

FINE GAEL 

A future to **Look Forward to**

Building the Republic of Opportunity

#LookForward

finegael.ie

Taoiseach's Foreword

Our economy has never been stronger. There are more people at work than ever before, incomes are rising, poverty is falling and the public finances are back in order.

We have a deal on Brexit that ensures no hard border, citizens' rights will be protected and the Common Travel Area will remain in place. The Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive have reconvened.

However, it's not enough.

Brexit is not done yet. It's only half-time.

The next step is to negotiate a free trade agreement between the EU, including Ireland, and the United Kingdom that protects our jobs, our businesses, our rural and coastal communities, and our economy.

Progress on health and housing is gathering momentum.

I meet people every day and I know the worry, frustration and concerns around the pace of progress in health and housing. In this manifesto we lay out our plans to build on what has been done, with a particular focus on home ownership and universal healthcare.

An improving economy and the careful management of our public finances, along with the sensitive stewardship of the upcoming Brexit trade negotiations, will enable us to drive that momentum and provide more houses, more hospital beds, more nurses and Gardaí, deliver climate action, and drive tax reform.

We've been able to make good progress, but I know it's not enough.

I want us to do much more.

I want people to start feeling the growing strength of our economy in their pockets – I want people to see it in their payslips and in their towns and parishes. In this manifesto we set out our plan for fairer taxes – for future jobs and for rural Ireland – to put that right.

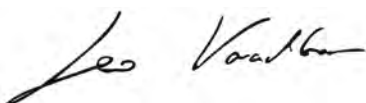
This manifesto outlines what Fine Gael stands for:

- **The Best Team for Brexit**
- **A Better Deal for Families**
- **Fairer Taxes**
- **Real Climate Action**
- **More Frontline Gardaí**
- **Backing for First Time Buyers**
- **Reform of our Health Service**

It has been a privilege to lead this country as your Taoiseach for the last two-and-a-half years. Thank you for that honour and for your trust in me.

On **Saturday 8th of February** I seek a fresh mandate so we can continue to build a better future. A future we can all look forward to.

We have the team. We have the track record. We have the plans.



Leo Varadkar
Leader Fine Gael

Réamhrá Ó Cheannaire Fhine Gael, An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar

Ní raibh ár ngeilleagar riamh níos láidre. Tá níos mó daoine ag obair ná riamh roimhe, tá teacht isteach ag ardú, tá an bochtanas ag dul i léig agus tá cúrsaí airgid poiblí in ord arís.

Tá beart againn maidir le Brexit, a chinntíonn nach mbeidh teorainn chrua ann, go gcosnófar cearta saoránach agus go mbeidh an Comhlímitéar Taistil ann fós. Tá Tionól agus Feidhmeannas Thuaisceart Éireann tagtha ar ais le chéile.

Ach ní leor sin.

Níl Brexit déanta fós. Níl ann ach leath ama.

Is é an chéad chéim eile comhaontú saorthrádála a idirbheartú idir an tAontas Eorpach, Éire san áireamh, agus an Ríocht Aontaithe, comhaontú a chosnóidh ár bpostanna, ár ngnólachtaí, ar bpobail faoi tuath agus ar an gcósta, agus ár ngeilleagar.

Tá an dul chun cinn maidir le sláinte agus tithíocht ag bailiú nirt.

Buailim le daoine gach lá agus tá a fhios agam faoin mbuairt, frustrachas agus ábhair imní atá ann faoi luas an dul chun cinn maidir le sláinte agus tithíocht. San fhorógra seo leagaimid amach ár bpleananna chun tógáil ar a bhfuil déanta, le béim faoi leith ar úinéireacht tí agus cúram sláinte uilíoch.

Le geilleagar atá ag feabhsú, agus cúrsaí airgid á mbainistiú go cúramach againn, chomh maith le maoirseacht íogair ar an idirbheartaíocht trádála Brexit a bheidh ar siúl go luath, cuirfidh sin ar ár gcumas dúinn an neart sin a bhrú chun cinn agus níos mó tithe, níos mó leapacha ospidéal, níos mó altraí agus Gardaí a chur ar fáil, gníomhaíocht aeráide a chur i gcrích, agus athchóiriú cánach a bhrú chun cinn.

Bhíomar in ann dul chun cinn maith a dhéanamh, ach tá a fhios agam nach leor é.

Táim ag iarraidh go ndéanfaimid i bhfad níos mó.

Táim ag iarraidh go dtosóidh daoine ag brath ina bpócaí neart fásamhar ár ngeilleagair – táim ag iarraidh go bhfeicfidh siad é ina nduilleíní pá agus ina mbailte agus ina bparóistí. San fhorógra seo leagaimid amach ár bplean le haghaidh cánacha níos cothroime – le haghaidh postanna amach anseo agus d'Éirinn faoin tuath – chun sin a chur i gceart.

Tugann an forógra seo breac-chuntas ar an méid a seasann Fine Gael ar a shon:

- **An Fhoireann is Fearr le haghaidh Brexit**
- **Beart Níos Fearr do Theaghlaigh**
- **Cánacha Níos Cothroime**
- **Gníomhaíocht Cheart Aeráide**
- **Níos Mó Gardaí sa Líne Thosaigh**
- **Tacaíocht do Cheannaitheoirí Céaduaire**
- **Athchóiriú ár Seirbhíse Sláinte**

Pribhléid a bhí ann a bheith i gceannas ar an tír seo i mo Thaoiseach agaibh le dhá bhliain go leith. Gabhaim buíochas libh as an onóir sin agus as bhuir muintín ionam.

Dé **Sathairn an 8 Feabhra** táim ag lorg mandáid úr ionas gur féidir linn leanúint ar aghaidh ag tógáil todhchaí níos fearr. Todhchaí lenar féidir a bheith ag dúil.

Tá an fhoireann againn. Tá an taifead againn. Tá na pleannanna againn.



Leo Varadkar
Ceannaire Fhine Gael

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Helen McEntee

Candidate for
Meath East

Half-time in Brexit

Fine Gael protecting the interests of all people on the island of Ireland, north and south

- The right team
- The right relationships
- The right strategy
- The right results for Ireland.

Fine Gael has worked tirelessly to protect the interests of all people on the island of Ireland, north and south, since the United Kingdom's Brexit referendum in 2016. We have had a very clear set of objectives:

- **Protecting the Peace Process**
- **Maintaining the Common Travel Area and reciprocal rights between Ireland and Britain**
- **Ensuring Ireland's place at the heart of the European Union (EU)**
- **Agreeing the closest possible future relationship between the UK and Ireland/EU.**

Through intensive engagement with our EU partners, we have made sure that Ireland's concerns were understood. The revised withdrawal agreement meets all our objectives, including protecting the Good Friday Agreement, avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland and protecting the integrity of the Single Market and Customs Union and Ireland's place in them. This puts Ireland in the best possible position for it to face the challenges ahead.

The next phase of Brexit

On 31 January, the UK will leave the EU. But, this does not mean that 'Brexit is done'.

The standstill transition arrangements expire at the end of this year. Within that timeframe, a new long-term relationship between the EU and the UK must be negotiated and ratified. If it does not prove possible to negotiate and agree a favourable relationship, we risk the imposition of tariffs and quotas on trade between Ireland and the UK. Such a failure would result in significant and long-lasting consequences for many sectors of our economy.

The next phase of Brexit will be just as challenging as the first.

The capacity to do everything else that needs to be done – health, housing, climate action, tax reform – depends on achieving a deal by the end of this year.

The right team

Fine Gael is a member of the largest and most influential political grouping in Europe: the European People's Party (EPP). We have built up unbreakable bonds with key actors in the Brexit process – with political leaders such as Michel Barnier, who will continue in his role as negotiator

on behalf of the EU and with Phil Hogan, a former Fine Gael Minister, who, as Trade Commissioner, will have a central role in negotiating the free trade element of the future relationship.

We need the experienced Fine Gael team, led by Leo Varadkar, Simon Coveney and Helen McEntee, to continue their work in agreeing the future relationship with the UK. Now is the time for vigilance. Changing the team at this point would set us back.

The EU will shortly agree a mandate for the Future Relationship negotiations, which will cover vital and sensitive areas for Ireland, ranging from trade in goods and services to fisheries, security and connectivity. This is a short timeframe and it is imperative that the cohesive whole-of-Government approach successfully deployed heretofore should continue and ensure that Ireland is as well-prepared and positioned going forward as it has been until now.

Future relationship

We will work for the closest, deepest and broadest possible relationship with the UK. We want an ambitious, zero-tariff, zero-quotas free trade agreement, with a level playing

field in terms of standards, state aid, workers' rights and environmental protections. Other priorities will include cooperation in the areas of justice and security, fisheries, transport connectivity and continued participation of the UK in EU programmes.

The British Government has been clear that it will not extend the transition period into 2021. That means for a new trade deal to come into effect from 01 January 2021, it must be negotiated and agreed by the end of November 2020.

We will keep a laser-like focus on the negotiations in the crucial months ahead, to ensure that Ireland's interests are protected and prioritised.

Protecting the Peace Process

Protecting the Peace Process will continue to be at the forefront of our approach to Brexit. This includes the protection of the Good Friday Agreement and the gains of the Peace Process, maintaining EU support for the Peace Process, increasing and deepening North-South cooperation and ensuring there is no border infrastructure of any kind on the island of Ireland.

Implementation of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland is a key priority for us. The Specialised and Joint Committees of the EU and the UK will be making important decisions on the protocol's implementation and Ireland will need to engage closely with these processes, to ensure the successful bedding down of the new arrangements from an economic and political point of view.

Fine Gael will work to ensure that people in Northern Ireland continue to enjoy access to EU rights, opportunities and benefits into the future. We have made commitments in respect of access to the benefits of the European Health Insurance Card and progressed bespoke legislation in the Oireachtas, as well as working on solutions for the Erasmus+



programme in the context of a no-deal scenario.

We will seek a PEACE PLUS programme for Northern Ireland and the border counties worth up to €1 billion, as part of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) negotiations. We will also seek to continue to include Northern Ireland and Wales in Interreg.

Prepared for Brexit

The UK Government's self-imposed deadlines mean that the risk of a cliff-edge scenario remains, with significant consequences for British-Irish trade. We are faced with starkly varying scenarios: from a comprehensive and balanced Free Trade Agreement, to a bare-bones Free Trade Agreement, to no future relationship agreement at all. While we are confident of our ability to secure a deal, we must prepare for the worst-case scenario.

We will continue to upgrade our ports and airports with the required infrastructure and work with businesses to prepare for different scenarios. This will include supports for the most impacted sectors and

dealing with concerns over possible disruption to the UK Landbridge. We will ensure that any changes are well communicated with stakeholders, to ensure that all involved remain properly informed throughout.

We have engaged with businesses and helped them to mitigate the risks of Brexit through the €300 million Future Growth Loan Scheme and the €300 million Brexit Loan Scheme. And, we stand ready to do a lot more, as the exact form of Brexit takes shape.

In Budget 2020, we announced a package of over €1.2 billion for 2020, excluding EU funding, to respond to Brexit. This will remain in place, ready to be implemented, if a new long-term relationship fails to be agreed. We will use this money to assist the Agriculture, Enterprise and Tourism sectors, to fund extra Social Protection spending for those on the Live Register and to assist people in transitioning to new employment opportunities.

Fine Gael believes that these supports will be sufficient but stands ready to do more, depending on how Brexit unfolds in the coming months.

Ireland – an island at the centre of the world and at the heart of Europe

Committed to the European Union (EU)

Fine Gael is the party of Europe. Following a vote of party members, 'Europe and Openness' was added to our Party's values – the core beliefs around which we base our policies and ideas for the future. Europe has always been, and will continue to be, interwoven with Fine Gael's policies.

Our place at the heart of the most powerful grouping in European politics – the EPP – has stood to us throughout the Brexit process. These relationships matter and will stand to us in the crucial stages of Brexit yet to unfold.

We will ensure that Ireland is not defined by Brexit.

At a time when some countries are turning inwards and choosing nationalism ahead of multilateralism, the EU must step up and demonstrate the power of shared decision-making. As Ireland is a global island, we believe that multilateralism strengthens, not diminishes, our diversity, our self-confidence and our security. Ireland and the EU must play its part in shaping together the kind of world in which the people of Ireland want to live, rather than having us live in a world shaped by others.

Strengthening our relationship with the UK after Brexit

We recognise that we need to rebuild and re-imagine our relationship with the UK. This will be a priority for Fine Gael over the coming years. We will establish an ambitious new structure to facilitate high-level bilateral cooperation between Ireland and the UK after Brexit. This could involve top-level summits between the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister, meetings of respective senior ministers and ongoing official engagement. For example, this could be an enhanced British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference (BIIGC) or a new body modelled on the Nordic Council.

Fine Gael will undertake a full review of Ireland's future relationship with the UK within six months of being returned to office. Having opened a consular office in Cardiff, we will open a new mission in northern England and look to further enhancing our footprint in London and Edinburgh.

Building new alliances within Europe

In a post-Brexit EU, we will have lost the UK as an ally on many key issues.

Fine Gael will continue to forge strong alliances with other Member States with which we share common goals and interests.

Doubling Ireland's impact

Fine Gael has an ambition to double Ireland's impact in the world by 2025. This has involved a whole-of-government effort, with the reinvigoration and expansion of Ireland's embassy and agency network, a deepening of its worldwide cultural links and a massive step-up in how it funds its official development assistance (ODA) to the world's most impoverished people. By enhancing Ireland's global impact, we will ensure that we play our part in shaping the kind of world in which we want to live.

We set out this agenda in *Global Ireland: Ireland's Global Footprint to 2025* (Global Ireland), which we are fully committed to implementing. Since its launch in June 2018, 10 new diplomatic missions have been established, including embassies in Wellington, Bogotá, Amman, Santiago and new consulates general in Vancouver, Mumbai, Cardiff, Los Angeles and Frankfurt. New embassies will open this year in Kyiv, Manila and Rabat. Given the movement of global economic power east and south,



Martin Heydon

Candidate for Kildare South

Heather Humphreys

Candidate for Cavan Monaghan

we are placing a priority on ensuring that Ireland expands its footprint and impact in Asia and Africa. This priority is manifested in the recent Africa Strategy (November 2019) and Asia-Pacific Strategy (January 2020).

Securing a UN Security Council Seat

A decade ago, when Ireland lost its economic sovereignty, our international reputation was at its lowest ebb since independence. Over the past nine years, Fine Gael in government and the Irish people have rebuilt that reputation.

Under the leadership of the Tánaiste, Simon Coveney, Ireland has campaigned heavily to win a seat on the United Nations Security Council for the 2021-2022 term. We are competing with Norway and Canada, and the election will take place this summer. Winning this seat would enable Ireland to bring its perspective to bear on some of the most important questions relating to international peace and security. The campaign has also given us an opportunity to engage and build relationships with countries near and

far on respective priorities, mutual interests and shared goals.

Bringing together our embassies and state agencies in 'Ireland House'

We believe that more of our missions abroad should use the 'Ireland House' model, whereby all state agencies such as Enterprise Ireland (EI) and Bord Bia – and government departments – are brought under the one roof. This co-location encourages joined-up thinking, increases efficiencies and offers a better service to citizens.

A 'Green' Department of Foreign Affairs

Coupled with the Irish House model, we want to transform the Department of Foreign Affairs into a 'Green Foreign Ministry'. Building on the example of other countries, such as France, we will reduce the carbon footprint of foreign affairs activity. This will involve more teleconferencing and the close measurement of the department's worldwide carbon footprint.

Championing a new EU-Africa partnership

A much more intensive and meaningful EU-Africa partnership is required, if we are to deal effectively with our shared challenges. Fine Gael will move beyond the traditional focus on aid towards building new multifaceted partnerships with a young, swiftly growing African continent. We will work to establish a new political structure to facilitate much closer political cooperation and two-way investment between the two continents, reflecting the breadth of challenges and opportunities we will face over the coming decades.

Ready to recognise the State of Palestine

Fine Gael stands ready to recognise the State of Palestine, if and when we believe it would be helpful in achieving a free, sovereign, democratic and sustainable Palestinian State, or if it advances the peace process in that direction. It is through multilateral engagement and maintaining open lines of communications that Ireland can act most effectively on these

issues. The relentless settlement expansion and related activities in the West Bank, including the forced removal of Palestinians from their homes, is critically damaging the viability of a future Palestinian State, and we will continue to speak out internationally to condemn further expansion plans and to do all we can to support the two-state solution.

As we increase our Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), we will also increase our funding to UNWRA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees) over the next five years. UNWRA is essential to the delivery of healthcare, education and humanitarian relief and social services, including food assistance, to more than 5 million Palestinian refugees. It is imperative that donors should have confidence in UNRWA and the organisation must be shown to be operating in a transparent way to the highest standards of governance.

Building on our deep relationship with the USA

The Irish and United States (US) economies are closely intertwined, with 150,000 people employed in Ireland by US companies and 70% of foreign direct investment (FDI) into Ireland originating from the US. In the other direction, more than 100,000 people are employed in Irish enterprises located across the US. Policy, taxation and trade changes may present obstacles in the years ahead, but we will work to strengthen and deepen that relationship culturally, diplomatically and economically. We are committed to the ambitious expansion of our diplomatic, enterprise and cultural footprint in the US, as outlined in *Global Ireland*, and in our dedicated strategy for the US and Canada, published in February 2019.

In the context of the UK leaving the EU, we will position Ireland as the EU's

bridge to the US, acting as a strong advocate for free trade, as well as closer economic and cultural ties across the Atlantic. We shall seek to lead within the EU on creating a common transatlantic approach to data protection, privacy and the protection of intellectual property.

Strengthening our relationship with the diaspora

Fine Gael will develop a new policy and strategic approach to improving linkages with the 70 million-strong Irish diaspora overseas, including the publication of a new diaspora strategy in 2020. We are also committed to holding a referendum on extending the franchise at presidential elections to Irish citizens living around the world (see Political Reform section for more detail).

Fine Gael will continue to support Irish citizens in the US by working on a bipartisan basis on Capitol Hill to (i) establish new pathways for legal migration by Irish citizens to the US and (ii) find solutions for undocumented Irish citizens to regularise their status. We will continue our extensive outreach in support of an E3 Visa Bill, which, if passed, would offer new opportunities for Irish citizens to live and work in the US.

Increasing Overseas Development Assistance

Fine Gael is committed to increasing our ODA Programme. We are targeting a spend of 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) on ODA by 2030. This will be a huge challenge – a trebling of our current commitment. It will require cross-party commitment across the Dáil. We have made solid progress since the publication of *Global Ireland*, with allocations to ODA increasing by €131 million, or 18.5%, over the past two budgets.

Supporting globalisation and liberalisation of international trade

Through new and existing EU trade deals we will expand Ireland's export options into new and emerging global markets. At a time when there is a rise in protectionism internationally, we are clear in our support for free trade.

Therefore, we back EU efforts to negotiate new and additional free- and fair-trade agreements, alongside ongoing talks with Australia and New Zealand, while defending our high standards and preventing unfair trade practices. We believe that we must seek to progress negotiations on a trade deal with the US, without lowering EU standards.

We are committed to carrying out a full economic and sustainability assessment of the headline EU/ Mercosur trade agreement, to inform future action on the ratification of this deal. We will work with EU colleagues throughout the lengthy legal refinement process, sparing no effort to ensure that Ireland's interests are prioritised, maximising protection for the agriculture sector.

Providing protection to those who seek and need it

As a strong and active member of the international community, Ireland has obligations to those fleeing persecution and war in conflict zones and oppressive regimes around the world. We have also provided sanctuary to those fleeing the harrowing violence in Syria and other war-torn regions, through the Irish Refugee Protection Programme. We have sought to show solidarity to fellow EU Member States at the frontline of the migration crisis. We will continue to play our part in the EU's response to meeting the needs of asylum seekers and refugees and develop longer term expert-informed

strategies to ensure that we are equipped to meet future challenges.

Speedy decisions on asylum requests

The most important initiative we can take for those seeking asylum in Ireland is to ensure that their cases are dealt with compassionately, fairly and quickly. By ensuring that decisions are made quickly, we can allow people in genuine need of asylum to commence their new lives here with the necessary supports. We will streamline application forms for applicants in consultation with the National Adult Literacy Agency.

Standards in direct provision centres

Significant progress has been made in improving services to applicants for international protection in recent years. Following *The McMahon Report: The Working Group on the Protection Process and Direct Provision*, we are

moving towards an independent living model in all Direct Provision Centres:

- We have worked with stakeholders, including key non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to develop a set of standards for centres and these new standards are being rolled out across the country
- We have ensured that service users have access to the Ombudsman and Ombudsman for Children
- We have transposed the EU (Recast) Reception Conditions Directive, which provides a wide range of rights for international protection applicants, including the right to work where a first-instance decision has not been reached within nine months.

New Direct Provision centres and community engagement

We have opened new Direct Provision Centres in recent months to address

rising demands for international protection. These centres reflect our new standards with own-door, self-catering accommodation. We will develop new models of community engagement to ensure that the establishment of new centres is done in an inclusive and welcoming fashion.

A better long-term approach

We do not believe that the current model is fit for purpose for the long-term.

The State has asked the former Secretary General to the European Commission, Catherine Day, to chair a small expert group to identify international best practice in the provision of services to applicants for international protection and to consider future migration trends. The group will complete its work late in 2020 and we will respond speedily to its recommendations.



Northern Ireland and the future of our shared island

This is a shared island, with a shared future. We want to shape that future together for the benefit of all our people. Our vision for the island of Ireland embraces all identities, religions and minorities. We have always been about building relationships and bringing communities and people together. Our vision aligns with the Good Friday Agreement aspiration of 'equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender or ethnicity' and fully equal rights for same-sex couples and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTI+) people across the island.

Our vision harnesses the potential of the entire island of Ireland, where students move freely around the island, where patients access high-quality healthcare and where trade flows smoothly. Thousands of people cross the border each day. These are people running a business, going to work, going to university, visiting family or accessing public services. As our approach to Brexit has shown, we will always protect the facilitation of this movement.

Bunreacht na hÉireann affirms our national aspiration for territorial unity. Fine Gael, the United Ireland Party, shares that aspiration, based on the principle of consent and a majority, north and south, being in favour.

Calls for a border poll at this time, which are not properly thought through, are only likely to exacerbate division and uncertainty. Fine Gael will continue to work to build consensus across political parties and civic society – both north and south – on the most appropriate way to maintain and strengthen relationships on the island of Ireland. Fine Gael is committed to maintaining the all-island civic dialogue in the context of Brexit but also as a useful structure to discuss future challenges to relationships on the island of Ireland.

New Decade, New Approach

Fine Gael has worked intensively in talks at Stormont to support the leaders of the political parties in finding an agreement that will restore the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement. We believe that the new deal represents a fair and balanced package, with four key elements:

- **Transforming Public Services and Investing in the Economy – to deliver better public services, a stronger economy and a fairer society**
- **Better Politics and Sustainable Institutions – to ensure that Northern Ireland never goes three years without an Executive again**
- **Language and Identity – offering a new cultural framework with a Commissioner to protect and enhance the Irish language and a further Commissioner to develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster Scots/ Ulster British tradition**
- **Petition of Concern – reforming the petition of concern to bring it closer to its original role, as conceived of the Good Friday Agreement, and as a means of building consensus.**

Northern Ireland is facing real challenges, but also exciting opportunities. We hope that this new deal marks the beginning of a decade of real and lasting progress.

Cross-border collaboration on public services and key infrastructure

It makes sense on an island the size of Ireland to collaborate across a range of public services and on key infrastructure projects. Fine Gael believes there is huge potential to improve connectivity across the island of Ireland – by road, rail and air.

In line with the *New Decade, New Approach* Agreement, we will look to quickly progress key infrastructure projects such as the A5, the Narrow Water Bridge and the Ulster Canal connection from Clones to Upper Lough Erne. Fine Gael will ensure that the Irish Government delivers on its funding commitments to these projects, including a total of €75 million up to 2022 for the A5.

High-speed rail

We are very supportive of examining the feasibility of a high-speed rail connection between Belfast, Dublin, Limerick Junction and Cork, creating a spine of connectivity on the island. As set out in *Project Ireland 2040*, we will ensure that this feasibility study will start as early as possible in 2020.

Enhanced air connectivity

We strongly support opening up new air routes between north and south. We will establish a review of the potential for government support

to renewed viable air routes from Cork to Belfast and Dublin to Derry, working with the UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive.

Cross-border greenways

The border should not act as a barrier to building on the enormous potential for greenways. We will build on greenway projects, such as the Sligo-Enniskillen Greenway, to deliver sustainable tourism and other enterprise potential.

Developing the potential of the North-West

Fine Gael will step up investment in Letterkenny and Derry and the wider North-West region, in conjunction with the Northern Ireland Executive and the British Government. We welcome the UK Government's announcement to invest up to £105 million in Derry and the North-West, through the Derry and Strabane City Deal and the Inclusive Future Fund.

We believe that Derry has enormous potential to become a major centre for higher education. It could open up educational access for young people on a cross-border basis, enable further cooperation between higher education institutions in the North-West and bolster economic development opportunities. Fine Gael is committed to exploring new joint funding opportunities to significantly expand the university campus in Derry and, perhaps, a cross-border

university with campuses in Derry and Letterkenny.

All-island school exchange programme

In line with the *New Decade, New Approach* agreement, we will build on the success of the recent pilot programme of bringing pupils from schools from north and south of the border and from Nationalist and Unionist traditions together to meet, discuss issues of mutual concern and visit sites of significant shared historic relevance. We will expand the scheme over the lifetime of the next Government with a target of achieving 100 such cross-border engagements per annum within a five-year programme.

Addressing the legacy of the past

As announced in conjunction with *New Decade, New Approach*, we have reaffirmed the Irish Government's commitment to working with the UK Government to support the establishment of the Stormont House Agreement legacy institutions as a matter of urgency. This commitment includes introducing the necessary implementing legislation in the Oireachtas, to deal with the legacy of the Troubles and to support reconciliation, meeting the legitimate needs and expectations of all victims and survivors.

Implementing Sláintecare

We have a plan to deliver affordable, quality healthcare to all

Fine Gael has made the decision to reform fundamentally the Health Service Executive (HSE), bringing power back to local communities through six new Regional Health Areas.

As part of our plan for a fairer, better health service we will:

- Provide more health services in the community, so that people get a good range of care close to home
- Increase bed capacity and staff numbers, so that hospital care can be provided in a timely manner
- Promote healthy lifestyles to support people staying well and living longer, healthier lives.

Funding Sláintecare

It is clear that our health service is not currently the right size or shape to meet the needs of our growing and ageing population. Through Sláintecare, this change can be planned, managed and implemented, and Fine Gael is making a long-term financial commitment to deliver it.

By 2025 we will be investing an additional €5 billion per year to resource our health service, to deliver our ambitions and to protect our population as it ages and grows.

Sláintecare in action

We will:

- Provide 2,600 extra hospital beds

and 4,500 community beds

- Provide 80 additional Primary Care Centres and community diagnostic facilities
- Develop three elective hospitals in Dublin, Cork and Galway
- Recruit 3,840 primary care workers, with recruitment of 1,000 by the end of this year
- Expand diagnostics services and increasing to access to radiology services in the community.

Reforming the HSE

We will continue to reform the HSE and give greater decision-making powers to local areas. This will give frontline workers a greater say in the delivery of healthcare.

The next steps towards Universal Access to Healthcare

We will take the next steps towards universal access to healthcare by:

- Extending free GP care to all children under 18
- Extending free GP care to carers in receipt of the Carer's Support Grant
- Further reducing prescription charges
- Reducing the Drug Payment Scheme to a maximum of €75 a month
- Increasing the income limits for

medical cards and GP visit cards to take account of wage inflation

- Increasing the threshold for medical cards for people over 70 back to 2012 levels
- Abolishing in-patient hospital charges for children
- Extending discretionary medical cards to those with a terminal illness
- Extending a free dental-care package to children under 16, in line with our oral health policy *Smile agus Sláinte*
- Introducing baby boxes for all new parents.

We will also negotiate with general practitioners (GPs) about a package of subsidised visits for adults using the PRSI system similar to Treatment Benefit (dental/optical).

Investing in health facilities

Under *Project Ireland 2040*, we are doubling investment in healthcare infrastructure and equipment from €5 billion in the last 10-year period to more than €10 billion in the current period.

Between now and 2021, we will spend more than €2 billion on 250 projects across the country, providing 480 new beds, 58 community nursing units, and new investment in mental health and disability projects in the community.



Primary care should be the first point of contact with the health service, where all our health and social care services, including GPs, a public health nurse or the services of therapists are available close to home. Already, 129 primary care centres are open and we will deliver a further 80 new primary care centres.

We will open the new National Children's Hospital in 2023, supported by two satellite centres, one of which is already open at Connolly Hospital and a second to open in 2020 at Tallaght Hospital.

As set out in the *National Maternity Strategy – Creating a Better Future Together 2016-2026*, work will continue on the replacement of standalone maternity hospitals by relocating the National Maternity Hospital to St. Vincent's University Hospital, the Coombe Hospital to St James's, the Rotunda Hospital to Connolly, and Limerick University Maternity Hospital to University Hospital Limerick.

In 2020, we will open the new and much-needed forensic mental health services hospital in Portrane Co. Dublin, a state-of-the-art facility

providing a modern forensic mental health service, with proper and timely intervention.

In 2020 we will decide the locations in Cork, Galway and Dublin for three new hospitals specialising in reducing waiting lists and progress these projects as quickly as possible.

We will also provide new radiation oncology facilities in Cork, Galway and Dublin in 2020.

Through the Design and Dignity Programme, in association with the Irish Hospice Friendly Hospitals, a renovation and renewal of eleven mortuaries across the country has been funded. We will deliver further capital projects in hospitals throughout the country.

We will continue to increase funding for the National Ambulance Service so that we can increase capacity and expand Community First Responder schemes, working in conjunction with the Dublin Fire Brigade, Irish Air Corps and Irish Community Rapid Response. We will provide new ambulance bases in Galway City, Mullingar, Cork, Limerick and Ardee and upgrade ambulance facilities at St Joseph's Hospital, Stranorlar, Co Donegal.

Supporting healthcare workers

Since Leo Varadkar became Taoiseach, health sector staff numbers have increased by almost 5,000, including over 600 hospital doctors and over 1,000 nurses.

Over the lifetime of the next Fine Gael Government, we will recruit 5,000 additional nurses. We will continue to implement the recent Nursing Agreement, which includes additional measures to assist with the recruitment and retention of nurses into the public health service. We will work to further advance the nursing and midwifery professions, to provide more clinical autonomy and responsibility and raise them to the level of therapists, in terms of pay and conditions.

We will also engage with radiographers, paramedics and healthcare assistants on how their roles can be developed.

This year, we will commence the recruitment of 1,000 frontline staff, including public health nurses and allied health professionals such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists, dementia advisers

and speech & language therapists. We want more staff working in our community and this is the first step on that journey.

We have concluded a new contract with GPs, investing €210 million to sustain vital services in our communities, particularly for out of hours services and in rural areas, while ensuring that general practice remains an attractive option for medical graduates.

We have commenced the roll out of a Chronic Disease Management Programme, delivering structured care to patients via their local doctors, thereby improving health outcomes and reducing the need for hospital admissions.

