds or other EU led initiatives should be linked to maintaining the basic standards of the EU.

- We will work with our EU partners to link EU funding to upholding the protection of the rule of law.

Giving Ireland a strong voice in the global community

A foreign affairs policy that reflects our best values

Ireland has a proud record of positive engagement in world affairs. We have consistently punched above our weight through our cultural, diplomatic and peace keeping links to all corners of the world. Brexit heightens the need to strengthen this engagement and develop fresh economic and cultural links to emerging markets.

Fianna Fáil is proud of our role in nuclear non-proliferation and peace keeping that has helped to create a safer world. We will ensure we continue to play a role at the heart of such endeavours.

Our goals

- Ireland as a strong voice for multi-lateral co-operation
- A coherent and humane approach to migration
- A clear pathway to a peaceful resolution in Palestine

Over the next five years we will:

Work towards our 0.7% Overseas Development Aid target

Irish citizens can take immense pride in our long and rich history of assisting developing countries in providing health and education services through missionaries and non-governmental organisations. Even in difficult times on this island we have always felt and acted on a deep affinity with those less well-off across the globe. Fianna Fáil is committed to building on our strong tradition of assistance and putting Ireland on a clear path towards meeting our targets.

We will:

- Commit to Ireland remaining a world-leader in development aid and will work towards the achievement of the UN target. We will put Ireland on a pathway to reach our ODA target by spending an additional €50m in Overseas Development Aid.
- Enforce that all aid donated by Ireland should only be granted to countries which have a strong record of accountability and transparency.

Maintain our Neutrality status

Ireland has a long and proud tradition of constructive neutrality that has enabled us to play an important role as peacekeepers across the globe. This has also facilitated our ability to spearhead initiatives such as nuclear non-proliferation and the ban on cluster munitions.

- We will not allow Ireland to participate in any plans to overtly militarise the EU with a common defence force and shared defence budget.

Renew engagement with the Diaspora

Our emigrant communities abroad are inextricably linked to the fortunes of this island and always will be. Culturally, economically and politically they are an immense resource. In particular we have an obligation towards older, vulnerable communities.

We will:

- Increase funding for the Emigrant Support Programme (ESP) by €2.5m and ring-fence it to ensure that the most vulnerable members of our overseas communities are supported.
- Maintain a Minister of State for the Diaspora.
- Provide assistance and support to those who wish to return to Ireland and address barriers facing returning emigrants.
- Work for recognition of the undocumented Irish in the USA.
- Work for the extension of E3 Visas to Irish citizens.

Campaign for a Seat on the UN Security Council

Ireland is campaigning for a seat on the UN Security Council 2021-2022. This is an opportunity for Ireland to be a key player in international affairs and to promote global peace and security.

- We will vigorously campaign to win a seat and if successful we will use the opportunity to call for reform of the United Nations and the use of the veto in the Security Council.

Address the migrant crisis

Europe is challenged by the moral crisis of migrants dying in their desperate efforts to reach this continent. The unprecedented levels of migrants and refugees fleeing war torn regions in the Middle East and North Africa remains a serious humanitarian and political challenge to Europe. Fianna Fáil is committed to ensuring that Ireland must play its part in assisting those in need of refuge at home and in providing help on front line camps. People seeking refuge here in Ireland must be afforded the supports they need to fully integrate into Irish society.

We will:

- Work with our EU colleagues and international community to help address the underlying causes of the migrant crisis across the Middle East and North Africa.
- Co-operate with the EU to maintain and strengthen common borders to secure the integrity of the EU.
- Continue to support improved conditions for refugees in camps in the Middle East, including the release of further EU funding for this purpose.
- Increase Ireland's contribution to the Trust Fund for Africa by 20%, a €3m increase.
- Stand with others in fighting against the extremists who are using this crisis to promote fear and distrust between groups. We will insist that Europe remains true to its democratic and inclusive values.

Work towards a two-state solution in Palestine

Ireland was the first European Union Member State to declare that a solution to the conflict in the Middle East had to be based on a fully sovereign State of Palestine, independent of and

co-existing with Israel. Fianna Fáil in Government launched that policy position in 1980 and continues to strongly support that position today.

We will:

- Progress the Occupied Territories bill.
- Continue to spearhead the campaign to seek the recognition of the state of Palestine by the Irish Government and will continue to pursue this policy at an EU level.
- Support any efforts to achieve a two-state solution.

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**Éire
do Chách**