As part of this agreement, a strategic review of GP services will commence in 2020, to examine how best to ensure the provision of GP services for everyone into the future.

We will increase the number of GP training places to 300 by 2025 and support GP practices through a multi-million euro fund, as part of revised contractual arrangements.

We will also begin talks this year with our pharmacists on a new contract and enhance the role of pharmacists in the delivery of healthcare.

We will now, on a phased basis, hire only consultants who are committed to working in public hospitals. Under our proposals, the number of consultants will increase by 1,000 over the next 10 years. It makes sense to begin this change now, to provide for an ageing population. By making this change, we will:

- **Establish better access to care, based on medical need and not ability to pay**
- **Deliver better public hospital care**
- **Add capacity**
- **Reduce waiting times**
- **Ensure better value for public money.**

We owe a debt of gratitude to all those working in our voluntary organisations

for the care and dignity provided to patients and service users in our communities. We have established a Dialogue Forum, with an independent chair, to build a stronger working relationship between the State and the voluntary healthcare sector for the benefit of those accessing these services.

A more compassionate health service

We have introduced mandatory open disclosure of serious patient safety incidents and established an independent Patient Safety Council.

We will accompany this by the introduction of a supports package to be automatically offered to those affected by patient safety incidents at the same time as being given open disclosure and an apology.

We will introduce a no-fault compensation scheme for those impacted through vaccination programmes.

We will continue to fully implement the recommendations contained in Dr Scally's Reports of the Scoping Inquiry, the MacCraith Review and the report of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists into CervicalCheck.

Improving access to care through the National Treatment Purchase Fund

Fine Gael has dramatically increased funding to the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF), reducing the time that patients wait for common hospital operations and procedures. In 2020, there will be a significant focus on ear, nose and throat (ENT), orthopaedics, dermatology, ophthalmology, urology and gynaecology, as well as scopes, diagnostics and children's waiting lists.

Under Fine Gael, the NTPF is now investing in the public health service. Fine Gael will reform the NTPF and develop it into a National Treatment Access Fund. This will allow us to treat more patients in the community.

Reducing the cost of medicines

We will establish a National Medicines Agency, promoting national prescribing to reduce the cost of medicines, to set a fair price for drug reimbursement and to speed up the reimbursement of new drugs, including those for rare diseases. This agency, in conjunction with the Health Products Regulatory Authority, will also examine opportunities for Ireland to extend the number of clinical trials taking place here.

We are implementing a National Biosimilars Policy to help patients to access cheaper medicines. Fine Gael in Government delivered the last Framework Agreement on the Supply and Pricing of Medicines in 2016 and will deliver a new one in 2020.

We will continue to collaborate with international colleagues, via the BeNeLuxA initiative, to deliver sustainable access to innovative medications through the collaboration of smaller countries.

Hospital car parking charges

We will cap the maximum daily charge for patients and visitors at €10 for all hospitals. Flexible day/pass/multi-entry passes will be introduced in all hospitals to patients and their families.

Implementing national health strategies

Fine Gael in Government has produced a new *National Cancer Strategy*, *Trauma Strategy*, *National Dementia Strategy* and Ireland's first *National Maternity Strategy*.

From the new financial commitment that we are making to the Irish health service, we will have a ring-fenced fund for these vital national strategies, and fund the implementation of the *Neuro Rehabilitation Strategy*.

In line with the Cancer Strategy, we will establish a National Cancer Research Group to ensure that

cancer clinical trials constitute a core activity of cancer centres, with a stable funding mechanism.

We will continue to support the CervicalCheck Screening Programme, implement a primary HPV testing programme from early 2020, as well as continuing to promote uptake of the HPV vaccine.

By the end of 2021, we will complete the extension of BreastCheck to age 69 and provide for the expansion of BowelScreen to all aged 55-74.

We have established a National Screening Committee and tasked it with reviewing our newborn screening programme in line with best international evidence. We will act on its recommendations.

Under the National Cancer Strategy, we will put in place a fund for local cancer support services that are providing vital assistance to people living with and beyond cancer.

A plan for rare diseases

We will work with stakeholders and patient representatives to publish an updated National Rare Diseases Plan, with agreed prioritisation of tasks and clear implementation timelines.

We will continue investment in staff and equipment at the medical genetics service in Our Lady's Children Hospital, Crumlin, which provides services for patients and families affected by, or at risk of, a genetic disorder.

Sláintecare recognises that research, in particular clinical trials, are key to improving prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases. Over €150m has been invested in clinical research infrastructure and supports over the last decade, providing for the establishment of state-of-the-art clinical research facilities on the campuses of hospitals, clinical trials networks and Clinical Research Coordination Ireland (HRB-CRCI).

We ensured Ireland's membership European Clinical Research

Infrastructure Network (ECRIN). As a member our researchers now have access to a wider patient base and expertise from across Europe. Membership increases the ability of people in Ireland to be part of research on rare conditions.

We will enact the National Research Ethics Committee Bill providing for the establishment of a National Office for Research Ethics Committees, and the urgent establishment of a National Research Ethics Committee in the area of Clinical Trials (of Medicinal Products), will deliver an effective and coherent national model which will benefit those conducting and participating in trials.

We will establish a National Genetics and Genomics Medicine Network to develop effective governance arrangements recognising the interdependence between corporate, financial and clinical governance across the service and ensure the delivery of high quality, safe and reliable healthcare.

A healthier Ireland

Healthy Ireland is our national action plan to help people live healthier and longer lives.

The most recent Healthy Ireland Survey demonstrates good progress in reducing the prevalence of smoking, citing the introduction of plain packaging as good motivation to quit.

We will continue to increase the excise duty on tobacco in the years ahead to further discourage smoking. We will also bring in a targeted taxation regime to specifically discourage 'vaping' and e-cigarettes

The implementation of the Public Health (Alcohol) Act will be instrumental in reducing harm from excessive alcohol consumption. We will honour our longstanding commitment to introduce Minimum Unit Pricing at the same time as its introduction in Northern Ireland, to ensure that cross-border price differentials do not undermine its effectiveness.

Recognising the increasing public health challenges posed by obesity, we will work with key stakeholders to introduce a Public Health Obesity Act, including examining restrictions on advertising aimed at children.

We are committed to protecting the nation's health and wellbeing through immunisation, infectious disease control and continued support for our screening programmes. Fine Gael has established a National Vaccine Alliance supported by a broad range of medical professionals. Having already allocated €500,000 to promote its work, we will continue to invest in the alliance.

Fine Gael will act on the advice of the Health Research Board on mandatory vaccination and implement its recommendations.

We will ban the sale of nicotine-inhaling products, including e-cigarettes, to people under 18 years and a licensing system for the retail sale of nicotine-inhaling products. We will also curb the advertising of these products near schools, on public transport and in cinemas.

Public health approach to substance misuse

There is a difficult balance to be struck to help people who use drugs, while continuing the relentless pursuit of drug dealers. Through ongoing implementation of the National Drugs Strategy, Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery, in partnership with the statutory, community and voluntary sectors, we will reduce crime and rebuild lives.

By promoting health supports, diversion programmes and rehabilitation we can reduce the demand for drugs and access to illegal drugs. This will be matched with key law enforcement strategies to protect people from the harm of illegal drugs.

We will support secondary schools to introduce drug and alcohol awareness programmes building on recent initiatives at junior and senior cycle to ensure that our young people leave secondary school with an

understanding of the consequences of drug and alcohol misuse.

We will work with our Drug and Alcohol Task Forces in identifying local need in communities, and will support targeted initiatives to address drug and alcohol misuse.

We want to reduce the number of lives lost through overdose and will open a pilot medically supervised injecting facility in Dublin City to bring those who openly inject drugs into a safe environment where they can access health supports and make communities more secure.

We are expanding services for pregnant and post-natal women affected by substance use, and their children.

We are committed to developing health and social interventions based on an inclusion-health approach to target people who are homeless and in addiction.

Many people in addiction also suffer with mental illness but struggle to access appropriate care. We will progress the National Clinical Programme for Dual Diagnosis and work to develop joint protocols and referral pathways.

We will not be complacent about the dangers of drugs and will continue to resource harm reduction and education campaigns aimed at increasing awareness of the risks of drug use and the contribution of drugs to criminality.

Many families with members suffering addiction feel abandoned and are unsure where to turn for advice and assistance. We will establish a 24-hour helpline based on the FRANK helpline in the UK.

Improving sexual health

Fine Gael will deliver free contraception over a phased period, starting with women aged 17-25.

We will produce a new Sexual Health Strategy, invest in sexually transmitted infections (STI) clinics and continue

the roll out of the PrEP programme.

As part of the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2018-2020, we will ensure accessible community-based services and supports across the country, improve training for health and social care professionals and develop a communications plan to raise awareness of mental health resources.

We will implement a best practice model of care for Trans people, in line with the World Professional Association of Transgender Healthcare (WPATH) standards of care.

We will deliver a framework for the development of National Gender Clinics and Multidisciplinary Teams for children and adults.

The refreshed Vision for Change

We know that mental health service users are among the most vulnerable people in Ireland. For this reason, the mental health budget is now over €1 billion a year, an increase of 17% since 2017. These increases have provided for a range of mental health services, including an increase in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Teams, the appointment of assistant psychologists and psychologists in primary care and an increase in Jigsaw services.

Since the publication of *A Vision for Change – Mental Health and Suicide Prevention*, there have been significant changes and improvements in our mental health service, but there is much more to do, to develop appropriate and accessible mental health supports at community and primary care levels.

We will fully implement and resource a refreshed *Vision for Change* and use a 'stepped care' approach, ensuring that each person can access a range of options of varying intensity to match their own needs.

Under this refreshed approach, we will:

- **Increase access to a range of**

counselling supports and talk therapies in the community

- **Strengthen Multidisciplinary Community Mental Health Teams as a cornerstone of service delivery in secondary care**
- **Provide a comprehensive specialist mental health out-of-hours service for children and adolescents in all geographical areas**
- **Ensure that Speech & Language Therapists are core members of CAMHS Teams**
- **Pilot out-of-hours Crisis Cafes as a new referral option, providing access to talk therapies, coping strategies and one-to-one peers in a supportive environment**
- **Promote social prescribing as an effective means of linking those with mental health difficulties to community-based supports and interventions**
- **Ensure better alignment between the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Justice and Equality and the HSE on primary/post-primary schools, mental health services and supports such as National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS), GPs, primary care services and specialist mental health services**
- **Promote positive mental health and wellbeing among the working age population, by building on existing initiatives in the workplace**
- **Develop a dedicated National Mental Health Promotion Plan**
- **Implement a National Stigma-reduction Programme, aimed at reducing stigma and discrimination for those with mental health difficulties.**

We will establish an overarching National Implementation and Monitoring Committee to drive these measures, monitor progress overall and ensure delivery on the commitments.

We will continue to support the expansion of Jigsaw services in the community.

Drogheda and Cavan, and a further inpatient unit is planned for the Midlands.

We will continue to support Community Specialist Palliative Home Care Teams in all HSE areas, fund designated home care packages and resource specialist palliative care provided in Section-39 acute hospitals.

We are increasing resources for the Children's Palliative Care Programme supported by consultants with a special interest in children's palliative care and children's outreach nurses to coordinate care for children with life-limiting conditions and their families.

We will publish a new Palliative Care Policy for Adults by mid-2021, to update the 2001 policy to reflect the many developments in end-of-life care and better interface with Children's Palliative Care.

Funeral poverty occurs when the cost of a funeral exceeds a person's ability to pay. It is a big concern for many people at a very stressful time.

There are other economic consequences to bereavement arising from poor physical and emotional health outcomes and the need to take leave after a bereavement to recover or care for other family members.

We have partnered with the Irish Hospice Foundation to carry out research into the cost of bereavement and funeral poverty in Ireland. This research will inform our work to eliminate funeral poverty and indicate what further interventions or supports the State can provide to alleviate any hardship associated with loss and bereavement, e.g. the restoration of the bereavement grant.

Improve organ donations

We will enact the Human Tissue Bill, providing the legal basis for an opt-out system of organ donation transforming organ donation in this country.

As recommended by the Youth Mental Health Taskforce, we will invest in age-appropriate, digital youth mental health supports, ensuring that all young people have access to an active listening service and signposting tool.

We will continue to develop the range of e-mental health initiatives, including tele-counselling, tele-psychiatry and a Crisis Text Line, as alternatives to traditional service mechanisms.

Connecting for Life is Ireland's national strategy for suicide prevention; it has delivered considerable progress and is well regarded internationally. We will extend the timeframe and funding to build upon the success of the strategy, and to implement further actions.

We are committed to establishing PathFinder, a cross-governmental youth mental health team with participation from the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Older people

Fine Gael has prioritised the supports that older people need and deserve. We have continually reduced the cost of prescription charges for older people and these reductions will be of significant assistance to people over 70. We are committed

to incrementally raising the income thresholds for medical cards for people over 70.

We want to make home care a statutory right. This will mean no matter where people live, or what they do, they will have a right to homecare.

We will fund 1 million additional hours this year and will deliver an additional 1 million for every year that Fine Gael is in office. We have already increased funding to the Fair Deal Scheme to maintain the waiting list at four weeks and we will implement the revised Fair Deal arrangements for farmers and business owners, following the passage of relevant legislation.

End-of-life care

Fine Gael wants to protect the high standards of palliative care that so many have received from our voluntary hospices and are committed to equalising funding for statutory and voluntary hospices. We have increased the number of specialist palliative care beds countrywide by 50% in the last five years and will increase the number by a further 50% over the next five years, ensuring that there will be a hospice serving every region in the country. We are opening new units in Mayo, Waterford and Wicklow in 2020. Plans are underway to build units in

Protecting women's health

There is now an increased focus on women's health issues, together with greater scrutiny of women's experiences of health care, and it is incumbent upon us to act.

We have established a Women's Health Taskforce, to develop a Women's Health Action Plan as a first step, in responding to gender inequality and to meet women's expectations for their care.

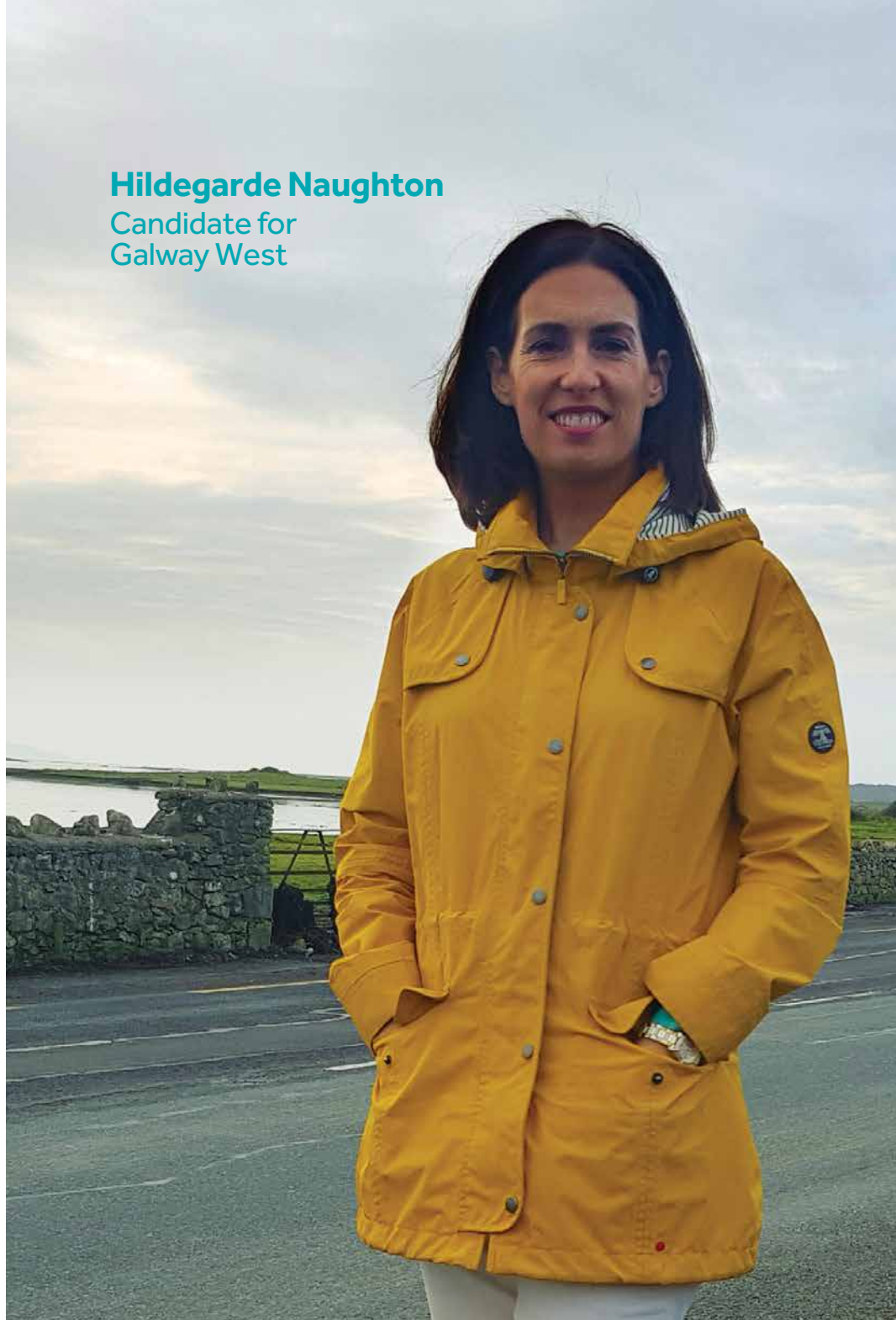
We will continue to increase funding to the *National Maternity Strategy*, to support recruitment and training of additional key midwifery and medical staff, to provide access to dating and anomaly scanning in all maternity units and to implement the supported care pathway across the maternity network.

We will publicly fund fertility treatment in 2021. Starting this year, with a €2 million fund to assist men and women with fertility problems, we will enact the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill, regulating in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) and surrogacy.

Often, barriers to women's healthcare can be improved by ensuring that services are more joined up. We will establish one-stop clinics for women to access cervical screening, sexual health checks, contraceptives and menopause care.

Ireland repealed the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution so that women can legally access abortion care in their own country. We will introduce Safe Access Zones, to ensure that they can access these services without impediment.

Hildegarde Naughton Candidate for Galway West



Tackling health disadvantage

Those most in need of healthcare are often the least likely to receive it. It is seen in everything from higher rates of smoking, a lower uptake of cancer screening and longer waiting times to see specialists to higher rates of illness and lower life expectancy among people from poorer backgrounds.

We can change this by targeting investment in preventive and primary

care in disadvantaged areas. We are already providing €2 million annually to be set aside to provide additional support to practices in deprived urban areas. We will establish a Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)-type programme for health, providing GP practices, community pharmacies and public health staff with dedicated additional resources to communities.

Helping parents to give their children the best start in life

The importance of the first five years

The first five years have a fundamental impact on the type of person we become. A happy and healthy start in life – one that provides children with positive nurturing influences – is vitally important. Our children deserve the best start and opportunities in life, to fulfil their potential.

With Fine Gael, there have been many positive developments for young children in recent years – paternity leave, free GP care for those under 6, a second year of free pre-school and the introduction of subsidised childcare. There is more planned.

Extending paid parental leave

The most important thing a parent can share with their children is their time. Fine Gael is prioritising initiatives to ensure that parents can have more time with their children. We introduced paternity leave and have also brought in additional maternity leave for the mothers of premature babies.

Parents of children up to age 12 can now avail of unpaid leave of up to 22 weeks. This will increase to 26 weeks in September 2020.

From the end of last year, parents of new-born children are entitled to an extra two weeks' paid leave each, which can be taken at any time in the first year of their child's life. This is welcome for parents, but it is not enough. Therefore, over the next five years, we will extend parental leave by a further seven weeks. This means that in 2025, parents will each have an individual entitlement to nine weeks of paid parental leave in the first year of their child's life. This is in addition to their existing maternity and paternity entitlements.

Reducing Childcare Costs

We know the pressures parents are under because of childcare costs. We have made progress – increasing investment from €265m in 2015 to €638m for 2020, up 141% - but we know people are still paying too much. We will reduce childcare costs further, increase quality and support the childcare sector.

Fine Gael has doubled the number of children benefitting from subsidies, doubled the number of places and doubled the free pre-school (ECCE) scheme through a significant investment.

In 2019, 175,000 children received average subsidies of €64 per week. More than 9,000 children are receiving the highest weekly subsidy of €145.

Over the next five years, we will invest an extra €400 million, as we reduce childcare costs for parents and increase quality and accessibility. This will bring annual investment in childcare to more than €1 billion in 2025.

This funding will be used to increase the thresholds and the subsidy rates of the new National Childcare Scheme over the next 5 years. It will allow many more parents benefit and it will reduce the costs they pay for their childcare. This scheme is fair – it ensures those who need most, get most.

Under *Project Ireland 2040* investment in Early Years capital infrastructure will increase. The focus

of this will be to ensure more childcare places for parents to access, and childcare of a high quality.

The universal pre-school programme provides children with 15 hours per week of pre-school education across 38 weeks per year. Since September 2016, children qualify for two years of universal pre-school. Fine Gael is committed to increasing the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme to 42 weeks per year over the course of the next five years. We will also increase the capitation rate on this scheme.

Centre-based care has evolved rapidly, in terms of policy, while childminding has remained at the margins of funding and support. Fine Gael will work with childminders to publish a Childminding Support and Inclusion Plan that will give parents access to subsidies to reduce their childcare bill, increase quality, choice and ensure greater recognition for childminders and their profession. We will work with childminders and their employers to ensure they benefit from additional funding over the next five years.

We will incentivise after-school services in schools or community hubs to offer a range of education- and family-focused measures, including physical education (PE), homework clubs and speech & language therapy.

Inclusive childcare

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) helps childcare providers to offer their care and services to children with additional needs. Fine Gael is wholly committed to its full implementation.

For children aged 3-5 years with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), early intervention classes are available to provide early support before primary school. There are currently 130 ASD Early Intervention Classes and we are committed to investing further in this facility.

Supporting the Childcare Sector

Whilst helping parents to reduce the cost of childcare is a priority, so too is ensuring Ireland has a new funding model for the Early Learning and Care sector that is sustainable, high quality and attractive to work in. We want those running services and those working in services to make a fair income, have a successful career in childcare and be able to plan ahead. We therefore support the work of the Expert Group considering a new funding model for Early Learning and Care and School Age Care.

We value and appreciate those caring for children. They are the bedrock of the sector and their retention is key to ensuring greater quality.

We will support the establishment of a Joint Labour Committee in the childcare sector. A childcare JLC will be able to draw up an Employment Regulation Order, which would determine minimum rates of pay for childcare workers, as well as terms and conditions of employment

As part of the *First Five Strategy*, work has commenced on a new Workforce Plan to improve career development opportunities, attraction and retention initiatives that keep talented and committed staff within the sector. We will seek to expedite this plan.

We recognise the additional administrative and financial burden increased regulations places on a small business. We will streamline regulatory requirements whilst continuing to improve quality.

Transparency in Childcare

Parents want to be told if there is a serious regulatory problem with their childcare provider. Fine Gael is committed to ensuring that Tusla has the necessary resources, manpower and legislative support to ensure a transparent reporting structure for parents and guardians.

Flexible working arrangements

We will work with employees and employers to bring in flexible working across the work-force. Flexible working encompasses a wide range of practices including part-time working, remote working, compressed hours, working from home and job sharing. A labour market that offers flexible working solutions can result in a win for employers, workers and society alike. Fine Gael is pursuing this initiative, which will assist in retaining talent and balancing family commitments.

Supporting breastfeeding

Fine Gael supports the target of a 2% annual increase in the number of new mothers' breastfeeding in maternity hospitals and primary care centres, with support from increased access to lactation specialists and public health nurses. We will prioritise areas of social disadvantage and where there are low breastfeeding rates. For those wishing to extend breastfeeding beyond six months, Fine Gael supports the extension of paid breastfeeding/lactation breaks or paid reduction in working hours for breastfeeding mothers from 26 weeks to 104 weeks.

Parenting supports and positive parenting

Many parents would like more support and information about child development and parenting practice that can be put into everyday use. We are committed to the delivery of more easily-accessible online and class courses that offer advice and guidance to parents.

Family diversity

Ireland has a diverse range of family structures and Fine Gael has established a process to advise on the legal recognition of all types of parents, so as to ensure that all families have true equality in the eyes of the State, as they do in the eyes of their fellow citizens.

Tusla

Tusla plays a critical role in improving the wellbeing and outcomes for children. Its work is invaluable, but there are weaknesses which Fine Gael is determined to fix. We are committed to the full implementation of Tusla's Action Plan on the Recommendations of the HIQA Statutory Investigation into Tusla's Management of Referrals (June 2018). This includes the implementation of its Workforce Plan, and the management of referrals and retrospective cases.

Free GP and dental care for children

See the 'Implementing Sláintecare' chapter.

Youth mental health services

We will continue to extend Youth Mental Health services, including Jigsaw, which is free to access and does not require GP referral.

Children in emergency accommodation

Children, in particular, suffer educationally and emotionally from

living in emergency accommodation and we will continue to prioritise finding them permanent accommodation. The causes of homelessness are complicated but are linked to the collapse of our house-building sector and the severe supply shortage associated with it. The steps we are taking to rebuild our housing sector are making a difference, and we will do everything that is possible to tackle homelessness.

We are committed to delivering homes for all families experiencing homelessness and continuing to provide the necessary supports to keep them in sustainable tenancies through agencies, including the HSE, Tusla and the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Supporting parents through the loss of a child

The loss of a child is an incredibly tragic event. We will support parents through this difficult time by introducing a new bereavement assistance for two weeks for both parents.

A New National Framework for Children and Young People: Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF)

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 (BOBF) is our strategy to make Ireland a good place to be a child and a young person. We will build on the successful implementation of BOBF in the next National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, in recognition that any new strategy must have specific and measurable targets, with clear accountability and time frames. We will consult closely with stakeholders, including NGOs, in advance of publishing our new strategy.

Ensuring that work pays

Fine Gael believes in making work pay. Our policies promote work over welfare

A fair income tax plan

A decade ago, we saw how giveaway budgets undermined the public finances. So, we have consigned the days of income tax give-aways on Budget Day to history. Our income tax plans are affordable and fair:

The average full-time wage in Ireland is €47,596. However, people start paying the top-rate of tax at €35,300. This is deeply unfair. As people's wages increase, it is critical that the taxation system does not prevent them from seeing improvements in their take home pay by failing to keep pace with this wage inflation. Therefore, we will change the point at which an individual pays the higher rate of tax to €50,000 over the next five years. This will prevent people's taxes increasing as their wages increase.

The annual benefit for an average earner at the end of five years will be just under €3,000, which will ensure that tax levels keep up with projected income growth.

We will raise the USC exemption threshold from €13,000 to €20,500 so that people on low incomes like full time minimum wage workers, low paid part-time workers and people in receipt of modest occupational pension are no longer in the USC net.

The minimum wage will be €10.10 from 01 February 2020, which represents the sixth increase since Fine Gael has been in Government. When Fine Gael came into office in 2011, it had been cut by Fianna Fáil and the Green Party to €7.65.

This represents an increase of 32%, during a period when inflation has been 6%.

We believe that the Low Pay Commission is the best place to make future recommendations in relation to the minimum wage. We will continue to implement its recommendations. We believe that the current system of setting the minimum wage works and reflects the right balance of interests

between workers, employers, pay increases and protection of employment levels.

In order to mitigate any unintended impact on jobs or small businesses as a result of any future increase in the minimum wage, we will ensure that any increases are always accompanied by an appropriate adjustment to employers' PRSI.

Working Family Payment

We have replaced the Family Income Supplement with the Working Family Payment. This is a weekly tax-free payment available to employees with children and thereby provides extra financial support to people on low pay. We will keep the income limits for the Working Family Payment under review, to ensure that the families in need of this support continue to receive it. We will continue to support families into the labour market and therefore towards greater financial security, no longer being welfare dependent.





**Marcella Corcoran
Kennedy**
Candidate for
Laois Offaly

Andrew Doyle
Candidate for
Wicklow

Charlie Flanagan
Candidate for
Laois Offaly

Employee terms and conditions

We would like to see improvements in the pay and terms and conditions (such as no sick pay) in sectors formerly covered by Employment Regulation Orders, similar to that in retail and hospitality. Low pay and poor conditions are not just bad for workers, they are bad for employers, as they result in high staff turnover. These conditions are also costly for the Exchequer. We will use the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) to consult with unions and employers on how Joint Labour Committees might be made operable again in a way that improves pay and conditions, without undermining employment levels or the viability of small businesses. We will complete this work by the end of 2020.

Fine Gael will always stand up for fairness and the employment rights of low-paid and precarious workers – as we did with the Employment Act 2018, where we restricted zero-hours contracts and introduced banded-hours contracts. We will ensure that employment rights legislation keeps pace with the changing world of work and its new platforms. Employees must have rights, no matter how they work or who they work for.

Protecting employees' tips

It has become clear that, in a minority of establishments, workers are not being treated fairly with regard to tips. Fine Gael is determined to introduce measures that will improve the situation and, crucially, have a sound and workable legal basis. We will enact new legislation to amend the Payment of Wages Act, to ensure that tips and gratuities cannot be used to 'make-up' or satisfy a person's contractual wages and also to provide a requirement for employers to clearly display, for the benefit of workers and customers, their policy on how tips, gratuities and service charges are distributed. Crucially, this new legislation will also

ensure that all tips, be they cash or electronic, must go to the worker and not the employer.

Public pay deal

Fine Gael will honour the terms of the current Public Service Stability Agreement. We will negotiate a new public pay deal, to commence in January 2021. It will be a sustainable deal, allowing us to increase public pay while also investing in public services and reducing tax for low and middle income earners. We will introduce a bargaining clause in the new agreement to make progress on sectoral issues.

We will seek to continue to enhance public servants' working conditions and career development opportunities, through support for greater mobility in the public services and greater opportunities for training, promotion, and upskilling.

We will ensure that the public sector takes a leading role in supporting genuinely flexible working, as well as remote working. This will be central to any new negotiations with public servants in relation to pay and conditions.

We will ensure that any pay improvements are clearly linked to the modernisation of work practices and improvements in productivity.

Backing those who back themselves

We recognise and value the contribution made by the self-employed. They are creating jobs not only for themselves, but frequently for so many others. They should be nurtured and supported.

Fine Gael is creating a supportive environment for entrepreneurship, including providing an income safety net to employees and self-employed alike. This is why we have extended Treatment Benefit, Invalidity Benefit and Jobseekers Benefit to the self-employed, ending the unequal treatment of the past. We will explore the best way to extend Illness Benefit and Carer's Benefit

to the self-employed, with a view to harnessing their entrepreneurship and providing a safety net, should they ever need it.

Fairer tax treatment for the self-employed

Recognising the crucial role of the self-employed, Fine Gael established, and has increased, the Earned Income Tax Credit over a series of budgets since 2016. We will further raise the Earned Income Tax Credit for the self-employed to match the PAYE Tax Credit and maintain that parity into the future. This will benefit small business owners across the country, including small retailers, farmers and tradesmen.

Protections in relation to self-employment

There are concerns about the incidence of 'bogus' self-employment. We will ensure that people are aware of their rights and the protections available and ensure that there continues to be rigorous policing of existing law.

We will also introduce new laws to further strengthen the law. This will include putting the Code of Practice for Determining Employment Status on a statutory basis. We will also develop measures to stop victimisation of workers who seek a determination of their employment status.

Employment permit reform

We will establish an expert working group to consider the introduction of gradual mobility between jobs for all employment permit holders through the introduction of sectoral employment permits. The working group will be required to take labour market conditions into consideration, to consult with stakeholders, including NGOs, and to identify a mechanism to ensure that any person with concerns about exploitation is encouraged to report these concerns without any adverse consequences.

Helping those with disabilities to achieve their employment ambitions

Currently, there are more than a quarter of a million people with disabilities receiving a social welfare illness or disability weekly payment in Ireland. Almost half of these are receiving Disability Allowance. Ensuring that people with disabilities are enabled to achieve their employment ambitions is one of the most significant labour market and social policy challenges. Fine Gael is committed to continuing to implement the recommendations in the *Making Work Pay Report*, with measures such as fast-tracking the return to Disability or Invalidity Pension for people where employment does not work out, thereby reducing the 'risk' factor of taking on employment opportunities.

Fine Gael will also continue to fine-tune and expand targeted

employment schemes such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme (WSS) and the Ability Programme, with a view to helping people with disabilities to stay in the workforce.

Reducing the number of people who are long-term unemployed

Despite the number of people at work being at record levels, we remain committed to continuing to further reduce the number of people who are unemployed.

While there has been huge progress in reducing the numbers of people who are unemployed over a year, and also in the youth unemployment rate, we cannot become complacent. We will continue to focus labour activation programmes at the long-term unemployed and unemployed men and women under the age of 25.

There are still a number of groups that face different barriers to

entering and staying in employment. This is why Fine Gael is providing additional funding to develop and implement specific activation. We now have a strong network of activation channels with Local Employment Services, Community Employment and Jobs Clubs established throughout every county in the country. With these valuable supports augmented by Intreo services and JobPath, we have the skills and expertise in place to ensure that we have a country in which everybody who wants a job can get a job.

We will ensure that participants experiencing social exclusion or social isolation, who could benefit from an extended period of participation on a CE scheme, will be able to do so. We will also ensure that people who are over 62 years of age will be able to remain on a Community Employment Scheme until they reach state pension age



Michael Ring
Candidate for Mayo

An Ireland where nobody is left behind

Fine Gael believes in a society in which nobody feels left out. We believe in one Ireland, in which there are equal opportunities for all and a second chance for everyone who needs one.

Disability

We want to empower all of our children, our young people and adults, including those with special needs or a disability, to progress, to reach their full potential, and to become full members of our society. For too long in the past, society placed obstacles in the path of many of our citizens, obstacles that prevented them reaching their potential. They were unable to receive an education, or play a full part in their community, or be part of the work force. To change this there has been significant investment in recent years.

We will:

- **Develop an implementation plan to coordinate implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**
- **Implement a consultation and participation model, in line with the UN CRPD, to facilitate participation by persons with disabilities in the policy development process. Their voice will be heard**
- **Implement an awareness and support programme for employers to support the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities in employment**

- **Develop programmes to promote awareness within the general public of the lived experience of, and to support more positive attitudes towards, people with disabilities**
- **Develop initiatives to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities living in rural areas, including through remote working options**
- **Support initiatives to facilitate the participation of people with disabilities in cultural and heritage-related activities and programmes.**

Each year we have increased the Health Disability Budget and we will continue to do so. The overall budget for health disability services in 2020 is in excess of €2 billion. This represents a 32% increase on the disability budget when this Government came into office in 2016. In increasing the budget this will allow us to further increase much needed personal assistant hours and respite funding. In doing so, we will ensure that we:

- **Improve services through better implementation and collaboration**
- **Strengthen rights**
- **Expand into new areas**
- **Raise awareness of the lived experience of people with disabilities.**

Better understanding the cost of disabilities

It is well recognised that many people with disabilities face extra living

costs associated with their disability, but often the extent to which this affects individuals is unclear. We have already commissioned much-needed research into this important area, the results of which will be used to properly inform the direction of future policy. This research involves a 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approach and will survey over 30,000 people living with disabilities in Ireland today.

We will increase the weekly social welfare payments to the disabled by at least €25 over the next five years, a €5 increase each year.

Personalised budgets

We are committed to the introduction of personalised budgets, improving the provision of services for people with disabilities and empowering their ability to choose the supports that most meet their needs. We have introduced a pilot in two phases with 180 participants. At the end of 2019, users already had their budgets approved. Phase 2 will commence in 2020.

Implementing and funding the National LGBTI+ and LGBTI+ Youth Strategy

Fine Gael in Government will continue to implement and fund the *National LGBTI+ and the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy* – the first in the world – to create a safe, supportive and more

inclusive Ireland and to improve the physical, mental and sexual health of our young people.

Traveller and Roma Communities

We will ensure that the *National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, 2017-2021* is fully implemented to better the lives of Travellers and Roma people. We will conduct an in-depth consultation with these communities, in advance of preparing a new five-year strategy.

Health inequalities are experienced by members of the Traveller Community, evidenced by the disproportionate impact of chronic disease and higher mortality rates. To overcome these challenges, we will ensure integrated primary care services aligned with comprehensive national projects, including:

- A Traveller Health Action Plan
- Accessible primary care projects, family support programmes, counselling, dedicated public health nurses
- Targeted mental health promotion and suicide prevention services
- Ongoing engagement between our health service and representatives of Traveller and Roma Communities, to ensure that the health policies being provided deliver for the needs of these communities.

We will ensure that the housing needs of the Traveller Community are met by local authorities. Guided by recommendations from the Expert Review Group on Traveller Accommodation, we will ensure that existing funding is fully drawn down and utilised and new resources put in place.

Intercultural Health Strategy

In implementing the *National Intercultural Health Strategy 2018 – 2023* we will enhance access to services and provide high quality,

culturally responsive care to those from diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds.

Recognising family carers

Family carers are the backbone of care provision in Ireland. Fine Gael recognises this, which is why it brought in free GP visit cards for carers and published Ireland's first National Carers' Strategy, which we will review and update. We will now ensure that all those in receipt of the Carer's Support Grant are entitled to free GP care.

We will increase social welfare payments to carers by at least €25 over the next five years.

We will develop a pension solution for carers, particularly carers of incapacitated children, that recognises the enormous value of the work carried out by them.

Senior Alerts Scheme

The Senior Alerts Scheme encourages community support for vulnerable older people in our communities. Since 2016, more than 55,000 people have benefited through the provision of alert alarms. Fine Gael will continue to develop and enhance this demand-led scheme and ensure that it adapts to changing demographics and technological advancements.

Supporting volunteers

So much in Ireland happens due to the hard work of volunteers. The State should support volunteers in their work and not put undue constraints on them. We have already started work on a *National Strategy for Volunteering* and will publish and implement it. This strategy will set out a shared vision for the future of Irish volunteering, as well as how the State can help to deal with the challenges and opportunities that exist within volunteering today.

There are also older people who, while not wanting to remain in the

workforce, have significant skills that they wish to contribute to society, and in particular to their local communities. This could be as mentors or serving on the boards of community organisations. Fine Gael will ensure that this is a significant plank of the National Strategy for Volunteering we will deliver.

Men's and women's sheds

Ireland is one of the world leaders in men's sheds, with over 400 now in existence across the country. Fine Gael recognises the invaluable role they play in bringing people together and tackling social isolation. We will ensure men's and women's sheds are properly resourced in the coming years.

Scheme to Support National Organisations

The Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO) funds organisations that demonstrate good governance and deliver services that focus on poverty, social exclusion and equality. Fine Gael will ensure over €18 million is provided over the next three years, to cover the core costs of the 74 successful applicant organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector, up to 2022. We have recently launched a new Community and Voluntary strategy and will ensure its objectives are implemented over the next five years.

Social Innovation Fund Ireland (SIFI)

Fine Gael values the important work carried out by SIFI. We will work with SIFI to broaden its access to funds from across Government departments. We will work with SIFI to review the 50:50 matched funding model and examine how it can have better assurance of medium to long-term funding arrangements from Government. We will consider measures to further support the role of philanthropy in our society.

Social Enterprise

Social enterprises make a valuable contribution to our social and economic programmes through the creation of jobs and the delivery of a range of services in communities across Ireland. Fine Gael will build on Ireland's first ever *National Social Enterprise Policy* for Ireland and provide additional supports to social enterprises to help them to increase their social impact.

Strengthening community development funding

While many towns and villages have bounced back economically from the recession, there are others in need of further targeted support. We will seek to refine and build upon a range of programmes to support communities throughout Ireland, as outlined in the following table:

SICAP (social inclusion and community activation programme)	Investing €190 million between 2018 and 2022. Since 2015, the SICAP has supported 150,000 people and 8,000 groups
CLÁR	CLÁR provides funding for small-scale infrastructural projects in rural areas experiencing the greatest levels of population decline. Since 2016, €32 million in funding has activated 1,400 projects
LEADER	Fine Gael will launch a new LEADER Programme, once negotiations with the European Commission for the post-2020 period have concluded. LEADER has supported 2,500 projects with funding worth €100 million, since 2016
Community Service Programme (CSP)	Since 2016, we have helped 700 projects, such as walking and cycling trails and greenway developments, through this scheme, with funding of €43.6 million. We will continue to fund the programme in coming years
Community Enhancement Programme (CEP)	<p>The new Community Enhancement Programme (CEP), replacing RAPID, is designed to take a more flexible, streamlined and targeted approach to providing funding to communities. In 2019, the CEP helped more than 2,000 communities and community groups in disadvantaged areas.</p> <p>Potential projects that can benefit neighbourhoods and reinvigorate the locality with the backing of local authorities include the renovation of community centres and amenities, improvements to town parks, and CCTV equipment and energy efficiency initiatives.</p>

Tackling disadvantage in urban areas, building on the Dublin north east inner city model

Although certain parts of our cities are thriving, other areas clearly need sustained investment to tackle intergenerational disadvantage. Following the Government's commissioning of the Mulvey Report, several million euro in funding has been allocated for the social and economic regeneration of Dublin's north-east inner city. We will expand this model to other areas experiencing disadvantage over the next five years.

Reducing poverty and social exclusion

Fine Gael has consistently sought to protect the most vulnerable in society throughout the financial crisis. We did this by protecting core weekly social welfare payments and increasing the minimum wage. This is in contrast to Fianna Fáil's approach of cutting basic payments and cutting the minimum wage. We understand that even now, with a strong economy, too many people are in poverty and feel socially excluded. This is compounded by the unacceptable situation of children living in emergency accommodation.

Income inequality is at its second lowest level since records began in 2004 and poverty has been consistently falling for five years. In recent years, 40,000 children have been lifted out of child poverty. Clearly, progress is being made, but we know that we need to do more. In particular, we must be conscious of eliminating discrimination on grounds of gender, age, family status, marital status,

sexual orientation, race, disability, religion or membership of the Traveller and Roma Communities.

We will implement the newly published social inclusion strategy – *A Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025* – which will:

- Make Ireland the most socially inclusive State in the EU
- Reduce consistent poverty
- Reduce the percentage of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion from 25% to 15%
- Increase the employment rate of people with a disability to 25% in 2021 and 33% by 2026

Renewing the Migrant Integration Strategy

The *Migrant Integration Strategy: A Blueprint for the Future*, published in 2017, provides a framework for a wide range of actions to support migrants to participate fully in Irish life. It includes actions to promote intercultural awareness and to combat racism and xenophobia. Under the auspices of the strategy, we have recently established a new committee to tackle racism, which will draft a new national action plan against racism.

Undocumented Minors

We will work with NGOs to identify appropriate legal pathways for young people who find themselves 'undocumented' to regularise their status.

Dealing with 'hate speech'

There is an upward trend in the instances of hate speech in many countries around the world, including Ireland. We have commenced consultation on our incitement to hatred legislation and, if returned to office, we will modernise our laws to ensure that those who seek to encourage and incite others to hate minority groups can be prosecuted.



Simon Harris
Candidate for
Wicklow

Deirdre Duffy
Candidate for
Dublin Central

We will identify international best practice in prosecuting hate crime and legislate to create specific offences, to ensure that those who target victims because of their association with a particular identity characteristic, such as their sexual orientation or ethnicity, can be prosecuted.

An Ireland where everyone is equal

Fine Gael is passionately committed to creating a country in which every person is able to achieve their potential. We want to support women, empower them, remove structural barriers and create opportunities across all areas of life – in the workplace, in education, in the family, on public and corporate boards, in sports and the arts.

We have put a spotlight on gender equality and want a mandate to continue this. We introduced legislation on gender pay; brought in subsidised childcare; and challenged corporate and state bodies on female leadership and diversity.

Citizens' Assembly

We recognise that this is a complex issue and while progress is being made, it is not enough. For this reason, we have established a Citizens' Assembly to advance gender equality and to bring forward proposals that:

- **Eliminate the remaining barriers and challenge social norms and attitudes that facilitate gender discrimination towards girls and boys, women and men;**
- **Seek to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in the workplace, politics and public life**
- **Recognise the importance of**

early-years parental care and seek to facilitate greater work-life balance

- **Examine the social responsibility of care and women and men's co-responsibility for care, especially within the family**
- **Scrutinise the structural pay inequalities that result in women being disproportionately represented in low-pay sectors.**

The Citizens' Assembly is convening in January and will conclude its work this summer.

If you cannot see it, you cannot be it

Transparency is an important aspect in closing the gender pay gap. We have introduced legislation requiring publication of the gender pay gap in large companies. This will require companies to publish information, including the mean and median gap in hourly pay between men and women, in bonus pay and in hourly pay of part-time male and female employees; and the percentage of men and of women who have received bonus pay and benefits in kind. We will 'name and fame' companies that make the best efforts to breakdown gender gaps.

The best decisions are made by men and women working together. Through targeted government initiatives, over 40% of people on state boards are women. However,

the private sector still lags behind. We will use the Government-backed Better Balance for Better Boards initiative to achieve a higher level of female participation at board level in corporate Ireland. Currently, fewer than 20% of the directors in Irish publicly listed companies are women. Our initiative aims to increase this figure to 30% by 2023 and to ensure that there is female representation on boards of all Irish publicly listed companies.

We are concerned about the lack of females in senior positions within the Irish higher education sector. We will implement the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative to fix this problem.

Fine Gael is committed to eliminating the gap between male and female sporting participation over the next decade. We have ensured that this goal is at the centre of the new National Sports Policy.

In 1992, there were just 20 female TDs elected to the Dáil. By 2011, that had increased to just 25. This is why, when Fine Gael came to power in 2011, we – with the Labour Party – legislated to require political parties to have at least 30% of female candidates in general elections. As a result, the number of women elected in the 2016 General Election increased to 35 – the most ever – and an improvement of 40%.

Regina Doherty

Candidate for
Meath East



In the 2019 Local Elections, we brought forward financial rewards to political parties that ran more female candidates. We will significantly increase this incentive in advance of the next local elections in 2024.

Female entrepreneurship

As part of the new *Action Plan for Women in Business*, we will ensure the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) and EI work collaboratively to develop and grow female entrepreneurship in every county, through increased one-to-one engagement and mentoring.

We will expand the Acorns Programme, providing additional funding support and mentoring of female entrepreneurs in the agri-food industry. This funding will support small businesses led by female entrepreneurs, with useful input in the early stages of business development.

Returnships

Fine Gael will make it easier for women to re-enter the workplace with the introduction of 'returnships'. This new initiative will support women, in the main, who have taken time out of work to raise their families or care for loved ones, to re-enter the labour market through new education, training and personal development programmes. We will work in partnership with employers across the country, with a view to matching returners with employers.

Ending the epidemic of domestic and sexual violence

Ireland ratified the *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence* – the Istanbul Convention – on 8 March 2019. In

Government, we have strengthened the legislative and policy approach to tackle these insidious crimes, alongside important measures to protect and support victims. *The Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender based Violence 2016-2021* is being implemented. We will engage closely with stakeholders to develop the next iteration of this important strategy, to ensure that victims are at the heart of the strategy, that it is focused on reduction and prevention, and that it draws extensively from international best practice.

We are taking a range of steps to increase reporting, to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice and that the victims are treated with compassion and care:

- Garda Divisional Protective

Services Units are being established in every Garda division to ensure a consistent and professional approach to the investigation of specialised crime types, including sexual crime, child abuse and domestic abuse

- An expert group is examining the adequacy of the mechanisms available in law and practice relating to protecting vulnerable witnesses in the investigation and prosecution of sexual offences.
- The Central Statistics Office (CSO) is conducting multiannual surveys of the prevalence of sexual violence in Ireland. These surveys will ensure more accurate data to inform policy development. We will ensure that it is repeated every 10 years, with more targeted surveys in the interim period
- We will work to develop an age-appropriate Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme, across the primary, post-primary and third-level sectors, which focuses on developing healthy relationships, the importance of consent, an understanding of sexuality, the role

of social media and the prevention of domestic violence

- Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) help to identify how responses to familicide could be improved in the future. We will introduce DHRs and the other recommendations proposed by the special expert group we have established to examine the issue.
- The newly-established Judicial Council will have an important role to play in ensuring specialist training for judges working in the area of family law.
- Post-release supervision of sex offenders is important. We will update the Sex Offenders Act 2001, to ensure that convicted sex offenders are effectively managed and monitored. We will examine ways to ban sex offenders from using online dating apps.

Women's refuges

Fine Gael supports Tusla's development of a plan for future refuge provision, to ensure that every part of the country has access to refuge or outreach services, where needed.

Reducing harassment and harmful communications

We have begun the legislative process to tackle harassment and harmful communications, such as:

- Revenge pornography
- Taking and distributing intimate images without consent
- Harassment, including all forms of communication, such as online or digital communications or communications about another person.

We are creating additional offences, including:

- A specific offence of stalking
- A new offence to make 'upskirting' clearly illegal and punishable
- The expansion of the existing offence of sending threatening or indecent messages to apply to all threatening, false indecent and obscene messages using any form of online communications.

Fine Gael will ensure that this legislation is enacted as soon as possible.

A first-class education system

Education is at the heart of all of our ambitions as a nation. No other area of Government activity has greater capacity to change our country for the better. It is crucial to all of our ambitions to support a fairer society, and it is crucial to all of our ambitions to deliver a stronger economy. Tackling educational disadvantage, supporting children with special educational needs to achieve their full potential, and investing in leadership and continual professional development, are cornerstones of our plan to have a first-class education system.

Dealing with the costs of education

We know how the summer months can be a source of anxiety for parents, as they face the costs associated with children returning to school. We will work hard over the next five years to reduce those costs.

Free schoolbooks scheme

In September 2020, we are commencing a free schoolbooks scheme pilot, which will benefit thousands of primary school pupils and their parents. We will use the learnings from this to inform the introduction of a free books scheme for all primary schools, commencing in September 2022.

Enacting the Student and Parent Charter Bill

We will enact the Student and Parent Charter Bill, which will require schools to:

- Consult students and parents regularly in relation to school costs and to work to prevent costs from acting as a barrier
- Publish school financial statements that will include information on how any voluntary contributions are used
- Invite feedback from students and parents
- Provide a fair and accessible mechanism for resolving complaints, including through mediation.

School capitation

We recognise the challenges that schools face in meeting their day-to-day running costs. Over the past two years, we have increased capitation in recognition of this. We will continue this and increase the capitation paid to primary and secondary schools by 5% each year, over the next five years.

Hot meals in schools

Research shows that children who benefit from a daily nutritious hot dinner have greater focus and better learning outcomes. So, in

2019 Fine Gael provided free-of-charge hot school meals to more than 7,000 children, as part of a new pilot programme. In 2020, we will continue the roll out of this new initiative by providing hot meals to a further 35,000 children in primary schools. We will continue this level of expansion over the next five-years, focusing in the first instance on providing hot meals to the most vulnerable children in our society.

Investing in teachers and schools

Under Fine Gael, we have achieved the lowest ever pupil-teacher ratio (26:1) in Irish primary schools. We will reduce this further.

Fine Gael will continue to invest in state-of-the-art school facilities and ensure the delivery of new permanent school places, to keep pace with demographic demand. We will continue to open new primary and post-primary schools. Forty-five new schools have already been identified for the period to 2022.

As part of *Project Ireland 2040*, there will be a 70% increase in schools' capital funding, compared to the past decade (€4.9 billion to €8.4 billion). Investment will rise to €1 billion per annum by 2027. This long-term planning and certainty is essential

across all infrastructural investment, but most particularly education.

The focus on building new schools will not be to the detriment of the existing schools. Therefore, we will ensure that the focus on refurbishment of existing schools outlined in *Project Ireland 2040* is delivered. This includes upgrading school labs as part of the modernisation of science curricula, building and modernising PE facilities in primary and secondary schools, commencing deep energy retrofitting of schools built prior to 2008, and investing €420 million in digital facilities over the next decade.

Increasing parental choice in education

We will achieve the target of at least 400 multid denominational and nondenominational schools by 2030, to improve parental choice.

We will continue to uphold the rights of parents to have their children educated in a denominational school. We will protect minority faith schools.

Tackling educational disadvantage

Tackling educational disadvantage and helping people to achieve their full potential is at the heart of our plan. We aim to close the gap in learning and progression among disadvantaged groups.

Our programme to tackle educational disadvantage will include:

- **Developing more tailored supports for DEIS schools, including a toolkit of supports, to enable schools to get the right supports to meet their needs, based on school improvement plans**
- **Providing school leaders with access to better data, so that they can plan for the future**
- **Continuing to develop initiatives to improve reading and Maths**
- **Targeting access programmes to higher and further education**
- **Improving the pathways in our education system for less academic students, particularly in transition**

from school to apprenticeships.

The DEIS programme has been an outstanding success in helping to tackle disadvantage in education. We have commenced a review of the current DEIS scheme, to extend it and to support more schools in disadvantaged areas. Informed by this review, and in consultation with our education partners, we will expand access.

Supporting small schools

We will build on the steps taken in recent years to support small schools by reducing the pupil-teacher ratios in schools with four teachers or fewer. In each of our first two years in office, we will reduce the number of pupils – by one – required by small schools to retain or recruit a teacher.

Reducing school transport costs

We know that the cost of school transport can be significant for parents. Over the next five years we will progressively reduce the charge to parents for the School Transport Scheme until the charge is abolished. We will also amend the scheme's rules to allow a pupil attend their nearest school or next nearest school to offer families more choice.

We will conduct a study in 2020 to examine the feasibility of introducing free public transport for under 18s who are still in education, taking into account the planned significant increase in capacity for public transport to meet current and future demand.

Enabling educational innovation

School excellence support funding will become a central developmental pillar of the policy of the Department of Education and Skills. We shall integrate more closely the advisory service of the Schools' Inspectorate with supports such as continuous professional development (CPD), leadership development and specialist support services (e.g. NEPS, NCSE).

We will develop Technical Support Service Teams, which will sustain the delivery of step-up plans designed by schools and the development of innovation clusters.

The School Excellence Fund (SEF) is an innovation implemented by Fine Gael, which enables schools to collaborate and participate in innovative programmes aimed at improving learning outcomes for young people.

We will increase funding to the Digital, STEM and Creative School Excellence Funds.

Inclusive education

Following on from the recent review of the Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Scheme, a new model has been implemented on a pilot basis since September 2019. The new Inclusion Support Model will be front-loaded and will see the majority of support posts allocated ahead of time, removing the need for assessments and allowing for earlier intervention. Students should have access to a continuum of assistance based on need, not diagnosis.

We will ensure that children get the right assistance at the right time. This new model will help to develop better progression paths from primary to secondary education and will involve a nurse-led approach.

This new model will also ensure that parents do not have to get a formal diagnosis.

As part of this, we will commence a new training programme for SNAs, ensuring that they are trained to the highest standards.

There is increased demand at primary and post-primary level for places in special classes for pupils with additional educational needs. We will work with school patrons, management and staff in providing the supports and training required by schools to provide these school places.

Where there is a difficulty in providing school places, we will continue to use the legislative powers available to

require schools to provide them, but as in the past, this will only be done when other efforts have been exhausted.

We will review the current system of the July Provision (or July Education Programme). We understand how important it is to the families and children who currently benefit from it, so we want to make it even more inclusive.

Committed to teachers' professional development

We are committed to investing to help teachers and leaders to continually improve, by helping them to develop their own self-evaluation plan and design and implement initiatives to deliver measurable improvements.

We will build the capacity in schools to undertake this work and become learning organisations:

- Using data to effectively inform their practices
- Creating the tools and the time for planning
- Fostering a culture of inquiry, knowledge and innovation
- Using the new middle management framework to develop accountable leadership in most important areas of work
- Working with other schools.

We will continue to invest in teachers' CPD to support the phase-in of the new curriculum at a primary level, Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle. We will ensure that the professional development training provided to teachers at primary and secondary level enables a greater understanding of the benefits of digital education resources and supports teachers and schools in the use of digital technology as an educational tool.

Supporting school leadership

Our school leaders play a vital role in our education system and we will continue to support school leaders

at all levels, including those schools that take on additional special classes. We recognise the burdens faced by teaching principals in their dual roles of class teachers and school managers and will continue to support them.

Involving young people in shaping the future of education

We will develop a consultative forum on the future of education, including experts, education partners and most importantly, young people. It will discuss matters including lifelong learning for all, the Irish language, how education can help to stop climate change and other challenges of global citizenship, the impact of social media and technology and the purpose and culture of education in the future.

Developing healthy relationships with an age-appropriate Relationship and Sexuality Education programme

We will work to develop an age-appropriate RSE programme, across the primary, post-primary and third-level sectors, which focuses on developing healthy relationships, the importance of consent, an understanding of sexuality, the role of social media and the prevention of domestic violence.

Modern foreign languages

We introduced *Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026*. We will continue to work at all levels of our education system to encourage a greater take-up of foreign languages and to promote a society where the ability to learn and use at least one foreign language is taken for granted. This will give us a significant competitive advantage after the UK leaves the EU.

Ensuring a fit-for-purpose curriculum at all levels

Primary Curriculum

We will continue the review and the renewal of the primary curriculum, so that each child can grow, learn and flourish within our education system.

Junior Cycle

The new Junior Cycle has undergone a major reform. We will continue to embed it and keep the new system under review, as the first generation of students who were taught under the new cycle sit exams.

We will develop a special core status for History and have it in place for September 2020.

Senior Cycle Review

We will build on the recent reforms at Junior Cycle level, to create an education system designed to prepare future generations with skills that they need in life, such as critical thinking.

Compassion at exam time

In 2019, we introduced a system whereby students sitting the Leaving Certificate who suffered the loss of a close family member could postpone some exams. We will extend this to other Leaving Certificate students, in particular those suffering a serious illness.

Sustainable funding for our third-level institutions

Fine Gael has significantly increased investment in higher education, but we know more is needed. The provision of additional resources is dependent on economic growth and steady management of the public finances. Only Fine Gael is capable of delivering this.

In July 2016, the Expert Group on the Future Funding of Higher Education published its report, *Investing in National Ambition: A Strategy for Funding Higher Education*. We sought, through the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills, to develop a cross-party consensus. This was not possible.

Informed by research that we have commissioned with the European Commission, we are committed to establishing a long-term funding model for higher and further education in Ireland.

This long-term funding model will have regard to the following principles:

- **No increase in the registration fees**
- **Continuing the increases in public funding**
- **Ensuring that the increased resources will deliver more student places, good student experiences and jobs-ready graduates prepared for the workplace of the next decade and beyond.**

This long-term funding model will build upon the significant increase in investment that has occurred over the past few years. Between 2016 and 2020, planned investment in higher education has increased by 25% to €1.88 billion. This is in addition to the significant capital allocations made to third-level education contained within *Project Ireland 2040*. Over the next four years, more than €500 million will be spent on upgrading and adding facilities on campuses all over the country.

We have already earmarked monies from the National Training Fund for investment in higher education. We will allocate more of this surplus to higher and further education if prudent to do so. We will also make more Exchequer funds available.

Technological Universities (TUs), the most radical reconfiguration of Irish higher-level education in generations

The creation of Technological Universities (TUs) is the most radical reconfiguration of the higher education landscape in generations and was established by Fine Gael in Government.

TUs will have a major impact upon their regions. They will deliver significant advantages to national

strategic priorities in relation to higher education access, research-informed teaching and learning excellence, as well supporting enterprise and regional development.

Technological University Dublin (TUD) opened its doors on 01 January 2019, amalgamating DIT, IT Blanchardstown and IT Tallaght.

Four consortia have formed and are in the process of preparing or refining applications to achieve the status of a TU. They are:

- **Munster TU: an amalgam of Cork Institute of Technology (IT) and IT Tralee**
- **TU of the South East of Ireland: an amalgam of IT Carlow and Waterford IT**
- **Connacht Ulster Alliance: an amalgam of Galway Mayo IT, IT Sligo and Letterkenny IT**
- **ALTU: an amalgam of Athlone IT and Limerick IT.**

We have put in place a rigorous statutory process for these consortia to meet, in order to attain TU status.

We will continue working closely with them to get these new TUs up and running and have provided €90 million to support these processes. *Project Ireland 2040* commits resources to the infrastructural development of TUs, with a particular urgency being attached to the establishment of the TU of the South East of Ireland.

Making higher education accessible to all

Fine Gael will expand and extend the *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education*.

The plan will ensure that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels reflects the diversity and social mix of Ireland's population.

An independent review of the plan has found it is successful in meeting and exceeding its goals for most target groups, although further work is required with some, including members of the Traveller Community.

We will work to improve access to higher education for members of the Traveller Community, along with other groups that are underrepresented.

Fine Gael recognises that people with intellectual disabilities are underrepresented in higher education. More needs to be done to support the transition from secondary education into higher education and employment.

Ten higher education institutions offer special options for students with intellectual disabilities. These programmes are enriching the lives and prospects of the students and their families.

If returned to office, we will work with the Inclusive National Higher Education Forum to build on the already constructive engagement the forum has begun with the Department of Education and Skills, and Solas.

Cost of student accommodation

Fine Gael understands the difficulty faced by students in sourcing suitable accommodation, and that they are suffering due to the housing crisis. Fundamentally, the problem lies with the lack of supply which is being addressed.

Fine Gael has increased the number of new student bed spaces available to more than 8,000 since July 2016 when *Rebuilding Ireland* was launched and just over 30,000 student bed spaces existed. We have also provided funding to the USI for a Student Housing Officer to assist students in finding appropriate accommodation. We have also funded a web-based platform to match property owners and homeowners with students looking to rent a room.

In addition, student accommodation is now covered by Rent Pressure Zone legislation which provides basic protections for those in student accommodation. This includes a cap on annual rent increases of no more than 4%. These provisions came into law last summer.



Pa O'Driscoll

Candidate for
Cork East

Skills: a national priority

There is a war for talent. Ireland must be the most adept at providing the talent, in order to deliver new technologies to support innovation and to develop entrepreneurship.

- Ireland must equip employers and workers to anticipate and adapt to a changed workplace and ensure that those who might be displaced are upskilled
- The National Skills Council and the nine regional skills fora will drive Ireland's ambition to be a world leader in anticipating and responding to skills needs
- We will expand Springboard throughout further and higher education, designed to offer upskilling in areas of skills shortage to those who want to upskill, to those who are re-entering the workforce or to those who have been made redundant.

Human Capital Initiative (HCI)

Fine Gael established the Human Capital Initiative (HCI) – a €300 million programme from 2020 to 2024 – as a strategic response to meeting the skills needs of the economy.

The sum of €60 million will be spent in each of its five years on measures to respond to future world of work challenges, upskilling, reskilling and to mitigate Brexit risk. This will be a transformative development for the third-level sector and is a key element in preparing our economy and our workforce for these changes.

A focus on lifelong learning

From leaving education to retirement, most people will spend more than 40 years in the world of work. They are likely to have a wide variety of careers and employers, and even if they stay confined to one sector or employer, will see the nature of their work change significantly. To this end, we will ingrain a culture of lifelong learning within the workforce. We will focus on increasing the lifelong learning rate from 9% currently to 18% by 2025. We will examine the feasibility of using the National Training Fund to help workers fund lifelong learning, drawing on the example of other countries, such as France.

Committed to expanding further education

Fine Gael have a plan to grow apprenticeships and traineeships to

give an exciting career path for many young people. We want apprentices and trainees to acquire applied, technical skills within a variety of sectors, and provide a very practical grounding which will stand to them as they move through their career and take advantage of promotional opportunities.

We will publish an updated Apprenticeship Action Plan to grow the number of apprenticeships between now and 2025, increasing the total number of new annual registrations to 10,000 per annum. We will target 120 apprenticeship and traineeship programmes. New programmes opened already include auctioneering, ICT, hospitality, logistics and biopharma.

We must develop a stronger pipeline of apprenticeships and traineeships to support a growing economy and to provide career paths for people with different interests and abilities.

We will improve the pathways between second level and apprenticeship and ensure that apprenticeship is a good alternative to third level. Higher education institutions alone will supply a portion of our skills needs, but there is a need for stronger alternative routes and alternative sources of the different types of skills that a growing economy requires.

We know that more needs to be done to attract underrepresented groups, in particular women. We will extend the bursary scheme to employers to take on female apprenticeships, in

certain craft areas, to a wider range of programmes..

Prioritising the wellbeing of third-level students

The wellbeing of students is a top priority. In Government, we have led and funded initiatives around student care and welfare on campus, dealing with consent, wellbeing, mental health and drug, alcohol and substance abuse. We will continue to prioritise these programmes, if returned to office.

The Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) grant

We know that meeting the costs of third-level education can be hard for students and their families. We recognise the challenges families face and will increase by 5% the income threshold for the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) grant. We will also keep both the grant level and the income eligibility thresholds under regular review.

Expanding the horizons of students and our third-level institutions

We will work with all our third-level institutions so that they can develop partnerships throughout the EU to massively increase our exposure to Horizon 2020 funding and to increase Irish participation in Erasmus+ programmes, particularly in terms of sending and receiving third-level students on academic exchanges.

Preparing for the jobs of tomorrow

In 2011, Ireland was a broken country. The economy was in tatters and hundreds of thousands of men and women were out of work. Since then, though, an extra 4,250 people have joined the workforce every month. This only happened because of the hard work of the Irish people and the right mix of policies. However, we cannot be complacent about this progress. We cannot take it for granted.

Backing Irish business

Ireland is internationally regarded as one of the best locations in the world for FDI. In the years ahead, we will continue that work and ensure that Ireland remains one of the best places in the world for FDI. We will also work to diversify the source of that investment.

However, we must now establish the same reputation for Ireland as the home of innovative, competitive and increasingly export-oriented small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Our plan for Irish enterprise is about helping businesses to start, grow and expand. This means

Our jobs plan is based on delivering sustainable, enterprise-based jobs growth, and will deal head-on with the threats our economy is facing. Beyond the immediate threat of Brexit, there are three major long-term priorities we must work on now to protect jobs and the economy into the future. We must:

1. Improve the performance and productivity of our domestic SMEs, with a particular focus on export-oriented firms.
2. Give a sustained focus to improving the quality of jobs and work-life balance. We need to ensure that the workplace is as open and responsive to the needs of workers as possible, if we are to help people enjoy proper work-life balance, remain competitive, win the war for talent and increase the participation rate in our workforce
3. Be prepared for the future.

Based on implementing our plan for jobs and the economy, we are targeting 200,000 additional new jobs by 2025.

increasing the number of start-ups with better survival rates, creating more Irish-owned companies of scale, developing businesses' exports to international markets, encouraging research and innovation in Irish companies, and prioritising measures to support improvements in the productivity of our SMEs.

New national SME and entrepreneurship strategy

The OECD has just completed a full review of Ireland's SME and Entrepreneurship policy. We will use this work to form the basis for a comprehensive new national SME

and Entrepreneurship strategy. We will also consider how the strategy can be best implemented by a dedicated oversight mechanism.

Over the next five years we will:

- Increase the number of SMEs exporting by 50%
- Improve the survival of high-growth start-ups by one-fifth
- Scale our micro-enterprises and ensure a seamless transition from LEO to EI
- Take the necessary steps to improve the productivity of our SMEs
- Accelerate market diversification,



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so that 75% of our indigenous exports are to non-UK markets by 2025

- Increase innovation and R&D spend and improve the quality of that spend by SMEs
- Increase the sales of EI clients from €23billion to €30billion.

A major issue that we will focus upon is improving the management skills within Irish SMEs. We will develop an action plan for financial education for SMEs and entrepreneurs, which will bring a coordinated and focused approach to the works of agencies such as Skillsnet and EI.

We will also develop a regional innovation and technology clustering programme to link SMEs and Institutes of Technology (IoTs).

Fine Gael will continue to embed a culture of entrepreneurship that encourages people's curiosity and innovation from an early age. We will develop a cohesive, cross-government strategy for entrepreneurship education. This will involve a greater focus on ICT skills and quality science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education as part of the primary curriculum. We will enable an educational experience that nurtures people's curiosity, problem-solving and creativity from a young age, including the integration of coding and computational thinking throughout the curriculum.

Insurance reform

This has been an issue we have made progress on but not enough. Fine Gael understands the pressure on small businesses, crèches, and restaurants that is being created by insurance premiums.

We have a minister focussed virtually exclusively on this. We have enacted several pieces of legislation to reform the Irish insurance market, including to increase transparency on

claims and premiums, to strengthen the power of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB) around compliance with its procedures and to increase consumer rights.

The major reform of An Garda Síochána now underway means that every division in the country will soon have expertise in economic crime, including insurance fraud, with the expert Garda National Economic Crime Bureau overseeing this vital work. New measures also include a new special categorisation on the Garda Pulse system and a new Garda divisional approach to tackling fraud.

We have established a new Judicial Council, which is now tasked with drawing up personal injury award guidelines. The Personal Injuries Commission have said that Judicial Guidelines should lead to greatly increased levels of consistency in awards, increase the frequency of early resolution of claims, reduce costs and generally provide a much better informed process.

But we need to do more. We want to ensure any award is proportionate to the injury, so minor injuries only ever get minor awards.

It will be important to balance individual rights of people who have been genuinely injured through negligence, the independence of the judiciary, and the need to keep insurers active and competitive in the Irish market, including attracting new foreign players into the market.

Fine Gael is committed to cutting the cost of insurance. We will:

- extend the transparency of the claims database to cover public/ employer liability insurance
- create, from existing resources, an office within Government tasked with encouraging the entry of international insurers into the Irish market
- make perjury a statutory offence

and easier to prosecute, to ensure that false or misleading evidence in insurance cases is discouraged

- introduce a new deterrent to prevent individuals with a history of bringing fraudulent claims from bringing new claims without the prior approval of the High Court, to deal with serial claimants.
- Consider changes to the Occupiers Liability Act and the Civil Liability Act, to strengthen waivers and notices to increase protections for consumers, businesses, sporting clubs and community groups.

We will demand from the insurance industry that they will commit to reductions as reforms are enacted.

If these measures do not result in significant reductions, Fine Gael will then consider bringing forward a new constitutional amendment to allow the Oireachtas to set down guidelines on premiums.

A responsive tax regime

A responsive tax regime can act as a driver of domestic entrepreneurial activity. In Budget 2020, we introduced a suite of measures targeted at supporting our SME sector. We will build on these measures by providing a small business tax package averaging €20 million in each of the next five budgets. We recently commissioned an external review of the Capital Gains Tax Revised Entrepreneur Relief and will consider what changes could be made to the relief to better support entrepreneurs. We will review CGT rates in each Budget over the next five years, in particular with the objective of supporting innovation-driven enterprises.

Fine Gael has implemented the Key Employee Engagement Programme (KEEP) to help SMEs to reward and retain their employees – something that is all the more important as we reach full employment. We

have reformed the scheme as part of Budget 2020, so that more companies and employees are eligible to avail of it. In addition, we have made improvements to the Employment and Investment Incentive (EII) Scheme, to make it more effective and enhanced the R&D Tax Credit, with a particular focus on supporting claims to the credit by smaller companies.

We want to encourage greater take up of the R&D Tax Credit by small domestic companies. We will simplify the administrative process for applications to make it more accessible. This will include a pre-approval procedure and reduced record-keeping requirements.

We will continue to work closely with stakeholders and modernise these schemes, as necessary, in the future. We will allocate an additional €20 million in each budget to fund a package of supports for small companies.

Linkages with multinationals

We will continue to place an emphasis on developing linkages between multinational firms and our SMEs, so that SMEs can gain access to best practice and see and learn from world-class innovation. In order to achieve this, we will introduce specific incentives for large firms and multinationals to undertake R&D in partnerships with SMEs. An example of this is already in place with the €500 million Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund, where collaboration with an SME is a key requirement of the scheme.

Microfinance

Recognising the importance of access to credit for our SMEs and Start-Ups, we will increase the current maximum loan available from Microfinance Ireland (MFI) from €25,000 to €50,000.

We will also carry out a comprehensive review of the Credit Guarantee Scheme (CGS). This will take account of best practice internationally, particularly the Flemish model, to ensure that the CGS meets the needs of our SMEs.

Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs)

Fine Gael is committed to supporting our small, local, indigenous businesses. We will expand the role of the LEOs, so they can go further in supporting local job creation. At present, the LEOs can only provide direct grant support to businesses with 10 employees or fewer, while EI usually targets larger companies that have exporting potential. This means that a cohort of businesses with more than 10 employees operating in the domestic market is currently not eligible for support. We will change this.

Enterprise Ireland (EI)

There are more than 217,000 people employed in EI-supported companies right across the country. Fine Gael will ensure that Irish firms are globally competitive. To do this, we have already opened new EI offices and put more boots on the ground abroad, as we seek to find new markets for Irish companies. We will set out a series of ambitious targets for EI over the next five years, including:

- Increasing by 50% the number of SMEs exporting
- Doubling the number of firms supported by EI's Exporter Development Department
- Increasing export sales by EI clients from €23 billion to €30 billion.

We recognise the time and resources required for businesses to fill out paperwork. We will therefore streamline the process for

companies when applying for LEO or EI support and set clear deadlines for grant application turnarounds.

A sustainable and productive construction sector

While there are some highly innovative firms working in the construction sector, their practices and approach are not mainstreamed across the sector. Compared to other sectors of the Irish economy and other EU countries, productivity in this sector is too low. This is adding costs to projects, meaning less work for our construction companies.

Through the Construction Sector Group, we will develop a roadmap for the sector, focused on improving the productivity of the sector, exploiting the advantages of technologies like Building Information Modelling (BIM) and making sure that it is a source of good quality, long-term employment.

Improving the performance of our haulage and logistics sector

Our haulage and logistics sector is essential to so much economic activity. We will publish and implement a 10-year strategy for the sector, focused on improving efficiencies, standards, and helping the sector move to a low-carbon future.

Supporting local businesses to get online

Fine Gael wants to ensure that local businesses are able to avail of the many benefits from having an online presence. The Trading Online Voucher Scheme is available through LEOs and offers grant aid of up to €2,500 to help businesses to establish an online presence. Given the ever-increasing move online,

we recognise that more needs to be done. This is why we introduced a pilot competitive Online Retail Scheme for eligible SMEs in the retail sector, with grant aid of up to €25,000 available for successful SMEs. The new scheme has helped 40 retailers across Ireland to strengthen their online trading capabilities, in order to compete internationally. We will formally establish this scheme to support our retail sector.

Commercial rates

Fine Gael understands that commercial rates can pose big difficulties for some businesses. We want the system to be as straightforward, transparent and as responsive as possible. We are conscious that revaluations can present sudden changes in business rates bills, so we will examine if such changes can be introduced on a phased basis. We will closely monitor the recent Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act, which sought to modernise the rates system, and which included provision for local authorities to introduce rates alleviation schemes to support specific national and local authority policy objectives. We will examine further ways to streamline the system and to ensure that appeals against commercial rates are processed quickly.

Better balance in life and work

As we reach full employment, we must focus on productive, quality jobs in all parts of Ireland. To retain or attract highly qualified or specialised talent into the future, workplaces will have to demonstrate flexibility, support lifelong learning and be more family friendly. A skilled employee in a tight labour market has greater employment choices, and will choose to work in an environment that does not compete with personal and family time.

Enabling flexible working

We will work with employees and employers to bring in flexible working guidance across the workforce. Flexible working encompasses a wide range of practices including part-time working, remote working, compressed hours, working from home and job sharing. Companies would benefit from the ability to access a wider talent pool and a more motivated and productive labour force, as well as from less absenteeism. Providing parents and carers with greater choice in organising their work and caring responsibilities also reduces the risk that they will leave the labour market altogether.

Increasing female employment results in higher earnings and contributes to career progression that positively impact on families' economic prosperity, social inclusion and health. A labour market that offers flexible working solutions can result in a win-win-win for employers, workers and society. Fine Gael is pursuing this initiative, as it will assist with retention of talent and family commitments.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) as an enabler of remote working

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) will enable new ways of working and will exploit the huge benefits that remote working offers to employers, employees and society more generally.

For workers, this can mean better work-life balance, more affordable housing and less time commuting.

For companies, this can provide access to a wider talent pool, reduce spending on office space, and make for a happier and more productive workforce.

More generally, remote working will ease congestion, support regional

development by allowing people to remain in their own locality, increase labour force participation, and contribute to tackling climate change.

We will publish the first ever national guidance and strategy on remote working before the end of 2020.

Many major FDI companies already offer remote working as an option to their employees. We want to encourage this further. We will mandate the IDA to have a specific focus on remote working as part of their new five-year strategy, highlighting the new opportunities associated with the roll-out of the NBP.

While some people are happy to work from their own homes, others can find it isolating and prefer to work from an office environment, where they can interact with others as part of their working week. We want to support this type of co-working environment, which can also have significant benefits in terms of fostering collaboration, innovation and creativity. Fine Gael will continue to work to support the development of such hubs across Ireland.

Better work-life balance with the right to disconnect

The increasing digitalisation of the workforce, while presenting huge opportunities, can also lead to workplace stress due to an 'always on' culture. Fine Gael believes everybody has a right to 'switch off', once their working day is over.

While we recognise that situations can arise where workers may occasionally need to be available to take a call or send an email after hours, we believe this should be the exception rather than the norm.

We will bring forward proposals for a right to disconnect in 2020.

Being prepared for the future of work

Future Jobs Ireland - Preparing Now for Tomorrow's Economy (March 2019) places a strong focus on increasing productivity and boosting participation rates, so that we can take advantage of technological changes and embed them into all parts of our economy. We have entered a period of major technological and societal change. Technological changes, most notably robotics, AI and digitalisation are changing the very nature of work and, while presenting major opportunities, will undoubtedly impact on employment.

In tandem with this major change, we will need to move to a low-carbon economic model as a matter of urgency.

We know these changes are taking place and will accelerate in the coming years. We must act decisively now, to ensure that we are prepared as a country, as enterprises and as individuals for those changes, and adapt early to our greatest benefit.

Leading the next phase of disruptive technology

Fine Gael will ensure that Ireland is a global leader in research and innovation and that it leads rather than follows in this technological revolution. We introduced the new €500 million *Project Ireland 2040* Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund (DTIF). This is one of the first funds of its kind globally and will drive collaboration between Ireland's world-class research base and industry in the development and adoption of ground-breaking new technologies.

So far, €70 million of funding from *Project Ireland 2040* has been awarded to 27 different consortiums, bringing together enterprise, researchers and academic institutions to develop

pioneering technologies across the health, food, ICT and manufacturing sectors in all parts of Ireland.

We will ensure that there is at least one round of funding granted under the *Project Ireland 2040* DTIF each year, over the next five years, and that all of the €500 million fund is allocated by 2025.

Backing Science Foundation Ireland (SFI)

Fine Gael wants Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) to play a leading role, as it positions Ireland's economy for the future. By continuing to invest in science and research, Ireland can become a leader in bringing about positive societal change.

SFI is central to government policy across a range of areas, such as climate and sustainability, health innovation and new technologies for the agriculture sector.

As part of *Global Ireland*, we will greatly increase SFI's presence overseas, along with Tourism Ireland, Bord Bia and other agencies, and include it as a pillar of all trade and investment missions, along with EI and the IDA. As part of *Project Ireland 2040*, We are committed to increasing the number of SFI Research Centres to 20. In doing so, we will for the first time seek to establish a cross-border research centre, to bring together universities and industry north and south.

Enabling the opportunities for Ireland in high-potential sectors with Top Teams

Top Teams will be created where there is a multi-organisational response needed to accelerate growth and remove barriers to development. They will be time-limited and will have a sector-wide focus, thereby creating links between

multinationals and SMEs. Top Teams will examine how Government, the public sector and enterprise can exploit the opportunities presented by AI, GovTech and offshore renewables. We will expand the Top Teams to other sectors in the future, as opportunities present themselves.

Fine Gael recognises the fantastic work carried out by the Design & Crafts Council of Ireland, in terms of supporting and promoting the country's unique designers and makers. We have committed to establishing a National Design Centre under *Project Ireland 2040*, in order to drive competitiveness and innovation in the design sector.

Strategies for advanced manufacturing and artificial intelligence (AI)

Manufacturing is a central pillar of our economy: 227,000 people are employed in the sector, with 85% of the jobs outside located Dublin. We will deliver on Ireland's *Industry 4.0 Strategy 2020-2025*, focused on advanced manufacturing and encouraging firms to engage in advanced technologies such as cloud computing, internet of things, high performance computing, collaborative robotics and 3D printing.

We will finalise a strategy on AI shortly, setting out the opportunities and challenges faced by Ireland in this area, and how we will develop expertise and create competitive advantage.

Developing digital literacy in the next generation

In order to be prepared for this new world of work, digital literacy among young people is essential. To that end, we will progress the development of the new primary school Maths curriculum to include computational, flexible and creative thinking skills.

Not letting any adult fall behind in terms of literacy, numeracy and digital skills

We also know that we cannot let adults fall behind in terms of literacy, numeracy and digital skills. Too many adults today are locked out of parts of normal daily life, because they did not have the chance to get these skills in the first place. We have seen the impact that changes in employment opportunities in traditional industries can have in regions, and the vital importance of core literacy and numeracy skills in opening up new employment opportunities for people. Therefore, we will publish a new 10-year governmental strategy on this within the first year, if we are returned to office, and place the support for adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills at the centre of our education policy.

Protecting consumers

We have enacted long-awaited consumer protection legislation to ensure that gift vouchers have a minimum expiry date of at least five years. We will also enact the legislation that will ban ticket touting.

We will draft a new Consumer Rights Bill, which will update and strengthen Irish consumer law, in line with best international practice. This is a major piece of work and will involve significant public consultation, so that it is informed by the real experiences of consumers.

As part of this we will:

- **Strengthen consumer rights for consumers who download or stream digital content**
- **Give a right of repair or refund to consumers for substandard services for the first time**
- **Introduce a standard 30-day period during which consumers may return faulty goods and get a full refund**
- **Update the list of contract terms that are presumed to be unfair, which has not been updated since the mid-2000s.**

Transparency in advertising, sponsorships and partnerships

We will move away from the current self-regulating regime for advertising and require the Competition and

Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) to take a more active enforcement role. We will direct the CCPC to focus on ensuring that there is full disclosure in relation to partnerships, sponsorships and other advertising relationships between media influencers and brands. While this is captured, to an extent, by existing legislation there has been limited enforcement in this area. Given the ever-increasing importance of such influencers in consumer decisions, it is important to set out the obligations and consequences clearly.

We will enable regulatory bodies such as the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), the Central Bank and the CCPC to have greater use of administrative penalties to sanction rogue operators, as is the norm in other EU Member States.

We will modernise ComReg's legislative underpinning and give it greater powers of enforcement, with a particular focus on improving competition, innovation and customer service within the communications sector.

Responsible management of the public finances

We have balanced the books and moved to a healthy surplus of over €2 billion in 2019. We are targeting a budgetary surplus of 1% by 2021, improving incrementally to 1.3% by 2025.

This buffer is essential, as we are facing increasingly uncertain times. Britain will leave the EU, and while we will seek to negotiate the best possible future relationship deal for Ireland, it will not be as good as common EU membership.

In addition to this, as a small, open economy, we are especially vulnerable to international protectionism, which is on the rise.

International corporate tax reform is approaching and Ireland will be at the frontline of any changes.

We will continue to manage the public finances responsibly, using budgetary policy to smooth the economic cycle and ensuring that we do not return to the dark days of the past.

Our responsible approach can be best seen in how we dealt with the last budget, Budget 2020. Given the possible threat of a no-deal Brexit, we ensured that there was a responsible and prudent budget. This approach to a pre-election budget demonstrates the stark contrast between Fine Gael's handling of your money in

Government and that of Fianna Fáil, whose pre-election 'give-away' budgets were never in the national interest and ultimately damaged the country.

Debt and surplus targets

We will also target reductions in overall government debt levels. We will reduce the debt-to-GNI* ratio to around 85%, by 2025, as an interim step towards a ratio of 60% by the end of the decade.

Using windfall assets to pay down national debt

We will use any windfall gains such as the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) surplus, the final resolution of the liquidation of the Irish Bank Resolution Corporation (IBRC) or the sale of the state shareholdings in the banks, to pay down our national debt. This will reduce interest payments, and thereby free up money for sustainable increases in spending on health, schools, policing and other essential public services.

Winding down of NAMA

We will work with NAMA over the coming years to achieve the best possible return to the taxpayer from its portfolio. NAMA will pay €2 billion of its surplus to the Exchequer in 2020 and

a further €2 billion in 2021, subject to current market conditions prevailing.

Banking Sector

Stronger rules and regulation of our banking sector will help prevent a repeat of the banking crisis of a decade ago. However, rules and regulations by themselves will not be enough. We need a change of culture within our banking sector at the highest levels. Incidents like the tracker mortgage scandal suggest that our banking culture has not changed sufficiently yet. We welcome the establishment of the Irish Banking Culture Board. We will examine the effectiveness of this initiative over the next year and will bring forward further regulatory changes if that initiative is not demonstrating effectiveness.

State shareholdings in the banks

Fine Gael does not believe that there is a long-term case for the State to remain as a shareholder in the Irish banking sector. To this end, we will seek to sell these shareholdings in a measured fashion, to maximise the return to the taxpayer.

Central Bank independence

We value and respect the independence of the Central Bank of

Paschal Donohoe

Candidate for Dublin
Central



**Jennifer Carroll
MacNeill**
Candidate for
Dún Laoghaire



Ireland. We will oppose any attempts to undermine that independence.

Credit Unions

Fine Gael recognises the vital role played by credit unions in communities throughout Ireland. Conscious of the impact of enhanced regulation and levies in recent years, this year the Government has reduced the Credit Institutions Resolution Fund Levy by 44% when compared to 2019. We have also scrapped credit unions' 25c transaction charge associated with the "It Makes Sense" Loan Scheme from January 2020. This should improve take up of the scheme among credit unions and help keep more people away from moneylenders.

Fine Gael believes the credit union sector could play an important role in the funding of social housing. The Government has helped fund research in this area and we will ensure the Government provides as much guidance as possible to help encourage Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) and potential investors to agree a workable and mutually acceptable approach.

Capital Acquisitions (Inheritance) Tax

We will keep the existing threshold of €335,000 exempt from CAT when it relates to an inheritance to a son or a daughter (Group A). For the first €250,000 above that threshold we will introduce a new lower rate of 20%. Anything above €585,000 will remain taxed at 33%. This new measure will be introduced on a phased basis of €50,000 in each year.

Corporation Tax

Fine Gael is committed to the 12.5% Corporation Tax rate and the retention of national sovereignty over taxation policy.

We will continue to engage constructively on international tax reform, while critically analysing proposals that may not be in Ireland's long term interests. Demonstrating this, we brought forward the *Roadmap on Corporation Tax Reform* and are committed to its implementation.

Fine Gael recognises that taxation policy needs to catch up with a changing digital economy. This work is best done through the OECD. Fine Gael will not support unilateral measures that could risk trade and undermine the competitiveness of exporting EU Member States.

We are committed to increasing our budgetary surplus to deal with the predicted decline in corporate tax revenue from 2022 onwards.

The European Union (EU's) budget

We believe that the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) (the EU's seven-year budget) must deliver an ambitious strategic agenda for Europe. Ireland wants to play a positive role in shaping Europe's future, including the big challenges like climate change and migration, while securing the future of key programmes such as CAP, Horizon, Erasmus and Interreg. We are willing to contribute more to the MFF, provided that we can achieve the right budget for Europe and Ireland.

Delivering public projects and ensuring value for money

Project Ireland 2040 has seen a considerable increase in capital expenditure over the past two years. We will reform how public infrastructure projects are delivered in the years ahead, in order to ensure value for money for the taxpayer. These reforms are focused on improved appraisal, cost estimation and management of projects and

better reflect the realities of project delivery, ensuring full consideration of the costs, risks and potential benefits of each investment. These changes will:

- Provide a strong challenge culture so that the merits, costs and benefits of project are constantly interrogated
- Provide much greater clarity on governance and roles and responsibilities in major projects
- Deliver greater value for money
- Help public bodies to forecast costs better and to strengthen risk identification and management.

Procurement reform to deliver better value for money, rather than the cheapest price

Public sector procurement is a major bone of contention, and rightly so. Still too many contract awards are driven purely by securing the cheapest price, while contract price inflation is enabled by poorly designed and monitored tender processes.

We will reform the Capital Works Management Framework to improve the current approach to procurement under *Project Ireland 2040*. We will enhance work requirements to focus tenderers on accurately pricing the project: risks associated with the project will be better defined and those best positioned will be tasked with managing the identified risk.

We will establish the Commercial Skills Academy on a permanent basis, to provide training for public servants on all matters related to procurement.



Ensuring that every part of Ireland prospers through *Project Ireland 2040*

For the first time in Ireland's history, we have a long-term plan for our country's future development. This plan is *Project Ireland 2040*. It is a spatial plan, backed up with an infrastructural investment programme. As we look forward to a population that is expected to grow by 1 million by 2040, this is essential.

Without proper planning and the right policies, this population growth will continue the ongoing shift in population and jobs towards Dublin and the neighbouring counties. This is in nobody's interest.

Fine Gael has a plan

Two years ago, we started implementing our plan, *Project Ireland 2040*. Rather than standing by passively like previous governments, we are using this opportunity to ensure sustainable growth over the next 20 years for every corner of Ireland.

We are avoiding repeating the mistakes of Fianna Fail's *National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020*, which

promised something to everyone and ended up doing nothing for anyone. This is because *Project Ireland 2040* is aligned with the *National Planning Framework*, which sets out how we are planning for this population growth.

Balanced growth across Ireland

Project Ireland 2040 will ensure that, over the next 20 years, there will be a much better and more even balance of growth across Ireland. All regions will grow at broadly comparable rates. We will develop the cities of Cork, Waterford, Limerick and Galway as viable alternatives to Dublin. Under *Project Ireland 2040*, there is scope for the growth of all towns in Ireland, in particular the key regional towns of Athlone in the Midlands, Sligo in the North-West, as well as the cross-border networks of Letterkenny-Derry and Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry.

We have a strategy to make Cork a real counterbalance to Dublin. We are strongly supportive of the Cork Event Centre and will help fund its construction, subject to full planning

permission being received. This major investment will have a significant impact on jobs and dramatically change the night time culture of the city.

To ensure the vitality of our rural areas, a significant proportion of growth will be targeted at building up the fabric of smaller towns, villages and rural areas, with much of this happening by redeveloping derelict and underutilised lands inside small towns and villages.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund

The Project Ireland 2040 Urban Regeneration and Development Fund is helping to rejuvenate significant but underused areas in Ireland's five cities and large towns. It is enabling a greater proportion of residential and mixed-use development to be delivered within the existing built-up footprints of our cities and towns. We have ensured that €58 million is available to meet the funding requirements of approved projects in 2019 and this fund has an allocation



Eoghan Murphy

Candidate for
Dublin Bay South

of €2 billion to 2027. We are fully committed to the vital North Quays project in Waterford. We will work to finalise quickly the outstanding details in relation to the scheme so that the necessary funding can be provided.

Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

The Project Ireland 2040 Rural Regeneration and Development Fund is helping drive job creation in rural areas, reversing the depopulation of rural communities and enabling improvements in our towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000. The sum of €52 million has been made available to support projects in 2019 and we have committed €1 billion to the fund over 10 years.

Proper and appropriate planning

Unlike the developer-led Fianna Fáil housing policy of the 2000s, *Project Ireland 2040* is a plan-led development, which ensures that we build housing where there are the schools, transport links and amenities that allow communities to thrive. Fine Gael is committed to combatting urban sprawl by insisting on the development of high-quality homes at appropriate densities, where residents have access to the amenities and services required for modern living.

Jobs growth across Ireland

The main contributor to where people live is the availability of employment. Without a plan for regional jobs, balanced development is not possible. Fine Gael was responsible for the first coherent response to the enterprise needs of the regions with the Regional Action Plans for Jobs. Employment is now expanding and there are 146,000 more people in employment compared to when Leo Varadkar became Taoiseach.

Regional Action Plans for jobs achieve co-ordination among the national

enterprise agencies and the regional stakeholders. We will continue this approach. We will also place balanced regional development and alignment with *Project Ireland 2040* at the heart of the IDA's future strategy for 2020-2025.

The role of the public sector and state enterprises in balanced regional development

We will ensure that all new state agencies and enterprises established are ideally headquartered outside of Dublin in one of the population centres targeted for major growth.

We will also require that where new offices or units of the existing public service are being proposed in the Greater Dublin Area, a business case be undertaken to establish if they can be located outside the capital and surrounding counties.

High-speed broadband access for every home, business and farm across Ireland

Fine Gael has taken the decision to roll out the NBP through National Broadband Ireland. It means that we will be one of the first countries in the world to ensure that every home, business and farm has access to high-speed broadband. The number of households with access to high-speed broadband has increased from 52% in 2016 to 77% in 2019. We will increase this to 100%.

This is the largest and most significant investment ever in rural Ireland. It will be as revolutionary in the 21st century as rural electrification was for the 20th century.

No other political party backed this decision. In order to score political points, they were happy for rural Ireland to wait.

This decision is central to delivering the balanced regional development that is at the heart of *Project Ireland 2040*. It will enable flexible and remote

working, smart health with online GP and nursing services and medical monitoring, cloud-based services and connected devices, smart farming opportunities, digital learning and reliable electronic payments and bookings for people and businesses in every part of the country.

The right balance between public transport and road transport investment

In relation to new transport infrastructure projects, *Project Ireland 2040* sets out a ratio of 2:1 in favour of public transport to road transport. We will maintain that ratio into the future, but still ensure there is a strong programme of investment in new roads to improve regional connectivity (e.g., bypasses of congested towns). We will ensure that our road network continues to be maintained to high standards and that safety improvements are funded.

The collapse of our finances under Fianna Fáil led to significant curtailing in the maintenance of our road network, particularly in rural areas. Under Fine Gael, there have been significant increases in road maintenance and repair funding. We will maintain and increase that funding. We believe it is deeply disingenuous to equate spending on required maintenance and upkeep expenditure on the road network with new investment in public transport.

Fine Gael has always placed great importance on accessibility for all parts of the country. This is recognised in *Project Ireland 2040*, which provides funding for an extensive road-building programme, ensuring that all parts of Ireland are linked not just to Dublin, but also to each other.

We are placing a particular focus on improving road access areas, attracting more people to rural communities.

We will ensure the Local Improvement Scheme is well funded into the future.

Rural Ireland's voice at the heart of Government

When Leo Varadkar became Taoiseach, one of his first acts was to create the Department of Rural and Community Development, to ensure that the challenge of rural development was properly prioritised. We will retain this department to ensure that rural Ireland's voice is heard loud and clear at the top table of Government.

Enabling rural Ireland to thrive

Realising Our Potential: Action Plan for Rural Development, brought forward by Fine Gael in 2017, introduced the first ever coordinated, cross-government and cross-agency approach to supporting rural Ireland. Building on this, we will implement the next Action Plan for Rural Ireland this year.

Our new plan is underpinned by the transformational NBP. It will focus on ensuring that rural Ireland is a place where the young believe that they have a future to live, work and raise a family.

A new Town and Village Renewal Scheme

Since 2016, €210 million has been invested in rural Ireland through the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and the CLÁR programme. This funding has supported improvements in the public realm, stimulating economic activity and improving the attractiveness of towns and village centres for local people and residents.

The existing Town and Village Scheme is a grant-based model dealing mainly with public realm works and the renovation of a public building for a specified public use. We will also bring forward a new scheme to renovate and bring back into use the substantial number of vacant and derelict buildings in our towns and villages.

The first policy for the islands in more than two decades

Fine Gael will ensure that our islands have a bright and positive future. Sustainable, vibrant communities are the only basis on which the long-term future of our islands can be guaranteed. That is why we started developing a new policy for our islands – the first such policy in more than two decades.

We will ensure that our new Islands' Action Plan will be published this year. The Action Plan will take account of important issues such as improving connectivity and transport links and infrastructure, investing in education on our islands, job creation and fully exploiting the potential of tourism.

Supporting Údarás na Gaeltachta

Under Fine Gael, Údarás na Gaeltachta has been given an expanded and enhanced role to include the social and cultural development of our Gaeltacht communities, as well as economic development.

In line with the doubling of investment in our culture, heritage and language by 2025, we will support Údarás na Gaeltachta's work by doubling its allocation, including capital, current and language planning, based on the 2017 level.

We will use that additional funding to support the over 8,200 people working in Údarás-backed companies, as well as Údarás's important work in administering the Language Planning Process and carrying out the work of LEOs in Gaeltacht areas. We will prioritise the work of Údarás in strengthening the identity and branding for our Gaeltacht areas under the 'Gaeltacht na hÉireann' brand and their development of a Tourism Strategy for the Gaeltacht areas.

A modern post office network

Fine Gael is fully committed to a sustainable post office network, which is a key piece of economic and social infrastructure for both rural and urban areas. An Post is now implementing a new strategic plan to sustain it for a future that will look quite different, responding to the shifting ways in which consumers might use its network. The Government provided a €30 million loan to support the required transformation programme and we will continue to support it. We will examine the feasibility of setting up a shared service for the delivery of offline government services. This could be funded through a PSO.

Expanding tourism opportunities throughout Ireland

Tourism is a vital industry that benefits every part of this country and supports the employment of more than 260,000 people. This has been an industry that Fine Gael has continuously prioritised since 2011, and the increase in employment and visitor numbers since then bears testament to this. We will continue to expand tourism opportunities throughout Ireland by:

- **Prioritising the development of the Wild Atlantic Way, to bring further sustainable benefits to communities along the Western Seaboard, alongside the development of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Ireland's Ancient East**
- **Developing the Dublin to Cork Coastal Route, to increase the tourism potential for communities in the East and South-East**
- **Investing heavily in new greenways and cycle routes, to achieve an integrated nationwide network**

- **Increasing investment in Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland, to improve promote our overall offering as a top quality and value-for-money destination.**

Improving regional connectivity

We understand the importance of air access to tourism and regional connectivity. In Budget 2020 we increased the funding to the Tourism Ireland Regional Cooperative Marketing Fund €2.5 million per annum. This fund seeks to encourage new access and maximise the potential of existing air and sea services to those areas outside of Dublin. It is supported by contributions from tourism stakeholders (airports and ports) and matched by air and sea carriers. We will increase the annual Exchequer contribution to this fund by €2 million.

Border Tourism

We believe the border should not be an impediment to developing tourism opportunities on the island

of Ireland. As set out in the recent *New Decade, New Approach* deal for Northern Ireland, we will complete the Ulster Canal connection from Clones to Upper Lough Erne and actively promote greenways in border areas. We have allocated approximately €40 million to greenways development over 2020 and 2021.

The Year of the Invitation

The Gathering in 2013 caught the imagination of the Irish people, mobilising communities to organise over 5,000 special Gathering events for diaspora and friends. The Gathering boosted the number of overseas visitors to Ireland, generating an estimated €170m in revenue and helping to kick-start the strong revival of our tourism sector. We will make 2023 the Year of the Invitation – a global invitation to visit Ireland on the 10-year anniversary of The Gathering.



Mary Newman Julian
Candidate for Tipperary

A vibrant agri-food sector

Our agri-food sector stands for excellence, innovation and resilience. It is our most important indigenous industry and provides employment across Ireland. Fine Gael understands the value of the sector and is committed to supporting farmers and food businesses.

The sector's commitment to sustainability and best-in-class environmental practices will help to grow employment and farm incomes in the years ahead. Working with farming families, Fine Gael will drive innovation to reduce emissions and build on Ireland's green reputation for producing high-quality and sustainable produce at the least environmental cost.

The future of farming

Fine Gael has delivered on the ambition and targets set out in *Food Harvest 2020* and *Foodwise 2025* – the strategies outlining our ambition for the agri-food and seafood sectors. The sector employs 174,400 people and, since 2009, exports have risen in the agri-food sector by 73%, to €13.7 billion.

We will publish a successor strategy to *Foodwise 2025*, providing an ambitious blueprint for the industry for the years ahead, growing the agri-food sector sustainably into the future and supporting vital employment in rural Ireland.

The best possible CAP deal for Ireland

Maintaining the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget is our top priority in CAP negotiations and we are busy forming an alliance to support our position. We will bring the connections and relationships we have built up in recent years, particularly through the Brexit negotiations, to bear on the CAP negotiations. Fine Gael is the best-placed political party to negotiate a reform of the CAP that benefits Ireland.

We have clearly signalled that we are prepared to contribute more to the overall EU budget, if it is spent on measures that advance the European ideal. These include programmes that work and have stood the test of time, like the CAP, which has given Europe food security and helped to balance regional development across the Continent.

Our aim is to establish a well-funded CAP, with farmgate schemes developed in consultation with our farmers with a simplified system of implementation and inspection for the farming community.

We will develop a flagship agri-environment scheme under the new CAP, which is user-friendly for farmers, acknowledging the positive take up of previous schemes like the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS), providing income

support to farmers as well as increasing our environmental ambition.

Standing up for Irish interests in trade negotiations

As an export-led island nation, we rely on overseas markets for the vast majority of our food produce. We will firmly defend Ireland's interests in international trade deals that may emerge, working with our network of colleagues in the European Commission, the EPP and our strong team of representatives in the European Parliament. We will work closely with the agri-food sector to secure access to priority markets and to avail of opportunities that existing markets such as China and Japan afford the sector.

We will carry out an economic and sustainability assessment of the headline EU/Mercosur trade agreement, to inform future action on the ratification of this deal. We will work with EU colleagues throughout the lengthy legal refinement process, sparing no effort to ensure that Ireland's interests are prioritised and maximising protection for the agriculture sector.

Fair distribution of basic payments

We will ensure that direct payments are distributed fairly to active farmers.

Fine Gael introduced a rebalancing of payments under the last CAP, redistributing approximately €90 million in the process. We support the proposal, as published by the European Commission, to cap basic payments further under the next CAP.

Implementing the Unfair Trading Practice Directive

We will establish a regulator to implement and oversee the Unfair Trading Practices Directive.

Greater transparency

We will improve transparency through the establishment of a meat market observatory, providing for more transparency along the food supply chain.

Developing new markets

New markets are essential to the long-term prosperity of our agricultural sector. We will continue to focus on opening new markets and supporting the promotion of sustainable, high-quality Irish produce in premium target markets, to give our farmers a competitive advantage.

We are committed to maintaining the strongest possible trading relationship with the UK, post Brexit. However, we also recognise that given the level of uncertainty involved in the Brexit process, market diversification is necessary, and we will continue to support industry in doing so, by opening new markets for Irish produce. We will intensify the number of trade missions and continue targeted supports in the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine and Bord Bia, in order to build on the successes already achieved to date.

Agri-taxation initiatives

We have successfully introduced taxation measures to encourage land mobility and generational renewal. We will specifically introduce further measures that will encourage land mobility and environmentally friendly farming practices on farms.

We will review the operation of our succession farm partnership scheme, which provides a €25,000 tax credit over five years to assist with the transfer of farms within a partnership structure. This review will examine how the policy may be adjusted to support low-income livestock farmers with off-farm income.

Beef

We are fully committed to the future of the beef sector and the work of the Beef Market Taskforce. We acknowledge that beef farmers are experiencing serious hardship and low-income challenges. We will ensure the Beef Taskforce implements the agreement reached with stakeholders in the beef sector, to encourage greater transparency, cooperation and fairness in the beef industry throughout the supply chain.

We recognise the value of the beef industry and are committed to supporting farm incomes in this sector. Building on the €300 million Beef Data and Genomics Programme and the €20 million Beef Environmental Efficient Pilot, we will develop a new, user friendly scheme under the next CAP to support beef farmers.

In addition to the exceptional aid that we negotiated for the beef sector at EU level, we will provide a further €85 million in targeted beef schemes in 2020.

Establishing more producer organisations

We will encourage the establishment of more producer organisations in the beef sector, to provide farmers with the opportunity to build strength in the marketplace.

Developing live export markets

We recognise the critical role that live exports play in the livestock sector in providing an alternative outlet for farmers and stimulating price competition. We will continue to develop this market, working with industry to encourage additional lairage capacity and a continued

focus on the strongest animal welfare standards.

A Protected Geographical Indicator (PGI) for Irish beef

We will continue to work at EU level for the development of a Protected Geographical Indicator (PGI) for Irish beef. We will prioritise funds for the promotion of beef in key markets through Bord Bia.

Dairy

We will invest strategically in the future development of the dairy sector, focusing on greater efficiency and sustainability. We will work with dairy farmers and other stakeholders through the Dairy Forum to consider emerging challenges and will continue to focus on developing new markets.

We will encourage investment in renewable infrastructure on dairy farms to reduce energy costs and will continue to introduce taxation measures to manage evolving issues such as market volatility. We will also work with farmers to improve the viability of dairy calf-to-beef systems.

Sheep

We will build on the sheep welfare scheme under the next CAP, demonstrating our continued commitment to maintaining numbers in the sheep flock. We will move to increase the payment per ewe under the Sheep Welfare Scheme from €10 to €15. We are committed to delivering on further export opportunities for sheep farmers, on foot of the positive traceability measures adopted by the sheep sector and will defend the interests of the sector in trade negotiations.

Pigs

We are committed to further investment in capital infrastructure on pig farms through future on-farm investment schemes. We will work with stakeholders in the pig sector on the successor strategy of *Foodwise 2025*, open new markets and focus on animal health in the sector.

preventing emerging threats such as African Swine Fever.

Poultry

We will support further investment in the poultry sector, providing for upgrades in poultry facilities and further improvements in the areas of animal health and welfare.

Tillage

We will assist tillage farmers through on-farm investment schemes; we will work with EU colleagues on the issue of fertiliser tariffs; and we will work with tillage farmers in the context of the CAP post-2020 and in the development of the next Rural Development Programme and the successor strategy to *Foodwise 2025*. Building on the momentum of growth in the drinks industry, we will encourage opportunities for tillage farmers in this area and will maximise opportunities for homegrown proteins in animal feeds.

Organic sector

Together with stakeholders in the organic sector, we will deliver the 27 cross-sectoral actions set out in the *Strategy for Development of Ireland's Organic Sector, 2019-2025*. We will work with the organic sector in the context of the successor strategy to *Foodwise 2025* and in the formulation of a new scheme under the CAP post 2020, to ensure this important sector is encouraged to grow further into the future.

Horticulture

We will support the horticulture sector through promotion of Irish horticultural products and through continued investment in capital

infrastructure and the producer organisation structure. We are aware that the horticulture sector remains very exposed to the uncertain outcome of Brexit and will prioritise support for the mushroom sector, in particular, in the context of a no-deal Brexit.

Horseracing

We are fully committed to the future of horseracing and will work with Horse Racing Ireland in developing the industry over the coming years. We recognise the exposure of this valuable sector to Brexit and will work with the industry to put in place workable solutions for the movement of horses in a post-Brexit environment. We will continue to invest in the horseracing industry and in essential infrastructure, such as the Irish Equine Centre.

Horse Sport Ireland

We have doubled the level of funding for the horse sport sector and will continue to support the implementation of *Reaching New Heights*, which underpins the sector.

Greyhound racing

Fine Gael recognises the economic and social impact of greyhound racing in rural areas. We will fully implement the Greyhound Racing Act 2019, strengthening integrity in the industry and providing for a new system of traceability. We will invest in greyhound welfare and rehoming as a priority to ensure adherence to the highest standards.

Sustainable Irish farming

We are fully committed to building on our reputation for sustainability

and environmental performance on all our farms, to position Ireland at the forefront of sustainable food production. We see farming as part of the solution to the climate change challenge.

We will work towards reducing agricultural emissions by increasing carbon sequestration, improving farm efficiency, animal breeding strategies, and animal health and welfare policies and through the better use of technology. At the heart of this approach must be greater efficiencies and reduced input costs for farmers.

Backing Origin Green

We will also continue to support and develop the Origin Green strategy, which is raising the profile of sustainable farming.

Placing climate mitigation at the centre of policy

We will place climate mitigation at the centre of the successor strategy to *Food Wise 2025*, ensuring that we remain ambitious for the agri-food sector.

A more environmentally friendly CAP

We fully support the ambition of the current CAP proposals to direct 40% of funds towards climate and environmental objectives, building on the environmental and climate change measures introduced under the current CAP.

Roadmap for climate action

We will implement our roadmap for the agri-food sector, working with farmers and industry to deliver on the 34 actions in the agriculture agri-food sector outlined in the Government's *Climate Action Plan 2019* to tackle climate breakdown.

Andrew Doyle
Candidate for Wicklow



Improved water quality and microgeneration

We will expand programmes such as the Agricultural Sustainability Support and Advisory Programme (ASSAP), working with farmers, industry and advisory services to deliver real improvements in water quality. We will continue to invest in renewable energy equipment on farms, providing farmers with an opportunity to reduce their energy costs and to potentially earn additional income from microgeneration. We fully support the continuation of the Nitrates Derogation and will work with derogation farmers to maximise efforts to protect water quality on these farms.

Supporting biodiversity

Farmers are the custodians of the land and the agri-environment. We believe that farmers are central to the protection of biodiversity and maintaining ecosystems. We will continue to invest strategically in programmes under the CAP that support biodiversity. We will complete a national hedgerow survey, in line with climate action recommendations, and will continue to fund initiatives under agri-environment schemes that support biodiversity initiatives in this area, building on our significant investment in the hen harrier, freshwater pearl mussel, apiculture and European Partnerships initiative (EIP) projects.

We will implement the climate adaptation plan for the agri-food and seafood sector, helping these sectors, which are arguably those most affected by the impact of climate change, to adapt with the changed environment.

Delivering the forestry programme

Over the next five years, we will reach and maintain a target of 8,000 hectares of new forestry per annum, the equivalent of 22 million trees every year. We fully

support the forestry industry, which employs in the region of 12,000 people in rural communities. We will develop markets for harvested wood products and biofuels, recognising the important role the commercial forestry sector has to play in meeting our climate-change challenge and achieving the goals of the circular economy.

We will publish a successor forestry programme to deliver on our ambitious afforestation objective and further invest in key infrastructure such as forest roads. To support this increased planting ambition, we will also roll out a national promotional campaign on the benefits of afforestation.

We will assess the potential of state-owned lands for afforestation to contribute to our overall target, building on the Coillte/Bord na Móna initiative in this area.

We will support the development of forestry through the new CAP post-2020, aligning agri-environment schemes with climate change objectives and investing further in knowledge transfer. We will also invest further in agroforestry, continuous cover forestry, forestry for fibre and species diversification.

Our *Climate Action Plan* features several specific recommendations in relation to forestry. We are fully committed to implementing these actions, together with stakeholders in the forestry sector, in a regionally balanced way.

We will encourage the private sector to meet corporate social responsibility or sustainability objectives by investing in native woodlands, building on the Woodland Environmental Fund programme.

We will invest in schemes that promote recreational forestry and will work with Coillte on projects such as Coillte Nature, to provide the public with access to recreational forests across the country and will expand the

NeighbourWood Scheme, providing communities with amenity woodlands for local access and enjoyment.

To build on National Tree Week, we will institute a state-sponsored national Tree Planting Day and provide communities across the country with trees to plant on this day annually.

We will implement the MacKinnon report on the forestry licensing system, clearing existing cases without delay.

We will introduce a new and improved scheme to assist owners of ash plantations unfortunately infected with Chalara (Ash Dieback disease). This will offer a broader range of options to affected landowners.

High standards of animal welfare

Maintaining the highest animal welfare standards is fundamentally important to our agriculture sector. In Government, Fine Gael undertook a reform of our 100-year-old animal welfare legislation under the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013. This new Act has resulted in the successful prosecution of close to 100 cases of breaches of animal welfare rules.

We have substantially increased the funding provided to animal welfare charities. We have introduced a ban on wild animals in circuses, a national dog microchipping requirement, made a decision to phase out fur farming and introduced an animal welfare hotline for citizens to report incidences of animal neglect. We have also introduced new welfare regulations concerning the sale of animals in pet shops and online.

We will oblige all local authorities to act appropriately to deal with horse welfare issues. We will develop additional urban horse welfare programmes, working with local authorities and charities involved in equine welfare to provide stabling facilities and educational programmes.

We will support the farm animal welfare advisory committee in enhancing guidelines for animal owners and keepers. We will publish a new animal welfare strategy for Ireland, building on this work, and providing strategic direction for the sector in terms of welfare.

We will work with the live export market and farmers to continue to enhance transport conditions for livestock.

Together with dairy processors and farmers, we will invest in calf feeding and housing infrastructure and ensure that the highest of animal welfare standards are maintained for dairy calves.

A TB eradication strategy

Following on from the valuable work of the TB Forum, we will introduce a TB 2030 Eradication strategy. We will monitor emerging health and disease threats and invest strategically in programmes. We will work with Animal Health Ireland to develop new programmes in partnership with farmers, working continuously to make improvements to animal health.

Investing in veterinary laboratories

As part of *Project Ireland 2040*, we will invest €33.5 million in rebuilding the Laboratory Network over the next 10 years. This comprehensive Regional Veterinary Laboratory programme of renewal will bring existing facilities up to date and provide farmers with an enhanced level of customer service and diagnostic support.

Commitment to the Farmers' Charter

We recognise the importance of the Farmers' Charter and will meet agreed targets for the delivery of payments, schemes and services to farmers.

Farming in constrained areas

We are committed to the Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme, directing funds to farmers operating in the most disadvantaged circumstances. We have fully restored funding under this scheme to pre-downturn levels of €250 million per annum and will consider any further changes needed in consultation with farming organisations in the context of the next Rural Development Programme.

Farm gate investment

We will provide grants for on-farm investment, with enhanced grant aid rates for young farmers. We know that capital investment on farms is an important support for farmers seeking to modernise, increase efficiency and profitability, and keep up with the demands of modern farming enterprise.

Backing agri-enterprises

We will support and encourage farmers interested in availing of viable options for diversification across a range of areas, including artisan food production, agri-tourism, the bioeconomy, agro-forestry and forestry.

Investing in young farmers

We will invest further in the next generation of farmers under the next CAP, encouraging generational change and land mobility to young, educated, trained farmers. This will build on Fine Gael's investment of over €180 million in supports for young farmers in recent years through a range of schemes, taxation measures and the National Reserve.

Wellbeing and farm safety

We will fund a new measure under the next CAP specifically aimed at supporting the safety, health

and wellbeing of farmers in their communities. Farming can be a dangerous and sometimes isolated occupation. Too many families have experienced the tragedy of serious on-farm injury or losing a family member in an accident. We will work with the farming community to minimise the dangers on farms.

Social farming

We are committed to the social farming model, recognising the value of offering farming and horticultural work experience to people availing of health and social services, including disability and mental health services.

Supporting female entrepreneurs

We will continue to support the Accelerating the Creation Of Rural Nascent Start-ups (ACORNS) Programme and seek to expand the support it provides to female entrepreneurs in the agri-food industry in rural Ireland.

Research and innovation

We are fully committed to investment in research in the agri-food sector, prioritising investment in areas such as climate and the bioeconomy. We will build on supports provided to the agri-food sector to promote product diversification and innovation and to address emerging trends and demands in the agri-food industry.

Implementing the National Policy Statement on Bioeconomy

We will implement our *National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy*, providing the agri-food sector with new opportunities, using biological resources from the land and sea in a sustainable and circular manner.

Our golden years guarantee

As people live longer and healthier lives, retirement should be an opportunity for those who have worked hard and built our country to enjoy themselves, free from financial pressures.

Fine Gael has begun the necessary reforms of our pension regime, to ensure that it is fit for purpose for the Ireland of today and the Ireland of tomorrow.

Increasing the State Pension by at least €25

Since the last election, Fine Gael has increased the State Pension by €15 a week. This means that the pension now stands at €248.30 a week for the contributory pension and €237 for the non-contributory pension.

Building on our track record, we guarantee to pensioners that we will raise their annual pension by at least €25 a week, or €1,300 a year, over the next five years.

We recognise that some pensioners are more vulnerable than others – particularly those who are living alone. In the last budget, we increased the Living Alone Allowance by €5 a week. We will make further targeted increases over the lifetime of the next Government.

Total contributions approach

We will introduce the total contributions approach for contributory state pensions for newly retired people. This will firmly establish fairness at the heart of the contributory pension regime by replacing the current 'yearly

average' system with a system that makes the level of pension directly proportionate to the number of social insurance contributions made by a person over his or her working life. However, recognising that many people's contribution history will be lower because of taking time out of paid employment to carry out caring duties, we will specifically acknowledge and allow periods of credits for time spent caring, whether for children or elderly loved ones.

Increasing the pension age in light of longer life expectancy

It is a hugely positive development, that people are living longer, healthier lives. Over the past 30 years, the life expectancy for a person of 65 has increased by more than five years.

As people live longer, then it makes sense that the State Pension age should move to prevent our State Pension becoming increasingly unsustainable and unaffordable in the longer term. As set out in legislation (2014), the State Pension age will move from 66 to 67 in 2021 and then to 68 in 2028.

Other countries are doing the same as Ireland but at a different pace. We will engage with employers and unions under the Labour Employer Economic Forum (LEEF) to reassess the pace at which the pension age is being raised taking fully into account actuarial projections about the Social Insurance Fund.

We understand that while many workers wish to remain in the work place, these changes may prove

more difficult for some. As such we are setting out our plan, under the Golden Guarantee, balancing the need to provide for current retirees while protecting our pension system for future generations.

- 1. We are introducing a new State Transition Pension for those retiring at 66, which will be paid at the higher State Contributory Pension rate. It will not be means-tested but recipients will have to be retired and no longer in the workforce**
- 2. We are introducing a new State Pathway Pension for those retiring at 65, by maintaining the current payment rate, but eliminating Jobseekers criteria. That is, the requirement to sign on and be actively seeking work.**
- 3. We are committed to increasing pension payments by at least €25 a week, or €1,300 a year, over the next five years.**
- 4. Introduce a Total Contributions Approach for contributory state pensions.**
- 5. Introduce a system of auto-enrolment.**
- 6. We will engage with employers to allow people to stay in work longer should they wish to do so.**

By making these improvements now, we are providing financial certainty for all retirees.

Letting those who want to work later in life do so

Fine Gael recognises the skills, experience and contribution of older people. We will work with employers to ensure that valued employees

can continue to work after reaching retirement, should they wish to do so, while still leading a slower pace of life.

We have already changed the law to allow public servants who want to stay on until the age of 70.

As part of this, we will enable people to defer receipt of their state contributory pension on an annual basis to include actuarial increases in payment. We will also facilitate those without a full social insurance record to increase their retirement provision by choosing to continue making PRSI payments beyond pensionable age.

Helping people to retire in financial security

While the State Pension is an important part of people's financial security in old age, it should not be the only element. Unfortunately, for too many citizens it is. Too few workers are part of a pension scheme, with almost half not enrolled within one. It is especially worrying that younger workers are not enrolled within a pension scheme. This lack of provision will make it harder for them to have a comfortable retirement, but given the complexity of pension schemes, as well as the opaque charging regime, it is understandable why many workers do not take up a pension, unless it is part of their employment.

Our auto-enrolment plan

In line with best international practice, Fine Gael has started the process of bringing in a system of auto-enrolment for Irish workers in defined contribution pension schemes.

Under this regime, all workers (except those who are members of existing pension schemes) aged between 23 and 60 and earning more than €20,000 per annum will be automatically enrolled in a pension scheme at the start of their employment. The exact design of

the scheme will be finalised following consultations with the public and stakeholders.

Fine Gael is committed to delivering an automatic enrolment scheme based on the following principles:

1. **Matching contributions will be made by both workers and employers and the State will top up contributions**
2. **There will be a phased roll-out – over a decade – of the contribution made by workers**
3. **There will be an opt-out provision for those who choose to opt out**
4. **Workers will have the choice of a range of retirement savings products to choose from**
5. **There will be a charges cap imposed on pension providers.**

We will also subsequently allow for an opt-in system for individuals who are outside the workforce, self-

employed, or who fall outside the income threshold.

Fine Gael will introduce this new pension scheme in 2022, so that people of all ages and professions can start saving for their retirement years with the help of their employers and the State.

Automatic Enrolment will supplement the State Pension, which will remain the bedrock of the Irish pension system. It will also complement the existing supplementary pension system.

Maintaining the Free Travel Scheme

We are fully committed to maintaining the entitlement for the Free Travel Scheme for all individuals aged 66 and over. We will work with private bus operators and the National Transport Authority (NTA) so that the Free Travel Scheme is available on all publicly licensed bus routes.



Catherine Noone
Candidate for
Dublin Bay North

Ellen O'Malley Dunlop
Candidate for
Dublin South West

Providing more homes without repeating the mistakes of the past

Fine Gael is the party of home ownership. We believe that home ownership should be within reach of all our citizens, but for many this aspiration does not feel real. More than 40,000 first-time buyers have bought a home since 2017. With the increased supply of new housing and the stabilisation of house prices over the past year, we now have the opportunity to reverse the trend in declining home ownership, which has been falling since 1991.

We will continue our work to increase the level of home building, but we must adopt a sensible and responsible approach, to avoid repeating the mistakes of the Celtic Tiger era. During that period, reckless bank lending drove record house prices and fuelled unsustainable debt; homes were often built to poor standards; and basic services and infrastructure were not provided for households living in poorly located developments. We will not repeat the mistakes of the past: our people deserve better.

Ensuring that we continue to increase supply in the housing market

Following the unprecedented crash, a decade ago, the most important issue was ensuring that we resumed building new homes. After a difficult few years, we are now seeing real,

demonstrable progress. The most recent figures (Q3 2019) show that more than 20,000 new homes were built over the previous 12 months, the most in a decade. In the same period, construction work began on more than 26,000. The total completed in 2015, the year before *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* was launched, was just over 7,200. This continued increase in supply – coupled with a levelling-off in house prices – is encouraging. We believe that in the order of 35,000 - 40,000 new homes are needed every year to meet demand and will work to achieve and maintain this level of home building over the course of the next five years.

Helping first-time buyers with their deposit

The Help to Buy (HTB) Scheme introduced by Fine Gael in 2016 has helped almost 16,000 first-time buyers to purchase their first home. The scheme provides for a refund of income tax and DIRT of up to €20,000 to help first-time buyers to secure a deposit to buy or self-build a home. We will continue the HTB Scheme for the duration of the next Dáil. We believe that this scheme is the appropriate way to support first-time buyers and to encourage the building of new homes.

We will increase the maximum HTB

refund to €30,000 for first-time buyers for new or self-build properties valued at up to €500,000.

Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan

In 2018, Fine Gael introduced the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. This allows first time buyers with a joint income of €75,000, or an individual income of €50,000 – who cannot secure a mortgage from a commercial lender – to access sustainable mortgage finance. As of the end of September 2019, the scheme has helped 1,253 people buy their first home.

We will continue and expand the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan for a further five years with sufficient finance so more people can avail of it.

Mortgages for homebuyers

We fully respect the independence of the Central Bank of Ireland and the rules it sets for the sector. These rules will protect us from repeating the mistakes of the past.

Shared Home Ownership Scheme

Between now and 2025, we will directly provide more than 10,000 newly built homes at affordable prices, on both public and private lands. The purchase price will be reduced

because the State is funding essential services needed to make sites viable for housing using infrastructure funding (Serviced Sites Fund and Local Infrastructure Housing Activation Fund (LIHAF)) of more than €0.5 billion. These homes will be delivered through local authorities and in line with recently approved Affordable Purchase Schemes. A clawback will apply to any future sale of the property. These measures are aimed at supporting people with an income of less than €50,000 per annum and couples with a joint income of less than €75,000. Fine Gael will keep these income limits under review as incomes rise. In addition, we will provide seed capital to local authorities to provide serviced sites in towns and villages at cost to owner occupiers.

We will also explore allowing local authorities to increase Part V provisions to 30% for social and affordable homes within new housing developments, depending on local need and social mix. This could include designating up to 20% as cost rental.

The largest social housing programme in decades

We are delivering the largest social housing programme in decades. Over the past three years, there has been a huge ramping up in the number of new homes added to the stock of social housing. Last year, this number grew by 10,000. More than 6,000 of these were new builds, while the balance were long-term leases or the purchase of vacant properties, where it was better value for money than a new build. 2020 will be a record year for social housing delivery, with 11,000 homes to be provided, close to three-quarters of which will be new builds. This year, we will build more social homes than were built in any of the last 20 years.

Over the next five years, we will add at least a further 60,000 homes to the social housing stock.

In tandem with the massive increase in the provision of social housing, we will implement a reform programme to ensure that the housing stock is better maintained and managed in the long-term interests of all those in need of social housing.

Our Social Housing Passport will allow households to move from one local authority list to another, thus providing people with as many housing options as possible.

We will protect the right of tenants in social housing to buy their own home. However, we will require such tenants to be in situ for at least 10 years and limit the discount to 25% of the market value of the property. This will facilitate home ownership, while still ensuring that the social housing stock is protected.

We will ensure that our social housing stock is properly maintained, with any future increase in differential rents ring-fenced for maintenance programmes. This funding will be in addition to the National Social Housing Retrofit programme.

Ensuring a fair deal for renters

Fine Gael introduced the legislation to bring in a 4% annual cap on rent increases within designated Rent Pressure Zones (RPZs). This legislation is due to expire in 2021. To protect tenants from rental inflation, we will extend these provisions, if necessary.

In addition to the introduction of RPZs, Fine Gael has significantly improved tenant protections and is moving the Irish rental market towards the rental model found in other European states, with rent

certainty and security, and longer leases.

Building on this, we will introduce legislation to provide for tenancies of long-term or indefinite duration, which will provide for much greater stability and security for tenants.

We will continue the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) change programme, transforming it into an independent and strong regulator for tenants and landlords. This will build on the powers introduced last year and new rent transparency measures to come later this year.

Encouraging landlords to provide long-term tenancies

Fine Gael is committed to a comprehensive review of the tax treatment of landlords. This will ensure that smaller landlords, who provide most of the rental stock, are not unfairly treated compared with larger, institutional landlords. We will encourage landlords to provide long-term tenancies, offering greater stability to renters.

Cost rental as a real option

We will develop cost rental for our cities and large towns. Fine Gael has initiated two cost rental projects in Dublin.

Tackling the homelessness crisis

Homelessness has a devastating impact on families and individuals. Resolving this crisis is among the most important challenges facing our country and Fine Gael is absolutely committed to ensuring that the most vulnerable have access to safe and secure accommodation. The number of rough sleepers (92) has fallen to its lowest level since November 2015, while the number of families and individuals coming into homeless services has stabilised. We will work hard across Government and with

the NGO sector to end the use of hotels and B&Bs as emergency accommodation. However, until housing supply reaches the required level, emergency accommodation will still be required.

Preventing homelessness

We understand that families and individuals at risk of homelessness need help and support. This is why we will continue to fund services to help people to avoid losing their home, including the national Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service, Abhaile, which has helped more than 12,000 households at risk of losing their homes, and the Mortgage to Rent schemes, which allow local authorities and approved housing bodies to acquire ownership of properties with unsustainable mortgages. This means that households in financial difficulty can remain in their homes as social housing tenants. To date, 600 families have remained in their homes under these schemes, with more than 1,100 in train. We will also continue to fund the freephone national tenancy protection service for renters, which is operated by Threshold, and the National Tenancy Sustainment Framework, which is operated by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

As a result of our efforts to date, one in two families in Dublin presenting to homeless services are found a home without having to enter emergency accommodation.

We will also continue to resource the Residential Tenancies Board in its work to inform tenants and landlords about their legal rights and the application and enforcement of rent restrictions in RPZs.

More Housing First tenancies

Many people who sleep rough and who are frequent users of emergency hostels and shelters have complex needs around mental health and

addiction or have come out of state institutions. They require individualised care and assistance to successfully move from homelessness to a sustainable tenancy. This is why Fine Gael is committed to the implementation of Housing First. Housing First represents best international practice in addressing homelessness and recognises that a stable home provides the basis for recovery in other areas. So far, 341 homeless individuals have been housed under Housing First and 88% of these have successfully retained housing. We will create a further 400 tenancies nationwide by the end of 2021, helping to further reduce rough sleeping in many areas of the country, and we will build on this in subsequent years. We will achieve this by directing local authorities to build one-bedroom homes to reduce the number of single people on local authority waiting lists.

Fine Gael will also continue to fund essential outreach services, including emergency beds to help people who are sleeping rough to access shelter and other supports.

Better emergency accommodation and family hubs for when they must be used

The Dublin Regional Homelessness Executive has set out a national quality standards framework (*The Homelessness Action Plan Framework for Dublin, 2019–2021*) to ensure a more consistent approach to how local authorities and service providers respond to the needs of those experiencing homelessness. This framework is being introduced across the country on a phased basis. We will ensure that it is fully implemented by July 2020.

Through the provision of on-site supports, we are continuing to build family hubs to provide more appropriate emergency accommodation for families and to reduce the time spent in emergency accommodation. There are now 30

family hubs providing accommodation for approximately 690 families. These are not permanent solutions; they reflect the need to provide suitable accommodation to vulnerable families until homes are delivered through the social housing programme.

In Government, we will continue to ensure that all state agencies work together to provide appropriate supports to those who need them, including the departments of Children and Youth Affairs, Health, Education and Skills, Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the HSE and Tusla.

Leaving homelessness for a home

While the number of families and individuals in emergency accommodation demonstrates the scale of the challenge, progress is being made. Almost 4,400 adults and their children exited homelessness to a home in the first nine months of 2019 – an increase of 19% compared with the same period in 2018. This will increase as we continue to fund investment in our social housing programme.

Fine Gael will ensure that supports are provided to local authorities to help individuals and families move out of emergency accommodation. This includes the Homeless HAP Place Finder service, which assists households in identifying a home and also provides access to deposits and rental payments.

Meeting the health needs of our homeless

We know that people without a home can experience serious and complex health conditions, and can face barriers in accessing the care they need. It is essential that a joined-up approach is taken by local authorities, community healthcare organisations and voluntary service providers working together to connect with and support homeless people.

Through the national implementation of Housing First initiatives we are providing vital wrap-around health



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Candidate for
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supports for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, particularly those with addiction and mental health needs. This includes key workers, case management, GP, nursing services, peer support and other specialist care.

Under the North East Inner-City (NEIC) initiative, we opened the country's first inclusion health hub (July 2019). This service incorporates a dedicated Case Management Team for people experiencing homelessness.

Since 2016 we have allocated an additional €6 million for targeted measures to improve health outcomes for people who are homeless.

We will:

- Provide an additional €12 million to continue improve services through Housing First
- Roll out a Homeless Hospital Discharge Programme (piloted

in St James Hospital and the Mater University Hospital) to ensure continuity of care for homeless people leaving hospital and returning to emergency and supported accommodation

- Deliver enhanced in-reach and outreach health services for people living in emergency and supported accommodation
- Continue to fund Ireland's first Step Up Step Down Intermediate Care Centre for people who are homeless, providing specialised healthcare for homeless people
- Open a 100-bed medical treatment and recovery facility in Dublin for people who are homeless and require addiction supports, which we have already funded
- Fund a new 20 bed residential treatment service in the mid-west region (Limerick) for homeless women and their children who have been impacted by substance misuse.

Land Development Agency

Drawing on best practice from countries like the Netherlands and Germany, Fine Gael in Government established the Land Development Agency (LDA) in September 2018.

The LDA is the State's land developer and is filling a long-heralded need for the Irish State to take a more interventionist role in land management and development. The immediate focus of the LDA is on managing state lands to develop new affordable homes and to regenerate underutilised sites. The LDA is already developing housing projects across Ireland.

In the longer-term, the LDA will have a broader role in assembling strategic land banks, both public and private, and making these available for housing in a controlled manner, bringing essential long-term stability to the housing market.

We will ensure that the primary

legislation to place the LDA on a firmer statutory basis is passed as a matter of urgency. We will also ensure the LDA is capitalised with €1.25 billion of funding from the Irish Strategic Investment Fund.

Financing for home-building

Small builders, particularly those outside the big population centres, have faced challenges in securing finance from mainstream banks for viable residential development. That is why Fine Gael established Home Building Finance Ireland to make such funding available. We will ensure that it delivers on its mandate to fund small housing projects across Ireland.

Providing more housing in our town and villages

We will help local authorities to provide serviced sites in the existing footprint of our towns and villages for individuals and couples to buy at cost price and to build on. We will provide seed capital funding for this measure, which will be self-financing.

We will provide 1,400 sites across the country over the next five years in towns and villages with populations of less than 2,000. These will be capable of delivering 8,600 homes.

Provision of serviced sites for affordable housing and to encourage compact urban growth

Low- to middle-income households face an affordability challenge. Fine Gael has already introduced the €310 million Serviced Sites Fund to deliver infrastructure on local authority lands, which will provide 6,200 homes to be sold at discounts of up to €50,000 from the market price to eligible couples and individuals.

Fine Gael will extend this fund to private lands. Local authorities will allocate funding to house builders in areas with a proven affordability challenge, giving priority to developments with planning

permission. This will provide homes in multi-unit developments and on sites close to public transport, local amenities and services. As with the shared home ownership scheme, the local authority will take an equity share to the value of the discount, to be repaid by owners over time or upon the sale of the property. The scheme will only be open to owner occupiers. The fund will help deliver compact urban growth objectives under *Project Ireland 2040*.

In conjunction with this, Fine Gael will expand the role of Vacant Homes Officers in local authorities, to drive and implement the existing policies on town and village renewal and to encourage residential occupancy.

However, we recognise there will always be a demand for 'one-off' housing, and we will take a practical approach, which recognises that many people in rural Ireland want to build their own homes, so that they can live, work and rear their families in their local community.

We will continue our reforms to drive the delivery of apartments in our major urban centres, which have removed height caps and the requirement for car parking among other measures, and which the industry says has helped to reduce apartment construction costs by up to 20%. We will introduce targeted incentives.

Working with local authorities, as their city and county development plans are reviewed from early 2020, we will develop a follow-on plan from *Rebuilding Ireland*, to ensure that development is based on evidence identifying the future needs of local communities and capable of providing an appropriate mix of housing types for households of all incomes and size. This furthers our reform of the planning system from developer-led planning to more sustainable plan-led development.

State lands for housing

We will legislate for stated government policy that – for any

land sold for housing by national or local Government – at least 30% of homes must be made available for affordable purchase or cost rental. This is in addition to the standard 10% minimum requirement for social housing.

The LDA has been tasked with carrying out an audit of all state lands. This will be the basis for the first comprehensive database of publicly-owned lands and will be extremely important for future planning. On one level, it will identify larger tracts of land that may be used for major housing development or land swaps, but it will also identify smaller plots of land in villages, towns and cities that may not be suitable for large-scale development, but which could be used to build homes and strengthen the core of those areas.

Capturing the public benefit from land rezoning

The decision to rezone land often results in a windfall for landowners, and fuels speculation instead of making efficient use of land for the public good. These windfall gains are the product of state interventions, not entrepreneurship. It is important that the rezoning of land benefits the community to the greatest extent possible. Fine Gael will work to capture, through the taxation system, a significant proportion of the windfall gains that occur.

Use it or lose it planning permissions

The Strategic Housing Development (SHD) process has greatly improved the speed at which large-scale housing applications are considered and decided. While it has provided certainty, it is clear that some developers have used the speedier planning permission process to improve the value of their sites, rather than quickly building new homes. We have already committed to keeping the SHD process in place until 2021 at the latest and introducing a 'use it or lose it' provision, if

planning permissions are not acted upon within 18 months of being granted. We will extend these use it or lose it provisions to all housing developments of 10 or more homes from 2021.

Planning reform

We have commenced a comprehensive reform of judicial reviews across the planning system, to ensure that large-scale housing, renewable energy, public transport and other essential infrastructure projects are not unduly delayed by vexatious objections. This includes a requirement that the planning process is completely exhausted before judicial reviews are sought.

Reforming the CPO regime

We will consolidate compulsory purchase legislation into one piece of legislation and use this opportunity to further simplify the CPO system, particularly with regard to bringing derelict and vacant properties and unused development land into use. We will place an obligation on the affected party to make themselves known if ownership cannot be traced through the appropriate state agencies. This will encourage the use of vacant and derelict sites, and we will retain the vacant site levy to ensure that land banks are properly utilised. We will also reform the current system to make it more efficient.

Opportunities and challenges for an ageing population

We owe a debt to the older generation for building our country and for contributing so much to our communities. By 2041, there will be 1.4 million people aged over 65 in our

country – over one-fifth of our total population.

Their knowledge, experience and skills acquired over a lifetime will help our communities to flourish and will benefit our society in so many ways. But, our ageing population also requires additional resources and supports, and we are identifying them now so that we can effectively meet them in the future. This includes making sure that the state pension is sustainable.

In this future Ireland, we want to see older people living in their own homes and communities, leading healthy and active lives, travelling with ease, and respected as valued contributors in our communities.

We will build on our recent major shift in policy direction by implementing Sláintecare and the Integrated Care Programme for Older People, and we will continue to manage this change process to ensure better outcomes for all people, as they age.

In line with the policy statement *Housing Options for Our Ageing Population*, we will work to ensure that our ageing population has a range of options for living independently and alternatives to long-term residential care to support ageing in place. We will provide smaller homes on infill sites to ensure that older people can remain living in their communities, close to essential services and facilities. This approach will mean that Ireland is well prepared to offer the best quality of life for people as they age.

A huge amount of hard work is taking place to support positive ageing and we will continue to fund programmes such as the Age Friendly Ireland Shared Service. Most importantly, we will listen to the voice of older people through meaningful consultation

with the Older Peoples Councils across the country.

Remediation supports for those impacted by mica and pyrite

The Government is committed to helping to fund the remediation (or repair) of homes affected by mica and pyrite under a rolling funding programme, prioritising those worst affected first. To date, almost €126 million has been provided under the Pyrite Remediation Scheme. The latest scheme will be published on 31 January.

Conducting a full review of management company legislation

Fine Gael knows that there are significant challenges facing residents in housing developments run by management companies. We will conduct a full review of the existing legislation and its operation to ensure that the management company structure operates efficiently in the best interests of residents. A special working group is being established to do this.

Helping apartment owners to access finance for long-term works

We also know that there are significant defects in many developments with regard to the lack of sinking funds to complete non-routine maintenance programmes. We have improved building controls to ensure homes are built to the appropriate standards. We will work with homeowners, State agencies and financial institutions to help them help them to access long-term, low-cost finance.

Protecting our environment and moving decisively towards a zero-carbon future

Fine Gael is driving action at national and local level to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to improve our natural environment. This will give us cleaner air, warmer homes, shorter commutes and a better quality of life, while preventing catastrophic climate change. We will implement in full our *Climate Action Plan*, which will be updated annually and monitored quarterly. We will increase public transport services, take decisive steps to encourage more walking and cycling and continue to 'green' our agricultural sector. We will also protect farmers and implement the planning reforms – set out in Project Ireland 2040 – needed to prevent further urban sprawl.

By 2030, we will deliver a fourfold increase in the number of renewables connected to the grid. But, we will also massively increase retrofitting activity, electric vehicle (EV) uptake, the use of public transport, walking and cycling, while also planting 8,000 hectares of new forestry every year.

We will:

- **Increase by ten times the current level of retrofitting activity**
- **Increase by fifty times the current level of electric vehicles uptake**
- **Increase the number of sustainable**

energy communities five-fold and

- **ensure 500,000 more commutes to work and education are taken by public transport, cycling and walking.**
- **By 2040, we will have planted an additional 440 million trees, equating to 8,000 hectares of new forestry every year.**

Fine Gael is committed to reducing Ireland's domestic greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 by at least 30%, compared to 2005 levels, and to achieving net-zero-carbon emissions by 2050. This means that any emissions generated in the economy by 2050 will be offset, for example, by planting trees that absorb carbon.

Our *Climate Action Plan* will ensure that we create the green jobs and green businesses that will be the backbone of our economy for decades to come.

This is a major programme of change, but it is absolutely possible with the right plans and the right leadership. Fine Gael has a clear understanding of the challenges ahead. Most importantly, we know how to work collaboratively with individuals, families, businesses and wider society on how to achieve the level of ambition required.

Putting our ambition into law

We will increase our commitment to stopping climate change by enacting the Climate Action (Amendment) Bill in 2020. This will give legislative effect to many of the elements already set out in the *Climate Action Plan*.

Accountability will be at the heart of this new law, including:

- **Banning the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030**
- **Putting net zero by 2050 into law;**
- **Making the adoption of carbon budgets, setting maximum emissions by sector, a legal requirement**
- **Establishing the Climate Action Council as a successor organisation to the Climate Change Advisory Council.**

Transforming the electricity system

Over the next decade, we will increase electricity generated from renewable sources to 70%.

We will bring forward the necessary legislative and regulatory changes to ensure the required expansion of renewable energy, including offshore wind generation. We will develop a

new offshore wind sector, including the delivery of 3.5 gigawatts of offshore wind capacity by 2030. We will enact the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill in 2020 to achieve this.

This year, we will hold the first Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS) auction. This flagship policy will be essential to decarbonising our electricity grid, harnessing our natural resources and bringing renewable energy into the heart of our communities. The RESS will take account of international best practice and include at its core a focus on community investment and ownership. Consumers will be protected through the competitive nature of the auction.

By 2021, we will have established a new microgeneration scheme to allow homeowners, schools, farmers and communities that generate renewable electricity to sell back to the grid any electricity they do not use.

We will ensure that we build the €1 billion Celtic Interconnector to connect Ireland's electricity network to France via an underwater connection. Once built, its 700 megawatts capacity will power 450,000 households, and help Ireland to switch to 70% renewable electricity, as set out in the *Climate Action Plan*.

By 2023, we will end the use of peat for electricity generation, and no later than 2025 for coal. As part of the Just Transition, we will continue to engage with workers and companies to ensure that there are opportunities for those impacted to be retrained and to secure employment in other areas.

We will also carry out a review of the security and sustainability of our energy system. We will consider the actions needed to take to ensure that our electricity system is backed up in a secure, safe and

sustainable way. We will assess the role of gas and explore the role that other technologies can play in the transition to a zero-carbon future, such as battery storage, pumped storage, interconnection, hydrogen, biomethane and carbon-capture and storage.

We will publish updated planning guidelines for onshore wind, taking into account best international practice around noise, shadow flicker and set-back distance.

Funding climate action

Historic levels of money are being invested to tackle climate change and to transform our energy systems. This funding includes over €27 billion to drive the transition to a zero-carbon economy. Measures include:

- **Ring-fencing €6 billion of carbon tax revenue for climate action, Just Transition and reducing energy poverty**
- **Investing €21.8 billion through *Project Ireland 2040*, including a €500 million Climate Action Fund, funded by an oil industry levy**
- **€80 million for a bog restoration programme in the Midlands, funded through the repurposed PSO levy.**

Leveraging non-exchequer investment can increase the impact of state funding. The State's investment of €70 million in the first round of the Climate Action Fund is leveraging total investment of over €300 million, which is being used to drive decarbonisation across the transport, heat, electricity and agriculture sectors, while demonstrating the types of investments we need to make.

Just Transition is essential

We will support any individual workers and communities which may be negatively impacted by the transition to a low-carbon economy, as well

as technological change such as AI and robotics. A Just Transition is about ensuring that all sections of our society contribute and that those most exposed or least equipped to make changes will be helped. We are committed to supporting these workers and communities with a Just Transition, to ensure that they have opportunities in the future and the skills to take advantage of them. Jobs may become redundant, but people will not.

The first test of Just Transition in the Midlands

The first test of this Just Transition is in the Midlands, which will be significantly impacted by the move away from peat harvesting and electricity generation.

We will prioritise the following actions in the Midlands, to ensure that we deliver a Just Transition for workers and the region:

- **An €80 million Enhanced Peatland Restoration and Rehabilitation scheme to run over four years, which will restore thousands of hectares of Bord na Móna bogs to a high standard, so that they can store carbon, foster biodiversity and provide 200 jobs. This will be funded through the existing but repurposed electricity PSO levy, which will be subject to approval from the European Commission.**
- **An €11 million Just Transition Fund in 2020 targeted at the Midlands to fund retraining and reskilling workers and to assist local communities and businesses in the midlands in adjusting to the low carbon-transition**
- **A €5 million fund in 2020 for the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to restore 1,800 hectares of non-Bord na Móna bogs in seven counties, creating 70 jobs in year one, rising to 100 as the programme develops**

- A €20 million fund in 2020 to deliver a new model to group housing upgrades together as set out in the *Climate Action Plan*. Targeted at the Midlands, this will support an estimated 400 jobs directly and indirectly, as well as significantly upgrading the social stock in the region.

The first Just Transition Commissioner has been appointed and will help ensure a coordinated and effective approach to Just Transition for communities and workers affected by the imminent ending of peat harvesting for power generation in the Midlands region.

Our vision is that the Midlands should become a leader in other areas of the green economy, such as retro-fitting. Also, bog rehabilitation and tourism will ensure that our bogs continue to be a source of employment. To this end, we will progress the idea of a new national peatlands park and centre in the Midlands, in order to exhibit the environmental and social impact of bogs on Ireland's natural and built heritage and to showcase the story of our bogs to the world.

Learning from the Midlands for other communities and workers

We will learn from this and apply it on a bespoke basis to other communities and workers who are impacted disproportionately by both the move to a low-carbon future and/or technology change, such as Moneypoint in Clare. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, as some challenges will be regional, as with peat, but others will be sectoral across the country and affect people working in particular types of jobs (e.g., home heating oil installation and petrol stations).

Our plan for warmer homes

We will develop a new retrofitting delivery model which will:

- Group homes in the same area together to drive down costs

- Start with social homes owned by the local authorities, and move to include privately-owned properties in the community
- Provide easy access to advice and assurance on work standards
- Develop easy pay-back models allowing people to pay as they save (e.g., through utility bills)
- Put smart finance in place (e.g. loan guarantee models, European Investment Bank funding).

Budget 2020 provided €20 million to commence this process, which will begin in the Midlands. We will finalise a new model and publish an implementation plan for national roll-out during 2020.

Under *Project Ireland 2040*, more than €3 billion has been allocated for retrofitting up to 2027. We will supplement this with additional funding from the ring-fenced revenues of the carbon tax.

The retrofitting sector provides substantial job opportunities, particularly in rural Ireland. We will ensure that the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) provide training and retraining opportunities for anyone who wants a career in this area.

As well as making homes warmer, we will move away from heating homes with fossil fuels. We will establish a pay-as-you-save scheme for heat pumps, to allow homeowners to spread the cost of installing the technology by repaying over time through their electricity bills.

Investing in public transport

Fine Gael will make Ireland's cities and towns better places in which to live. Public transport, walking and cycling are central to our ambitions to improve air quality and reduce congestion. Under *Project Ireland 2040*, investment in new public transport is twice the level of that allocated to new road projects, demonstrating our commitment in this area. We will achieve a target of

an additional 500,000 public transport and active travel journeys every day by 2035.

To achieve this, *Project Ireland 2040* has linked infrastructure investment with spatial planning for the first time. This will pay dividends in the years ahead. We cannot go back to the haphazard planning attempts demonstrated by Fianna Fáil in the past.

Over the next five years, we will revolutionise public transport in the Greater Dublin Area by completing the *BusConnects* programme and ensuring that MetroLink proceeds through planning and to construction.

DART Expansion will be well underway. This will result in new DART services operating between Dublin city centre and Drogheda, Maynooth – M3 Parkway and Hazelhatch – Celbridge, and improve capacity and services across the entirety of the network.

We will work with the NTA to conclude a new Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy for the period 2021 to 2036, within the first year of being returned to office. We will ensure the extension of the Luas to Finglas is considered within that process, as well as extensions to Poolbeg, Bray and Lucan and the rail link into Navan. We will also explore the feasibility of extending MetroLink to other locations including UCD, south-west Dublin; extending the Luas network to Hazelhatch and Booterstown; explore other transport options to reduce dependency on the private car and evaluate the need for underground metro routes within the M50.

Our ambitious transport plans cover the entire country. We will extend the NTA's statutory remit to cover the cities of Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway, as well as Drogheda, Dundalk, Sligo, Athlone and Letterkenny and their hinterlands. This will allow transport strategies in our cities, regions and across rural Ireland – already underway or required – to benefit from a strong legal basis.

We will ensure that the *Cork Metropolitan Area Draft Transport Strategy 2040*, which has been subject to public consultation, is fully funded in the National Development Plan. This will include improved commuter rail services, 100 kilometres of bus lanes, the development of a light rail system, an extensive cycleway network and significant road improvements.

We will deliver the *BusConnects* programmes planned for Dublin, Cork and Galway, which will include dedicated bus corridors, increased capacity, segregation of cycle ways and new stops. These plans will involve extensive public consultation.

We will task the NTA to produce a Park and Ride Implementation Plan for each of the five cities, to help reduce congestion and journey times. These strategies will integrate car parking facilities with public transport and cycling networks and will include the provision of secure lockers for bicycles.

Improved connectivity across our island is essential for ensuring our long-term prosperity. Fine Gael will ring-fence a portion of the carbon tax for public transport in rural areas, leading to new routes and improved services across road and rail transport.

Fine Gael is also committed to improving the rail line between Dublin, Cork and Belfast, and will complete an economic evaluation of a high speed link between Dublin-Belfast, Dublin-Limerick Junction and Dublin-Cork. We will compare this option to what can be achieved by upgrading the existing line and advance the best option.

In line with *Project Ireland 2040*, a review has been commissioned to examine the potential and viability of completing the Western Rail Corridor Phase 2 from Athenry to Tuam and Phase 3 to Claremorris. If there is a positive business case, we will proceed with these projects.

Crucially, we will protect existing services by continuing to ensure that the level of payment required to operate the PSO fleet is adequate to maintain and improve service capacity and frequency.

Making cycling a real option for more people

Increasing the number of people walking and cycling as part of their daily lives has huge health and environmental benefits for the individual and society, helping to improve air quality and reducing congestion. However, a major impediment to greater uptake is that our road and street network is not designed with the pedestrian or cyclist in mind.

By the end of this year, we will have developed cycle network plans for each of the five cities and will commence implementation immediately thereafter.

We will update guidance on street, road and cycleway design to take account of best practice internationally. The number of people in Ireland cycling to work rose by 43% between 2011 and 2016. Huge progress is being made, but more needs to be done, as this only represents 3% of commuters.

We will publish a five year plan to increase the numbers of people cycling on a daily basis to work from 57,000 now to at least 120,000.

We will reverse the decline in the number of children walking and cycling to primary and secondary school. We will do this by requiring the Department of Transport to work with schools, local authorities, the Green Schools programme and local initiatives, including Cycle Bus, to identify barriers that prevent children, especially girls, from walking and cycling. This will include an examination of local speed limits and road conditions, which may present a safety concern for parents. An initial €6 million a year from the proceeds of the carbon tax will be made available

to fund improvements and initiatives based on local need.

As part of this and building on the success of the *Cycle Right programme*, we will ensure that all children in primary school are offered cycling training.

We will also conduct a review of road traffic legislation as it relates to cycling, to ensure that current legislation is appropriate.

A national cycling network

Working with local authorities and other agencies, we will continue to identify and invest in new greenways and cycle routes to achieve an integrated national network and improve facilities for commuters, leisure cyclists and tourists.

We will also provide help to local authorities to convert lightly trafficked roads to specially designated Priority Cycle Routes with special safety features, including limiting access to vehicular traffic and providing improved surfaces and sight lines and reduced speed limits.

Moving from diesel and petrol to electric-powered vehicles

Over the next decade, we will move from a car fleet that is almost entirely fossil fuelled to one that is largely powered by electricity. Electric vehicles (EVs) will reach total cost of ownership-parity with diesel and petrol engines by circa mid-2020s. The move to EVs will lead to much improved air quality in our cities and towns and associated health benefits.

To give absolute certainty to the sector that this move is real, we will legislate to ban the registration of new fossil-fuelled powered cars and other light vehicles from 2030 onwards.

We will review the current motor taxation regime, to ensure that it adequately captures the harm caused by NOx (nitrogen oxide) and

Colm Burke
Candidate for
Cork North Central

Simon Coveney
Candidate for
Cork South Central



SOx (sulphur oxide) emissions. This will only apply to newly registered vehicles.

We are frontloading investment in EV charging infrastructure to provide consumer confidence in the availability and reliability of charging points. We will publish an EV strategy to ensure charging infrastructure stays ahead of demand and provide planning guidance to facilitate installation.

To drive this ambition, Fine Gael has published draft building regulations which will oblige developers to provide ducting to allow for installation of an EV charging point in new homes and apartment developments with private car parking spaces. We will ensure that at least one charging point is provided in non-residential buildings with 10 or more spaces.

As an alternative to the current grant regime, we will consider a car-scrappage scheme in advance of our first budget in 2021, to promote

the purchase of EVs. The cost of purchasing EVs is falling, and we will keep the associated incentives under constant review, to ensure a greater take-up of EVs, while not unnecessarily subsidising purchases that would happen anyway.

We have ensured that all new buses for PSO services have low emissions. This will continue. We will ensure that all future procurement processes for public buses will include the evaluation of procuring fully electric buses, including how smart finance can be used to overcome higher upfront costs.

We will publish a public procurement framework for EVs. By at least 2025, we will only allow public sector bodies to purchase low- or no-emissions cars and light goods vehicles.

Improving air quality across Ireland

One of the major consequences of using fossil fuels to heat our homes, power our transport fleet and

generate our electricity is polluted air. The number of premature deaths attributable to air pollution in Ireland is estimated at more than 1,500 people per year. Moving to public transport, cycling and EVs, coupled with the phasing out of coal and peat in power generation and the usage of heat pumps for home heating, will play a hugely important role in improving air quality.

We will continue to extend the existing smoky coal ban to towns impacted by poor air quality.

We will shortly publish the first ever clean air strategy. It will set out:

- **A plan to improve enforcement, including the development of a regional approach to air quality and noise enforcement, which has worked very well in tackling waste**
- **A multiagency approach to clamping down on the sale of high-sulphur content fuel imported from the UK, with local authorities and the Revenue Commissioners involved**

- **Investment to improve our network of monitoring stations, to provide scientific evidence of air quality across different parts of the country, including real-time and localised air quality information.**

Carbon Tax

Carbon pricing is an essential part of any meaningful attempt to end our reliance on fossil fuels. Any plan without carbon pricing is simply not credible. Thanks to the work of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action, there is cross-party support to increase the price of carbon to €80 per tonne by 2030.

We know that this will not be easy for everyone. This is why we are committed to a series of equal and incremental increases of €6 per tonne per year, which will raise an additional €6 billion between now and 2030.

Fine Gael will ring-fence this revenue to decarbonise the economy and protect the most vulnerable citizens from increases in fuel and energy costs.

Investing the carbon tax into climate action

We will invest all of the new revenue raised from increasing carbon tax back into:

- **Protecting the most vulnerable people**
- **Funding a Just Transition for workers and communities**
- **Helping citizens, communities and businesses to reduce their carbon footprint.**

Protecting the most vulnerable people

We will protect the most vulnerable people through a mix of increasing the fuel allowance and delivering retrofitting at scale to low-income and social homes, prioritising those with the lowest energy ratings, through our new retrofitting delivery model.

The first phase of our new retrofitting model, which will start in the Midlands, is being partly funded through increases in the carbon tax in 2020. We will continue this approach in future years. We will publish our new retrofitting plan in 2020.

Helping citizens, communities and businesses to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions

We will also use revenues from the carbon tax to enable citizens, communities and businesses to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2020, we will invest 10% of carbon tax revenue into greenways, cycling and cycling promotion. Over the next decade, we will continue this and invest €600 million from the carbon tax into cycling and other forms of active travel. This is in addition to significant investment that will be made in cycle lanes through *Bus Connects* and the capital budget of the Department of Transport.

We will use these revenues to fund the continued expansion of our EV charging infrastructure.

We will also use a portion of the revenues, as we did in Budget 2020, to support innovative green agricultural projects.

Our new Green SMEs Fund

We will make Irish SMEs the greenest in Europe. Using resources from the ring-fenced Carbon Tax Fund, we will create a €10 million Green SMEs Fund and provide SMEs up to €2,000 each towards professional advice on how to reduce their energy costs, reduce waste and be more sustainable.

We will also provide firms with up to €5,000 of matched funding to implement measures arising from this greenest SMEs initiative.

An enterprise model for a low carbon future

Enterprise will play a pivotal role in our ability to fulfil the transition to

a low-carbon economy and meet our 2030 and 2050 climate targets. We will ensure that the enterprise agencies work with business to adapt to climate change. Only by adapting now, can our enterprises remain competitive and our society resilient. We will:

- **Embed energy efficiency**
- **Replace fossil fuels**
- **Carefully manage materials and waste and abate carbon across all enterprises**
- **Mobilise clusters regionally and sectorally, to become centres of excellence for the adoption of low-carbon technologies – the Top Teams model will be central to this**
- **Plan for the delivery of quality employment and enterprise in the new areas of opportunity being opened up.**

Reducing waste and cutting the use of plastics

While we have made great strides as a nation in terms of recycling, we need to do more to ensure that the next generation enjoys a clean and healthy environment.

We will bring forward a new National Waste Plan to ensure that we:

- **Recycle 70% of packaging waste by 2030**
- **Recycle 55% of plastic packaging waste by 2030**
- **Recycle 65% of municipal waste by 2035**
- **Reduce food waste by 50% by 2030.**

As a priority, we will bring forward 75 measures to tackle waste, which can be quickly implemented. These include enforcing existing rules, encouraging audits and waste reduction targets, higher fees for difficult-to-recycle packaging and bringing commercial vehicle tyres into the successful tyre recycling scheme.

We will work with industry, retailers and consumers to promote a more sustainable and responsible culture of consumption. Within this context and learning from the experience of the plastic bag tax, we will implement appropriate environmental levies to help change consumer behaviour and to send a clear signal to industry that packaging use must be reduced.

We will ban specific single-use plastic convenience items, including polystyrene food containers, cups and drinks containers, building on the successful ban already introduced in the public sector.

Following the conclusion of a public consultation, we will introduce a number of new levies as part of our plan to crackdown on plastic and waste. In particular, we will:

- **Introduce a levy on disposable coffee cups, similar to that introduced on plastic bags, to discourage their use and encourage people to use 'keep cups'**
- **Increase the landfill levy by €5/tonne**
- **Introduce a €5/tonne Waste Recovery Levy**
- **Increase the plastic bag levy to 25c**
- **Introduce further levies on 'medium weight plastic bag',**

takeaway and food packaging.

The revenue from this will be ring-fenced into the Environment Fund and used for schemes aimed at preventing and reducing waste and that protect the environment.

We will also provide for 90% collection of plastic drinks containers by 2029 and ensure all plastic packaging is reusable or recyclable by 2030.

Fine Gael has already legislated for a ban on plastic microbeads used in cosmetics, cleansing products and detergents, which have a detrimental impact on marine fauna and wildlife.

Providing a lean, reliable water network

Decades of underinvestment has resulted in a water network which is not fit for purpose. Working with local authorities, Irish Water is improving water quality, reducing pollution incidents, driving down leakage rates and planning for the long-term needs of our expanding population and growing economy.

We will retain Irish Water in public ownership as a national, standalone water utility.

Fine Gael is committed to funding the necessary upgrades of the country's

water network and will ensure that the *Project Ireland 2040* commitment of €8.5 billion is delivered.

While our rivers, drinking and bathing waters are generally of good quality, we are committed to ensuring that they are protected against pollution from wastewater treatment systems, agriculture and other sources.

We introduced a new, multi-annual capital funding programme in January 2016 to improve the quality of drinking water in group water schemes, while protecting water quality. Some €95 million has been allocated between 2018 and 2021, and we are committed to maintaining this level of funding. We will also continue to fund upgrades to wells and domestic wastewater treatment systems, including septic tanks.

Preparedness for extreme weather events

A major part of our response to climate change must be to better prepare ourselves for extreme weather events. *Project Ireland 2040* provides for almost €1 billion to be spent on capital works programmes to minimise the impacts of river and coastal flooding on society, through the implementation of the 29 Flood Risk Management Plans.

Protecting our Ocean Wealth

As an island nation, with almost half of all Irish people living within five kilometres of the coastline, we have a strong maritime tradition and affinity with the sea. Fine Gael has prioritised the marine and introduced the first ever blueprint for the development of the marine sector, *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth*.

A new ocean wealth strategy

Within the first year of being returning to office, we will develop and publish a new, follow-up strategy to *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth*, building even further on the 'blue growth' delivered to date.

Ireland's first marine spatial plan and framework

Fine Gael has published Ireland's first draft marine spatial planning policy, which is currently out for public consultation and will be finalised by the end of the year. This sets out a clear vision for the future development of our marine planning system, as well as the overarching policies and principles the Government expects marine planning bodies and other bodies that engage with the marine planning system to observe (e.g., in terms of public engagement, transparency, governance, environmental assessment, climate action, social and economic benefits).

Next, we will bring forward Ireland's first ever National Marine Planning Framework. This will introduce a planning system for the development of Ireland's maritime area in the same way that the *National Planning Framework* fulfils this function on land. It will be the key decision-making tool for regulatory authorities and policy-makers. Individual consent applications will have to have regard to the provisions of the plan.

Enacting the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill

As part of this reform agenda for our marine planning regime, we will ensure that the Marine Planning and Development Management Bill is passed into law as soon as possible. This will introduce a single-state consent system for the maritime area for certain project types, as well as eliminating the unnecessary duplication of development management processes (including environmental assessments) for activities or developments that are currently assessed under both the foreshore and planning regimes.

Exploiting our offshore renewable potential

This suite of marine planning reforms will allow us to fully exploit the renewable

energy potential of offshore wind, in particular. This is essential for achieving 70% renewable generation by 2030.

Ireland's first maritime national park

We will investigate the practicalities and merits of establishing an offshore maritime area as Ireland's seventh national park. This would form part of the expanded Marine Protected Areas and allow for a greater engagement and learning experience among Irish people for their maritime environment.

A sustainable future for the fisheries sector

We are committed to the sustainable development of the fisheries sector, ensuring that stocks are protected so the next generation have the opportunity to continue the family tradition of deriving an income from the sea.

A good Common Fisheries Policy deal

We negotiated a doubling of support for the fisheries sector under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), which provides an investment of €240 million. We are fully committed to drawing down all this funding and maintaining a well-resourced EMFF to support the fisheries sector in the context of the next CFP.

In the context of future CFP negotiations, the Hague Preferences will continue to be of fundamental importance to Ireland, guaranteeing Irish fishermen a better share of stocks when levels diminish.

We are committed to the environmental objectives of the CFP, which has introduced measures aimed at sustaining fish stocks, through the ending of discards, quotas based on science and the internationally recognised concept of Maximum Sustainable Yield.

Enabling future growth

We will ensure that the seafood sector is a key focus of the successor strategy to *Foodwise 2025*, providing a blueprint for further growth and development of this sector. In this context, we will continue to develop the seafood processing sector, providing the necessary infrastructure to encourage increased landings, to further support job creation in coastal communities.

The challenge of Brexit

We recognise the challenge that Brexit poses to our seafood sector with regard to access to fishing grounds, the threat to existing quota share and the potential consequences of the displacement of EU vessels into the Irish EEZ. We will work with like-minded EU Member States to ensure that the implications for fisheries are fully considered throughout negotiations for a future EU-UK relationship. More specifically, we will ensure that fisheries remain an integral part of trade negotiations in the context of Brexit.

Investment in harbour infrastructure

Delivering on *Project Ireland 2040* commitments, we will invest strategically in harbour infrastructure and continue the roll-out of Brexit supports for our seafood processing sector. This will provide the industry with the best possible competitive advantage in the coming years.

Clean oceans

Over 365 tonnes of marine plastic waste and over 9 tonnes of used fishing nets have been collected for recycling under our Clean Oceans Initiative. With the help of fishermen, we will expand this initiative, working with other small island nations to combat marine pollution in our collective waters.

Developing our inshore fisheries

We are committed to further developing the inshore fisheries sector, working within the National Inshore Fisheries Forum (NIFF) structure. We will implement the ban on large trawlers inside Ireland's six-mile limit and other conservation measures aimed at sustaining the inshore fisheries sector.

Aquaculture sector

We are committed to the future development of the aquaculture sector. Having cleared the backlog of shellfish licences, we will resolve outstanding issues around finfish licensing, with a sustainable and environmentally conscious approach.

Investment in coastline communities

We will continue to invest in coastline communities through the Fisheries Local Area Group (FLAG) programme, providing support for innovative projects to boost economic growth and job creation.

Supporting investment in our ports

As an island nation, Ireland is heavily dependent on its ports and our future economic success depends on our ability to trade. We will work with our port companies to ensure that they have the capacity, finance and policy support to develop in the years ahead.

Marine Tourism

Our coastal areas, marine resources and activities are key parts of our overall tourism offering. We will continue to sustainably develop the sector by building on existing partnerships to optimise our assets for the benefit of tourism and broader economic development.

We will build on our 'Wild Atlantic Way' tourism experience brand to entice even more visitors to coastal communities, as well as working to replicate this success on the southern and eastern seaboard.

Seafest

We will continue to promote Seafest as a significant marine and tourism event in the national calendar, celebrating all things maritime.

Security and justice in modern Ireland

A strong, well-trained, professional and visible police force is at the core of community safety. Michael Collins founded our national police service, named the Civic Guards, in 1922, and the force became An Garda Síochána the following year. A century on, Fine Gael in Government is delivering a programme of reform to ensure that Ireland has among the best police services in the world, well equipped to meet modern policing challenges.

The disastrous Fianna Fáil/Green Party Government closed the Garda Training College in 2010. The inevitable consequence was a fall in Garda numbers across the country in the years that followed.

As part of our reform agenda, we have reversed this and Garda numbers are now at their highest level in a decade. We are steadily building towards a record high of 15,000 sworn Gardaí in 2021, within an overall organisational strength of 21,000. Budget 2020 provides for up to 700 new Garda recruits. We will fund the recruitment of up to 700 Gardaí annually over the next five years.

However, recruiting more Gardaí is not enough. We must also free up Gardaí from administrative, technical and other non-core duties, to allow them to focus on policing matters.

The significant progress achieved in the recruitment of Garda staff over the last two years, in particular, has allowed over 600 Gardaí to be moved to frontline duties.

Fine Gael believes that Garda Reserve personnel play an important role in the community and can make an important contribution to the work of An Garda Síochána. We will support the Garda Commissioner, who is currently undertaking a strategic review of the Garda Reserve.

A modern, fit-for-purpose, policing service

In Government, we established a team of national and international experts to produce a new blueprint for policing in Ireland. The Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland set out an ambitious five-year programme to transform An Garda Síochána into a modern police service. We responded by adopting an implementation plan, which identifies the prevention of harm as an explicit core principle of policing in Ireland and which places community policing at the heart of the organisation.

In Government, we appointed a new Garda Commissioner to deliver this new blueprint for An Garda Síochána by the end of 2022. If returned to

office, we will continue to support the Garda Commissioner to deliver upon his mandate and we will ensure that the Gardaí have the resources they need to carry out their essential work.

We will bring forward the necessary legislation and provide the resources needed to implement the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, equipping An Garda Síochána to be as effective as possible in keeping communities safe. These measures include:

- Introducing a new Policing and Community Safety Bill to redefine the functions of An Garda Síochána, which will include community safety and the prevention of harm to vulnerable people
- Introducing statutory codification of the Garda powers for search, arrest and detention, to ensure a more coherent and transparent framework within which the Gardaí can enforce the law
- Introducing new legislation to allow Gardaí to wear body-worn cameras to provide evidence capture and clear records of events and interactions
- Extending the powers governing Garda use of CCTV and Automated Number Plate Recognition

devices. to ensure more effective investigation and evidence-gathering.

Fighting organised crime and terrorism

We will continue to support the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, which since 2015 has seized drugs with an estimated street value of €168 million, cash worth €10 million, 109 firearms and 3,400 rounds of ammunition. It has also made over 780 arrests.

Expanding the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB)

We have ensured that serious and organised criminals operating at every level in any part of the country can be targeted. We have expanded CAB's Divisional Assets Profiler Plan and there are now asset profilers active in every Garda division. We will continue to expand the pool of CAB asset profilers, to ensure that the bureau can target criminals who seek to benefit from the proceeds of crime.

Enabling specialisation to target gangland criminals

Unprecedented Garda budgets have allowed increased specialisation. Organised criminals are now targeted by the Emergency Response Unit, regional Armed Support Units, the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau, the National Bureau of Criminal Investigation, alongside the CAB.

Strengthening legislation

We will continue to legislate to combat serious and organised criminals, including:

- Codifying the use of Passenger Name Recognition data for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime
- Tackling human trafficking, ensuring that our laws encompass

relevant EU measures and the UN Protocol against the smuggling of migrants.

- We will annually renew the provisions of the Offences Against the State Act 1998 & the Criminal Justice (Amendment) Act 2009 and robustly defend the central importance of the Special Criminal Court in dealing with gangland criminals and terrorists.

Fit-for-purpose data retention powers

We will work at EU level to ensure that the data retention powers available to Member States help to bring criminals to justice and we will continue to update our data retention laws, so that Gardaí are fully enabled to bring criminals to justice.

Cross-border crime

While Ireland is not immune to the threat of international terrorism, the greatest threat to our country comes from so-called dissident Republican terrorists. We will continue to take a hard line in facing down this threat. In Government, we established the cross-border Joint Agency Taskforce, bringing together An Garda Síochána, the PSNI, the Revenue Commissioners and HM Revenue and Customs to fight cross-border crime and clamp down on criminals who exploit the border.

Now that the Executive in Stormont has been re-established, we will work with the Executive and the British Government to strengthen and deepen multi-agency cross-border cooperation on crime.

There are now Armed Support Units in every Garda region, including at the border in Cavan, Ballyshannon and Dundalk. These units play an important role in supporting frontline Gardaí to combat terrorism and organised crime in the border region.

Better coordination of intelligence

Today's threats to citizens and states

come from a wide variety of sources and in multiple ways. We have established the Strategic Threat Analysis Centre, to better coordinate intelligence collation and analysis, in line with the recommendations of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland. We will ensure that it is appropriately resourced in the years ahead.

Ensuring rural communities are safe

Increased Garda numbers are having a significant impact on crime prevention and investigations in every part of the country.

Special operations have relentlessly targeted those who seek to prey on people living in isolated areas and strong community partnerships have helped prevent crimes from taking place. Operation Thor, launched in November 2015, has resulted in over 200,900 targeted checkpoints and more than 356,300 crime prevention patrols nationwide.

Fine Gael will continue to support An Garda Síochána in tackling the gangs and individuals responsible for burglary and burglary-related crime.

Approximately 200,000 text messages are sent under the Garda Text Alert Scheme each month. We will facilitate and promote further partnerships between An Garda Síochána and communities, as well as ensuring that the Garda Text Alert Scheme is appropriately supported.

Community CCTV

We are strongly supportive of community partnerships to promote community safety and have provided funding of up to €1 million per annum to support community CCTV schemes. We recognise that the process of applying for community CCTV can be cumbersome and complex. Therefore, if returned to Government, we will review the legal and organisational framework

governing community CCTV. The purpose of the review will be to ensure (i) that the process of applying for government funding is as straightforward as possible and (ii) that community CCTV can be as effective as possible in deterring crime and providing evidence to An Garda Síochána, where required.

Investing in Garda vehicles

We will continue to invest in the Garda fleet over the next five years, providing the mobile force needed to combat crime. €9 million has been provided to upgrade the Garda fleet in 2020.

Reducing repeat offending

Recognising that 25% of recidivists are responsible for 75% of crime, we will continue to work to reduce repeat offending by extending the successful Joint Agency Response to Crime, which we established in 2016 to combat repeat offending to more locations around the State.

Tackling antisocial behaviour and youth crime

Antisocial behaviour encompasses a wide range of activities that can cause harm to an individual, a community or the environment.

We will build on the laws currently in place and work with An Garda Síochána to increase its capacity to tackle antisocial behaviour. As part of the implementation of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, we will develop a new Youth Justice strategy, drawing on learnings from the Icelandic model and emphasising prevention, early intervention and interagency collaboration. We will do this with:

- **A new Policing and Community Safety Bill**
- **New legislation to allow Gardaí to wear body-worn cameras, enabling them to capture evidence of antisocial behaviour and retain clear records of events and interactions**
- **Increased community CCTV, combined with the State's CCTV**

network, which will help to identify perpetrators

- **By introducing ever-increasing numbers of Gardaí with a strong focus on community policing.**

Furthermore, to address antisocial behaviour and youth crime, we will:

- **Criminalise adults who groom children to commit crimes, in line with the recommendations of the former Special Rapporteur on Child Protection**
- **Extend the Youth Joint Agency Response to Crime, launched in 2017, which targets prolific offenders aged 16-21 and has been proven to be successful in reducing recidivism**
- **Hold a special expert forum on antisocial behaviour, to consider the effectiveness of existing legislation**
- **Establish a special Joint Oireachtas Committee to consider the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection regarding the age of criminal responsibility.**

Restorative Justice

Fine Gael will continue to work with all criminal justice agencies to build capacity to deliver restorative justice, safely and effectively, to all those who might benefit from participation.

Garda Vetting

We will reform the Garda vetting process to ensure the process is streamlined and more efficient.

Reforming family law

Family law is an especially sensitive area, which requires special facilities and structures. Under *Project Ireland 2040*, we have earmarked €80 million in capital funding for the construction of a new Family Law Court.

We will introduce a Family Court Bill to create a new dedicated Family Court within existing court structures and provide for Court

procedures that support a less adversarial resolution of disputes.

Legal reforms

Major and far-reaching reforms of the judiciary are underway.

We recently established Ireland's first ever Judicial Council providing, for the first time, a statutory basis for the appropriate training for judges and for the investigation of complaints against judges. The new Judicial Council will adopt guidelines around sentencing and awarding of damages in personal injuries claims. It will be independent in the performance of its functions.

We will build upon this, by reforming the way in which judges are appointed, by the passage of the Judicial Appointments Commission Bill.

A century after the establishment of our courts, we will consult with stakeholders to develop a comprehensive long-term strategy for a modern courts system.

We will legislate to introduce a statutory offence of perjury, to make this crime easier to prosecute.

We will modernise the law on the administration of oaths in judicial and other proceedings, in line with the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission.

We will clarify and strengthen contempt of court sanctions for violations on social media.

Dealing with gambling addiction

We will increase awareness of the range of interventions for the treatment of gambling, providing access to assessment and individual counselling services.

Gambling has never been more accessible. While it is an activity that is enjoyed by the vast majority of participants, we are deeply concerned

about problem gambling. We will introduce an independent gambling regulator, to ensure that abuses are eradicated, and that public safety is protected. We will emulate best practice in the design of the new regulatory body and ensure that it is equipped to respond to a rapidly evolving gambling environment.

We will review the controls that exist in relation to access to, and the behaviour of, gambling apps and websites; and, if the existing controls are not sufficient to prevent underage or vulnerable people from gambling, we will mandate the regulator to put strict controls in place.

Increasing prison capacity

There has been a major capital investment in prisons in recent years, to ensure that these facilities are fit for purpose. In 2016, the early 19th-century prison in Cork was closed and replaced with a new, modern facility. All wings of Mountjoy Prison have been refurbished. Major works are in train in the State's only high-security prison in Portlaoise, and in Limerick, where a new wing is planned as part of the Irish Prison Service's Capital Strategy 2016-2021.

Fine Gael will ensure that planned capital projects are delivered and that a comprehensive approach is taken to the development of the next Irish Prison Service's Capital Strategy taking account of an increasing population and greater enforcement due to our investment in Gardai.

We will review the provisions of the Prisons Act 2007 which govern the Office of the Inspector of Prisons to ensure that the Inspector has the necessary statutory powers to undertake their duties effectively and we will expand their role into dealing with individual complaints

A Statutory Parole Board

We will establish the new statutory Parole Board. Under the Parole Act 2019, prisoners will not be eligible for their first parole hearing until 12 years

into their sentence. Furthermore, victims' rights are extended by the Bill and they will have the right to oral submissions. Victims will also be entitled to legal representation.

Victims' Rights

We will shortly publish a revised Victims' Charter. The new charter will contain a new chapter addressing supports for Irish victims of crime abroad and for their families.

Safer roads through enforcement

Great strides have been made over the past two decades in reducing road fatalities and tackling drink- and drug-driving. Fine Gael will introduce a new road safety strategy focused on reducing road deaths to less than 100 per year, by 2025. As part of this, we will place a particular emphasis on reducing the deaths and injuries of the most vulnerable road users: pedestrians and cyclists.

Our focus will be on improving the enforcement of existing laws, rather than creating new ones, and on the promotion of driver awareness and education. We will consolidate the existing road traffic legislation and close any loopholes that may have developed.

Tackling white-collar crime

Corruption and white-collar crime damage our economy, breed cynicism in our society and are a threat to our international reputation. That is why Fine Gael has prioritised allocating resources as well as legislative reform to tackle white-collar crime. We will continue this work over the next five years.

The Corruption Offences Act 2018 encompasses the public and private sectors and introduced a range of new measures to tackle corruption. On foot of this, the Garda Síochána has introduced a new Garda Confidential Line to enable confidential reporting of bribery and corruption and the Garda

National Economic Crime Bureau continues to vigorously pursue white-collar criminals.

Establish the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) as a standalone statutory body

As a matter of priority, we will establish the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement (ODCE) as a standalone statutory body and give it the flexibility and resources to do its job to the highest possible standard.

Review of our anti-corruption and anti-fraud structures

Fine Gael in Government has already established a review of Ireland's anti-corruption and anti-fraud structures and procedures in criminal law enforcement. Recommendations are due to be provided shortly, and Fine Gael will act on them as a matter of urgency.

Stopping white-collar crime trials getting delayed

As part of our wider court reform measures, we will legislate to provide for preliminary trial hearings to expedite the administration of justice in white-collar crime cases, which can often become unnecessarily delayed by technical detail.

Tackling attempts to launder money

We will continue the fight against money laundering and transpose the Fifth EU Anti-Money Laundering Directive into Irish law.

Reforming our whistle-blower legislation

Strong whistle-blower legislation is crucial to exposing malpractices in the public and private sectors and enabling the fight against corruption. Fine Gael in Government helped to bring in the current whistle-blower legislation, which is widely considered among the best regimes internationally. The EU is now considering reforms to European wide whistleblowing provisions, and we will use this opportunity to update and reform our legislation, to ensure that it remains as effective as possible.

Thomas Walsh
Candidate for
Sligo Leitrim



**Mary Mitchell
O'Connor**
Candidate for
Dún Laoghaire

A Strong Defence Force

The men and women of Óglaigh na hÉireann serve our country with pride and distinction, underpinning the security of our State, our democracy, our sovereignty, and participating in peacekeeping missions for the United Nations (UN) and the EU. They also provide essential aid to the civil power, and aid to civil authority, especially in times of emergency, such as Storm Ophelia and Storm Emma, helping to protect our citizens.

Maintaining the Defence Forces' strength

We are committed to maintaining the Defence Forces' strength at 9,500 across Army, Air Corps and Naval Service personnel, as set out in the *White Paper on Defence, (2015)*. We will restore the operational capacity of the Defence Forces through a planned programme of investment in equipment replacement and infrastructural developments across the services.

Ensuring that a career in the Defence Forces is attractive and sustainable

Fine Gael recognises the challenges faced by the Defence Forces in relation to retention. We asked the Public Service Pay Commission (PSPC) to consider these issues in detail and have accepted its

recommendations in full. These changes will give members of the Defence Forces more take-home pay by increasing the military service allowance for all personnel, restoring premium payments for weekends and increasing both security and patrol duty allowances. Those with sought after skills will be incentivised to stay in service and the first group to benefit from this have been Air Corps pilots. These steps will make a career in the Army, the Air Corps and the Naval Service a more attractive and sustainable option.

We have set a high-level implementation plan in train, which clearly outlines how the PSPC report will be implemented. As part of this, the non-pay issues highlighted by the PSPC, and other important issues such as retirement ages and incentivised longer service schemes for certain non-commissioned officer (NCO) and officer ranks, will be dealt with.

We accept that more needs to be done.

The recent White Paper Update identified that the wider political global environment is now more complex and uncertain and events internationally can impact on our political, social, economic and environmental well-being, in ever more complex ways and patterns.

Strategic Review Commission

Taking account of this changed geopolitical environment and to build on the work of the Public Service Pay Commission, Fine Gael will establish an independent Commission to carry out a Strategic Review of Defence to ensure that our Defence Forces continue to serve the interests of our people into the future.

This Commission should examine arrangements for effective defence of the country, improving structures for governance, oversight and accountability of the Defence Forces, the appropriate composition of the Defence Forces, including consideration of recruitment, career progression and pay structures so that we can further incentivise the loyalty and commitment of those who serve Ireland with distinction.

The outcome of this review will remain grounded in a policy of active military neutrality and participative multilateralism through the United Nations and European Union.

Fine Gael will ensure that Defence Forces personnel are fully represented in future pay talks, by permitting the affiliation of Permanent Defence Forces Representative Associations with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions

(ICTU), subject to confirmation that such a move will not alter military command structures and that the Defence Forces will continue to be available to provide the same services to the public, both at home and when deployed overseas.

A revised Conciliation and Arbitration (C&A) scheme

Following an independent review of the Permanent Defence Forces, Fine Gael will immediately proceed to implement a new Conciliation and Arbitration (C&A) Scheme.

Better access to healthcare

Access to healthcare is a vital part of ensuring that members of our Defence Forces personnel are ready and able to serve when called upon. For this reason, we have passed legislation to exempt the healthcare provided to members of the Defence Forces from benefit-in-kind taxation. Primary care is well developed in the Defence Forces, but we will improve the facilities currently available by building a state-of-the-art primary care centre to replace the current medical facility at St Bricin's Military Hospital, in Dublin. Fine Gael will ensure that all enlisted members of the Permanent Defence Forces have the same access to healthcare as officers do currently.

Amending the Organisation of Working Time Act

Fine Gael is committed to amending the Organisation of Working Time

Act and bringing the Defence Forces within the scope of its provisions. We will ensure that the Working Time Directive applies to members of the Permanent Defence Forces in a fair way, that takes into account the types of duties and tasks undertaken by them.

Committed to the United Nations (UN)

The patriotism and professionalism displayed by members of the Defence Forces, both at home and overseas, is a source of great pride to the Irish people, and a real display of international leadership. Since 1958, Ireland has had a continuous presence on UN peace operations, with personnel serving in peace missions all over the world, including in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America.

We will continue to ensure that the Defence Forces have the appropriate resources to maintain this commitment in the years ahead. Utilising this experience and Ireland's position of military neutrality, we will actively engage in the international stage and continue to espouse the importance of multilateralism in support of international peace and security.

A new Institute for Peace Support and Leadership Training

As part of this, and in line with *Project Ireland 2040*, we will also develop a new Institute for Peace Support and Leadership Training in the Curragh.

Recognising the contribution of retired members of the Defence Forces

We will continue to support the establishment of centres for retired members of the Defence Forces, providing an important resource to our veterans and assisting them in accessing services, while at the same time providing a social outlet and network for retired members.

This will provide a public recognition of the unique role played by members of the Defence Forces.

As we approach significant anniversaries for the veteran associations, we will mark these occasions in appreciation of the support and contribution of each association to its members, the wider defence community and to the State, through involvement in ceremonial occasions.

Upgrading and improving the Defence Forces' facilities

In line with *Project Ireland 2040*, we have published a five year Built Infrastructure Plan Programme, investing €145m, in a variety of critical projects key to improving the physical working conditions and live-in accommodation for members. These projects range from single living accommodation, to training and messing facilities up to ammunition depots, aircraft hangers and berthage facilities. The Programme ensures that investment is targeted where it is needed most.

Reserve Defence Forces (RDF)

The RDF is a significant element of the State's defence capability. Fine Gael will continue to develop the RDF so that it can support the work of the Permanent Defence Forces, we will review recruitment to the RDF with a view to increasing participation towards full strength of 4,000 personnel. Fine Gael has increased the supports for the Reserve Defence Force Association and will continue to do so.

We have conducted a skills survey in the RDF and will use this to develop a Specialist Reserve that can support the work of the Permanent Defence Force at home and overseas.

Civil Defence

Fine Gael is committed to supporting and developing Civil Defence and the 3,500 volunteers who give

generously of their time and talents to serve their communities. We have established a coordinated inter-agency guidance team, bringing together Principal Response Agencies involved in dealing with major emergency management issues and committed an extra €1 million towards upgrading the Civil Defence fleet in 2020. We will build on this work by increasing supports for Civil Defence Officers, develop a policy that sets out a shared vision for the organisation incorporating the input of volunteers and update legislation governing Civil Defence to reflect this vision.

Commemorating the past

As we come to the centenaries of the founding of the State and of Óglaigh na hÉireann, we will commission medals for serving personnel to commemorate these important events in our nation's history.

The role of the Defence Forces in the broader public service

The skills and capabilities of the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service will continue to be made available to An Garda Síochána, to assist in the internal security of the State, and to lead government agencies in the event of national emergencies, cyber emergencies and the maintenance of essential services.

Supporting the Emergency Aeromedical Support (EAS) service

We will continue to support the Emergency Aeromedical Support service operating out of Custume Barracks, Athlone.



Emer Higgins
Candidate for
Dublin Mid West

Brendan Griffin
Candidate for
Kerry

A sporting and active nation

Sport helps to bring communities together in a way that is both remarkable and inspiring. It can engender enormous national and local pride, when our teams and athletes do well. Most importantly, playing a sport keeps our bodies and our minds healthy.

Double spending on sport

We will double Government spending on sport by 2027 and we will use this investment to achieve the high-level targets in the National Sports Policy 2018-2027, particularly the elimination of the gender gap in sporting participation and the increase of active sporting participation among the adult population, from the current level of 43%, to 50%.

Providing funding for sports capital grants

We know the importance of sports capital grants in the development of clubs across the country. Fine Gael has ensured that the Sports Capital Programme was re-established once it came to office in 2011. Since then €293 million in Sports Capital Funding has supported 6,134 sports clubs and organisations nationwide.

Over the next five years, we will ensure that there are regular rounds of the Sports Capital Programme for clubs and local authority sportsgrounds across the country at a local and regional level.

The Sports Capital Programme co-funds local and regional sporting infrastructure and equipment. However, we also established the Large Scale Sport Infrastructure

Fund (LSSIF) for larger sports facility projects. The first round of the LSSIF was very popular with €77m of the €100m fund allocated, though many good projects have not yet been funded. We will make sure that there is another round of funding allocated early in the life of the next Government.

Lifelong sporting activity

The health benefits of lifelong sporting activity are well known. Some sporting activities are especially suitable for participation across a person's lifespan, such as swimming, cycling, walking and running. A strong emphasis needs to be placed on these activities from an early age, particularly through PE, so that people have the foundational skills to continue with them throughout their lives. For these four sports, in particular, schemes to help older people participate will be developed and enabled by central and local government such as park runs.

Encouraging sporting participation by all in society

For a wide variety of factors, the take-up and participation in sport is lower for those who have a disability. Increasing participation levels among people with disabilities is especially important. We will mandate Sports Ireland to develop a programme of interventions to boost participation levels.

Olympic and high-performance funding

As we double overall sports funding by 2027, we will triple funding for our

high-performance programmes. This additional funding will be associated with the goal of securing at least 10 medals at the 2028 Olympics and at least 12 at the Paralympics.

International sporting events

The decision to host the Ryder Cup in Adare Manor in 2026, as well as the role that Dublin will play in Euro 2020, speaks to the capacity Ireland has to be involved in some of the biggest sporting events in the world. If returned to office, we will develop a strategy to identify, on a systematic basis, what type of sporting events we can and should bid for, and how these events can be used to increase sporting participation, encourage domestic and international tourism and promote Ireland. We are also open to a bid for a future Rugby World Cup.

Importance of Physical Education (PE)

The greatest fall-off in sporting participation occurs in secondary school. Our education system needs to be at the centre of our efforts to improve participation in sport. In line with *Project Ireland 2040*, we will deliver a PE build and modernisation programme, so that students in more post-primary schools have access to indoor facilities for PE. This complements the decision by Fine Gael in Government to make PE an examinable subject at Leaving Certificate level. Enhanced and modernised PE facilities will also provide extra amenities for local communities.

Enhancing our culture and heritage

Irish culture, music, language and art constitute the window through which most of the world sees us for the first time. These elements are central to our image and reputation. Culture and creativity enrich our lives, are a substantial part of our economy, employing people all over Ireland, and are drivers of tourism.

In 2017, Leo Varadkar committed to the doubling of expenditure on arts, culture, heritage and the Irish language by 2025. The Fine Gael-led Government has also committed to this goal. We have already made meaningful progress, with an increase from €284 million to €351 million, or 24%, to date, and we will deliver on our commitment by 2025.

Project Ireland 2040 already commits over €1.2 billion to culture and heritage. This is the first ever multi-annual long-term capital funding plan for Irish cultural institutions.

Enabling all parts of Ireland to fully partake in our national cultural life

Geography should not limit people's ability to fully partake in Ireland's national cultural life. *Project Ireland*

2040 provides €40 million over the next decade for the continuation of the highly successful nationwide Arts and Culture Capital Scheme introduced by Fine Gael.

We will develop initiatives so that the National Cultural Institutions go on tour to towns across the country and enable greater national touring programmes by artists. Included in this will be the National Symphony Orchestra which, funded by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, and residing in the renovated National Concert Hall, will be fully staffed and will offer a national touring programme and educational and outreach programmes.

Supporting Galway 2020

In the year that the world's eyes will be on Galway 2020, we will provide substantial support to this landmark project and ensure a legacy that will sustain the city and county's cultural reputation.

The importance of local arts and drama festivals

Local arts and drama festivals afford artists and audiences around Ireland

with invaluable opportunities to participate in and experience the arts for themselves. We will continue to develop innovative support schemes for small local festivals, amateur dramatics and musicals.

Creative Ireland as the legacy to the 2016 Centenary Programme

Creative Ireland is the legacy programme arising from the hugely successful 2016 Centenary Programme. We will ensure that this ambitious five-year strategy, which places culture and creativity at the heart of public policy is implemented in full. The ground-breaking initiatives, including Creative Schools and Creative Communities, will be supported to expand and reach their full potential.

Creative Children Initiative

Through the continued expansion of the Creative Children Initiative, we will ensure that every child in Ireland has access to tuition and participation in art, music, drama and coding by 2022.



Jospeha Madigan
Candidate for
Dublin Rathdown

Encouraging the next generation of artists and musicians

We will create new bursary schemes for young artists from all disciplines, as a means of encouraging the next generation of Irish artists and musicians.

Sustaining creative spaces

We will also help to sustain spaces for artists and creatives in our cities, through creating a new fund which local authorities can access for joint-funding to create new spaces and studios.

Increasing funding to the Arts Council

We will continue to fund the Arts Council, supporting its 'arm's-length' independence.

Greater awareness of the Percent for Arts Scheme

The Percent for Arts Scheme is a voluntary initiative, whereby Government Departments and public bodies can invest up to one percent of the total budget for capital investment projects in public art. In 2019 we increased the scheme's bands and limits, ensuring that significant funding is being made available to the creative community, and that investment in public art projects is closer to the one percent. We will promote greater awareness of the scheme.

Recognition of women's contribution to Ireland through art

We will continue to support the recognition of the hugely significant contribution of women to Ireland's development through innovative cultural schemes like the Markievicz Awards, which supports new works of art celebrating the role of women in our history.

A thriving audiovisual sector

There is a thriving audiovisual sector in Ireland, which Fine Gael will continue to support. We will implement the *Audiovisual Action Plan* in full. Building on the success of the Regional Film Development Uplift, which is driving increased investment in Ireland's regions, we will ensure that our tax regime remains as supportive and as attractive as possible. We will also drive the development of new studio space and the upskilling of audiovisual workers.

Night mayors to promote night-time culture

Fine Gael wants to see the establishment of local committees and 'night mayors' to advance and improve our night-time entertainment, creative and cultural offerings. To this end, we are commencing two pilots, one in Dublin and one in Cork. As part of this, consideration will be given to public transport, public safety, licensing regulations and venue availability, but any changes will be balanced with the needs and concerns of local communities.

A new all-of-government heritage policy

We will publish and implement a new all-of-government heritage policy. This will complement the significant investment in our national heritage over the next decade, which Fine Gael has prioritised in *Project Ireland 2040*.

We will continue to develop and implement a masterplan for the development of our National Parks and National Reserves, following on from the work already underway at Coole Park in Galway and Glenveagh in Donegal, and the introduction of year-round opening at Connemara National Park.

In recognition of their community and development value, we will also continue to support new community heritage projects throughout the

country, including new projects in Ireland's peatlands and new cycling, walking and recreational amenities through the creation of new greenways and blueways along our inland waterways.

As part of the Just Transition for the Midlands, we will create a new National Peatlands Centre, to showcase Ireland's peatlands and their history.

We will investigate the practicalities and merits of establishing an offshore maritime area as a national park. This would form part of the expanded Marine Protected Areas and allow for a greater engagement and learning experience among Irish people for their maritime environment.

Community-led heritage

We will also build on successful community-led programmes, such as the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Structures at Risk Fund, which provide grant aid to protect and maintain important historic buildings in our local communities. In addition, we will work to progress flagship national projects, such as the restoration of the Ulster Canal.

Heritage Council and school visits

We will increase funding to the Heritage Council, to expand its Heritage in School Scheme, which enables greater awareness of Ireland's rich natural and cultural heritage with visits from one of our Heritage in School experts.

History and Heritage school trip supports

The decision to give history a special core status in the Junior Cycle recognises the unique importance we place on an understanding of history. That alone is not enough. We will establish a fund of €500,000 per year to support DEIS primary and secondary schools initially, with the

intention of establishing a scheme for all schools, to travel to and visit historic sites on the island of Ireland.

The importance of our biodiversity

Our biodiversity and nature are as important as our climate and are crucial to our health and our ability to sustain life. They also link in with other important sectors, including tourism, agriculture and recreation.

Under *Project Ireland 2040*, we are investing €60 million in the greater protection of our nature and biodiversity. Central to this will be the continued implementation of the third *National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021* and building on the commitments made at the first National Biodiversity Conference, which took place in 2019.

Restoration of our bogs

A major restoration effort has been underway on our raised bogs since 2011. We will continue to invest in peatlands restoration, rewetting and restoring native peatlands. This will include funding to community groups to develop projects that promote our peatlands. For further details, please see the 'Protecting our environment' chapter.

Local biodiversity projects

Local biodiversity projects to combat invasive species, plant native trees and protect our native pollinator species have proved to be highly successful in restoring nature and in raising awareness of biodiversity. We will increase funding for local nature groups and local authorities to work in partnership on these projects.

We will continue to raise awareness of biodiversity through initiatives, including an Annual Biodiversity Awards Scheme.

Building on the success of the UNESCO Dublin Bay Biosphere,

we will achieve further UNESCO designations for Irish sites, including the Lough Allen region.

Implementation of the 'biodiversity duty'

The Dáil has declared a biodiversity emergency. Fine Gael will introduce a series of measures in the next government term to address this emergency.

We will ensure full implementation of the 'biodiversity duty' on public bodies to have regard to policies, guidelines, and objectives to promote the conservation of biodiversity and the National Biodiversity Action Plan.

Appointing an Education Liaisons Officers in our National Parks

We will appoint Education Liaison Officers in each of our National Parks to work with schools across the country, in order to promote the importance of biodiversity and the natural world, and to involve pupils in the work that goes on in our National Parks.

We will seek to promote biodiversity initiatives across primary, post-primary and third-level sectors and seek to ensure that schools, colleges and universities across the country play an active role in providing areas to promote biodiversity.

Working with our libraries to continue evolving, innovating and serving communities

In 2019, we launched the new public libraries strategy *Our Public Libraries 2022: Inspiring, Connecting and Empowering Communities*. Since 2016, we have invested over €11 million in library buildings and over €10 million on ICT upgrades and innovative initiatives. We are also extending the My Open Library service, which allows branches to open from 8am to 10pm, as well as

additional library services 365 days a year. This is only the start. We will work with our network of libraries in evolving and innovating to meet the needs of our ever-changing society.

The importance of Irish media

We need a strong and vibrant media sector in Ireland to produce accessible content that informs, challenges, educates and entertains. However, the structures and approach by the State to the Irish media are rooted very much in the mid-20th century. Recognising this, we are establishing a Commission on the Future of Irish Public Service Broadcasting, which will bring forward proposals by September 2020. The commission will review the current approach and make recommendations on setting a new strategic direction for public service broadcasting provided at national, regional and local level, in light of international experience and future trends.

It is essential that our defamation laws are fair and proportionate. We will conclude the review of the Defamation Act 2009 quickly and will bring forward legislation on foot of that review.

We will enact the Broadcasting Bill by the summer. It will, in particular, enable the broadcasting levy to be reduced for all broadcasters and for some community broadcasters to be exempted entirely. It allows for the creation of a new funding scheme that would allow the granting of bursaries to journalists in local or community radio stations. We must support our local community radio stations and independent broadcasters. We fully value the role of local and community radio, as is evidenced in the terms of reference for the new Commission on the Future of Public Service Broadcasting.

Growing the use and enjoyment of the Irish language

The Irish language has a bright future and Fine Gael will help to realise it. We are committed to doubling funding for the Irish language by 2025 compared to 2017, when Leo Varadkar became Taoiseach.

Our approach is to not just preserve but to promote the Irish language. It is driven by the ambition to improve how our native language is taught, to grow Irish-medium education, increase the number of daily Irish speakers, recruit more Irish speakers into the public service and to ensure that services are provided through the language.

We are committed to the targets in the *20-year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030* to grow the number of Irish speakers outside education from 83,000 to 250,000; to increase the Gaeltacht's Irish speaking population by 25%; and to have 2 million people with Irish by 2030. In 2018, we published a five-year action plan (Action Plan 2018-2022) to help drive implementation and achieve the targets in a coordinated and comprehensive way. In addition, we will double investment in the Irish Language and the Islands from €46.7 million to more than €92 million from 2017 to 2025.

We recognise the need to provide public services through Irish to Irish speakers, in particular for the 26 Gaeltacht planning areas, but also the 16 Service Towns and the three Irish Language Networks in Clondalkin, Ennis and Loughrea.

We are committed to developing a new Irish Language Centre in Dublin, as a flagship focal point for the language, as well as new Irish Language networks, where there is a desire to do so.

Landmark Irish language legislation

We have already published a new Official Languages Bill and this landmark legislation involves a fundamental rethinking of the approach to the provision of services through Irish, as well as upholding the rights of Irish language speakers. We will ensure that it is enacted as a matter of urgency.

Everyday use of the language

We want to increase the number of Irish speakers and will expand the opportunities available to all to learn, develop and use the language in everyday life, particularly outside

the Gaeltacht. We want to promote the language in social settings and in workplaces, such as through Irish language tables in workplace canteens.

As part of our doubling of funding for the Irish language, we will increase the funding to the Irish Language Support Scheme, which provides financial assistance to organisations to help fund new projects like Irish language cafes, theatres and cultural centres. We will also expand the 'Teanga Tí' / Family Language Scheme and explore the introduction of similar schemes to further support and develop the language across the country.

We will ensure that the Houses of the Oireachtas leads the way in this regard.

Supporting the provision of Gaelscoil and Gaelcoláiste

Fine Gael has started the development of a comprehensive Irish-medium education policy. We will work towards doubling the number of young people currently in Irish-medium schools. We will provide a Gaelscoil or Gaelcoláiste in any area where there is strong demand for Irish language-medium education.



Joe McHugh
Candidate for
Donegal

Alan Dillon
Candidate for
Mayo

Innovations in Irish language education

To further support Irish language education, we will expand pilot programmes that we have introduced, including Seimeastar na Gaeltachta for third-level students and the scholarship fund for summer courses for DEIS pupils and resource third-level Irish language courses in Ireland and abroad.

We will continue to support and fund recent innovation in Irish language-medium education, such as the TechSpace technology curriculum for second-level schools.

Following the enhancement of funding to Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta, and in recognition of how crucial early years education is to the future of Irish, we will introduce an Irish language module within existing early years practitioner courses.

Having expanded and extended the Irish Language Assistants Scheme in Gaeltacht schools, we will introduce a

programme to support the teaching of Irish in schools across the country.

Innovations such as these and others within Irish language education need to be continuously advanced. To this end, we will create a €2 million annual Irish language education fund modelled on the School Excellence Funds.

Oral Irish for Junior Certificate

We will increase the emphasis on spoken Irish within the classroom, developing projects that engage pupils and build communities of language use within the school and wider community. We will give greater prominence to spoken Irish within the Junior Cycle, by increasing the focus on each student's oral Irish in the final assessment at Junior Cycle.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as a means of embedding the Irish language further into school life

Over the lifetime of the next Government, we will build on the recent introduction of the Content

and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) Programme. Following a three year pilot, we will introduce a national programme in which every primary school will teach PE through the medium of Irish. We will work with secondary schools to increase the number of schools under the CLIL Programme and the range of subjects, with an initial focus on PE.

Using the virtual classroom to give more subject choice in Gaeltacht schools

We will test the potential for virtual classrooms to allow for more subjects to be taught through Irish at Senior Cycle in the Gaeltacht. We will broaden the footprint of innovative and high-tech projects, combining Irish-medium education and technology in schools and youth centres in all regions. Our aim is to develop the leading creative technology network for youth development through Irish, with a focus on creating digital media and STEM material.

Cur le húsáid agus taitneamh na Gaeilge

Tá toadhcháí gheal roimh an nGaeilge agus cuideoidh Fine Gael sin a chur i gcrích. Táimid tiomanta maoiniú don Ghaeilge a mhéadú faoi dhó faoi 2025 i gcomparáid le 2017, nuair a rinneadh Taoiseach de Leo Varadkar.

Is é an cur chuige atá againn, ní hé amháin an Ghaeilge a chaomhnú ach í a chur chun cinn. Is é atá á thiomáint sin ná an uailmhian an chaoi a múintear ár dteanga dhúchais a fheabhsú, cur leis an oideachas trí Ghaeilge, líon na gcainteoirí laethúla Gaeilge a ardú, níos mó cainteoirí Gaeilge a earcú sa tseirbhís phoiblí agus a chinntiú go gcuirtear seirbhís ar fáil tríd an teanga.

Táimid tiomanta do spriocanna *Straitéis 20 bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030* chun líon na gcainteoirí Gaeilge lasmuigh den oideachas a ardú ó 83,000 go dtí 250,000; céatadán de phobal na Gaeltachta a labhraíonn Gaeilge a ardú faoi 25%, agus 2 milliún daoine a bhfuil Gaeilge acu a bheith ann faoi 2030. In 2018, d'fhoilsíomar plean gníomhaíochta cúig bliana (Plean Gníomhaíochta 2018-2022) chun cuidiú an feidhmiú a thiomáint chun cinn agus na spriocanna a bhaint amach ar bhealach comhordaithe agus cuimsitheach. Chomh maith leis sin, méadóimid faoi dhó an infheistíocht sa Ghaeilge agus sna hOileáin, ó €46.7 milliún go dtí níos mó ná €92 milliún ó 2017 go dtí 2025.

Aithnímid an gá seirbhísí poiblí a chur ar fáil trí Ghaeilge do chainteoirí Gaeilge, go háirithe sna 26 cheantar pleanála Gaeltachta, ach chomh maith leis sin sna 16 Bhaile Seirbhíse agus na trí Líonra Gaeilge i gCluain Dolcáin, Inis agus Baile Locha Riach.

Táimid tiomanta Ionad Gaeilge nua a fhorbairt i mBaile Átha Cliath, mar lárphointe suaitheanta don teanga, chomh maith le líonraí nua Gaeilge, mar a bhfuil mian ann sin a dhéanamh.

Reachtaíocht shuntasach don Ghaeilge

Tá Bille Teangacha Oifigiúla nua foilsithe againn cheana féin agus is é atá i gceist leis an reachtaíocht shuntasach seo athsmaoineamh ó bhonn maidir leis an gcur chuige i leith soláthar seirbhísí trí Ghaeilge, chomh maith le seasamh le cearta cainteoirí Gaeilge. Cinnteoidimid go n-achtófar an reachtaíocht ar bhonn práinne.

Úsáid laethúil na teanga

Táimid ag iarraidh líon na gcainteoirí Gaeilge a ardú agus leathnóimid na deiseanna atá ar fáil do chách chun an teanga a fhoghlaim, a fhorbairt agus a úsáid sa saol laethúil, go háirithe lasmuigh den Ghaeltacht. Táimid ag iarraidh an teanga a chur chun cinn i suíomhanna sóisialta agus in áiteanna oibre, mar shampla, trí tháblaí Gaeilge sa cheaintín in áiteanna oibre.

Mar chuid den mhéadú faoi dhó a dhéanfaimid ar mhaoiniú don Ghaeilge, méadóimid an maoiniú ar an Scéim Tacaíochta don Ghaeilge, a thugann cúnamh airgeadais d'eagraíochtaí chun cuidiú tionscadail nua a mhaoiniú ar nós caiféanna, amharclanna agus ionaid chultúrtha lán-Ghaeilge. Leathnóimid amach chomh maith an Scéim Teanga Teaghlaigh, 'Teanga Tí', agus breathnóimid ar scéimeanna comhchosúla a thabhairt isteach chun tuilleadh tacaíochta agus forbartha a thabhairt don teanga ar fud na tíre.

Cinntoimid go mbeidh Tithe an Oireachtais ar thús cadhnaíochta ina leith seo.

Tacú le soláthar Gaelscoileanna agus Gaelcholáistí

Tá tús curtha ag Fine Gael ar pholasaí maidir le hoideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge a fhorbairt. Oibreoidimid i dtreo líon na ndaoine óga atá i scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge a mhéadú faoi dhó. Cuirfimid Gaelscoil nó Gaelcholáiste ar fáil i gceantar ar bith ina bhfuil éileamh sách láidir ar oideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge.

Nuálaíochtaí san oideachas Gaeilge

Chun tacú le hoideachas Gaeilge a thuilleadh, leathnóimid cláir

phíolótacha atá tugtha isteach againn, lena n-áirítear Seimeastar na Gaeltachta do mhic léinn tríú leibhéal agus an ciste scoláireachta do chúrsaí samhraidh do dhaltáí DEIS agus acmhainní a chur ar fáil do chúrsaí Gaeilge tríú leibhéal in Éirinn agus thar sáile.

Leanfaimid ar aghaidh ag tacú agus ag maoiniú nuálaíochta in oideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge, ar nós an churaclaim teicneolaíochta TechSpace do scoileanna dara leibhéal.

Tar éis maoiniú a fheabhsú do Chomhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta, agus mar aitheantas ar a thábhachtaí atá oideachas luathbhlianta le haghaidh thodhchaí na Gaeilge, tabharfaimid isteach modúl Gaeilge laistigh de chúrsaí atá ann cheana do chleachtóirí luathbhlianta.

Tar éis Scéim na gCúntóirí Gaeilge a leathnú i scoileanna Gaeltachta, tabharfaimid isteach clár nua chun tacú le múineadh na Gaeilge i scoileanna ar fud na tíre.

Caithear nuálaíochtaí mar seo agus eile laistigh den oideachas Gaeilge a chur chun cinn go leanúnach. Chuige seo, cruthóimid ciste oideachais Gaeilge ar luach €2 milliún ar mhúnla na gCistí Sármhaitheasa Scoile.

Béaltríail Ghaeilge don Teastas Sóisearach

Cuirfimid leis an mbéim ar Ghaeilge labhartha sa seomra ranga, ag forbairt tionscadal a mheallann daltaí agus a thógann pobail úsáide teanga laistigh den scoil agus sa mhórphobal. Tabharfaimid suntasacht níos mó don Ghaeilge labhartha laistigh den tSraith Shóisearach, trí chur leis an bhfócas ar Ghaeilge labhartha gach scoláire sa mheasúnú deiridh sa tSraith Shóisearach.

Foghlaim Chomhtháite Ábhar agus Teangacha (FCÁT) mar mhodh chun an Ghaeilge a leabú a thuilleadh i saol na scoile.

Thar shaolré an chéad Rialtas eile, tógfaimid ar an gClár um Foghlaim Chomhtháite Ábhar agus Teangacha (FCÁT) a tugadh isteach le déanaí. Tar éis clár píolótach trí bliana,

tabharfaimid isteach clár náisiúnta ina mbeidh gach bunscoil ag múineadh corpoideachais trí mheán na Gaeilge. Oibreoidimid le meánscoileanna chun an líon scoileanna faoin gClár FCÁT agus an réimse ábhar a mhéadú, ag díriú ar dtús ar chorroideachas.

An seomra ranga fíorúil a úsáid chun rogha ábhar níos mó a thabhairt i scoileanna Gaeltachta

Tástálfaimid an fhéidearthacht maidir le seomraí ranga fíorúil chun gur féidir níos mó ábhar a mhúineadh trí Ghaeilge ag an tSraith Shinsearach sa Ghaeltacht. Leathnóimid lorg tionscadal nuálach agus ardteicneolaíochta, ag ceangal le chéile oideachas trí mheán na Gaeilge agus an teicneolaíocht i scoileanna agus ionaid óige i ngach réigiún. Is é ár n-aidhm an príomhlíonra teicneolaíochta cruthaitheach don fhorbairt óige trí Ghaeilge a fhorbairt, ag díriú ar mheáin dhigiteacha agus ábhar a bhaineann le hEolaíocht, Teicneolaíocht, Innealtóireacht agus Matamaitic.

Wellbeing and security in the digital age

The internet has transformed our lives. It allows us to connect with loved ones in an instant or find information on anything. It is impossible to imagine a world without the current level of hyper connectivity, and this connectivity will only increase in the years ahead. However, this is not without its risks. We will focus on ensuring that we get the balance right and that we can exploit the increasing levels of connectivity, while maintaining our collective wellbeing and security.

Legislating for greater online safety and media regulation

In 2020, we will enact a new Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill to place new requirements on online services to comply with binding Online Safety Codes made by the Online Safety Commissioner.

Each Online Safety Code will set out the steps online services must take to keep their users safe online, in relation to a particular issue. Codes will address a wide range of matters, including:

- **Combating cyber bullying material and material promoting eating disorders, self-harm and suicide**
- **Ensuring that services operate effective complaints procedures, where people can request that material is taken down**

- **Ensuring that advertising, sponsorship and product placement are not harmful and that they uphold minimum standards.**
- **Ensuring effective takedown measures.**

Online services will be legally obliged to abide by the codes that apply to them.

The Online Safety Commissioner will be part of a new Media Commission, which will replace the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and will also take on the role of regulating the audiovisual sector. The commissioner will have a range of strong powers to police the new law.

A greater understanding of the consequences of digital nativism

One of the greatest sources of uncertainty and anxiety to parents is when and how their children should get access to digital technologies and to what level they should be supervised. To inform parents and to guide policy-making generally, we need much better and more robust evidence.

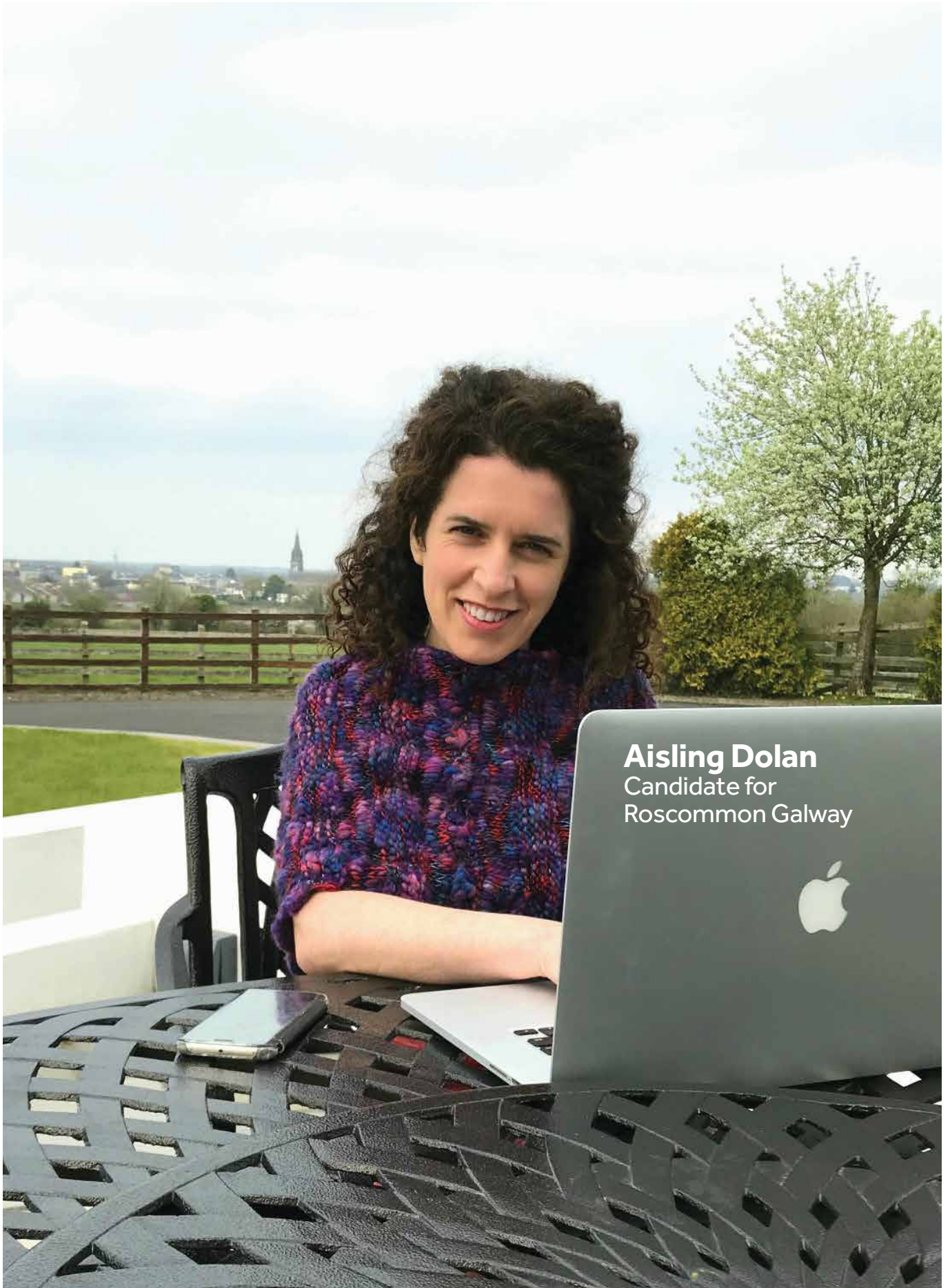
We will task the new Online Safety Commissioner with developing a research programme led by internationally recognised experts to review the existing and developing literature in relation to the

consequences, benefits and potential harms to children primarily of digital activity. Following this, we will fund an ambitious programme to fill the gaps in the research. As part of their mandate, research will be conducted into the guidance and measures that have been considered and/or implemented in other jurisdictions, regarding online activity and their effectiveness in reducing negative consequences.

Ensuring that we are protected from cybercrime

Given Ireland's leading position as a digital economy, cybercrime poses a particular threat. This threat extends not just to major companies but to smaller enterprises and to individuals. The major reforms we have initiated in An Garda Síochána include the provision for every division in the State to have expertise in cybercrime. We will continue to support the implementation of these major reforms, to ensure that communities are protected from evolving forms of criminality.

We will implement the new *National Cyber Security Strategy*, which will ensure that we are taking the necessary actions to protect Ireland against hacking, cybercrime, cryptojacking, hacktivism and cyber espionage.



Aisling Dolan
Candidate for
Roscommon Galway

Continuing political reform

Establishing an Electoral Commission

We will establish an Electoral Commission and reform our legislation covering online advertising.

The Electoral Commission's role will be to educate and inform the public about elections and referendums, to update and maintain the electoral register and to conduct elections.

As part of this, we will give the Electoral Commission the power to regulate online political advertising in the public interest, and introduce a consistent regime relating to political advertising across all media. We published the initial legislation on this before the general election and will ensure that the Electoral Commission is in place by the end of 2021.

Modernisation of the electoral registration process

We will complete the most radical modernisation process for voter registration in our State's history. This will involve:

- The simplification of forms and the registration process, including an online option
- A rolling (continuously updated) Electoral Register

- A single, national Electoral Register Database
- A move to a system of identity verification, using one's PPSN.

Stronger and more accountable local government, with directly elected mayors

Fine Gael believes in stronger and more accountable local government. We will transfer powers from the city and county managers to mayors, elected by the people for a five-year term. This will provide more accountability. We will create a new relationship between the county chief executives and the mayor, akin to the relationship between a minister and a department's secretary general.

The directly elected mayor for Limerick

The people of Limerick voted to have a directly elected mayor with executive powers. We will ensure that legislation to give effect to this decision is passed, so that the first directly elected mayor can be elected no later than May 2021.

In support of this initiative, we will provide exchequer resources of €5 million per year from 2022 to Limerick City and County Council, to deliver on the mayor's mandate.

Committed to a directly elected mayor for Dublin

Fine Gael is committed to a directly elected mayor for Dublin.

We want to ensure the proposal for a Dublin mayor proceeds in a way that enjoys broad support. Therefore, Fine Gael will establish a Dublin Citizens' Assembly, to consider what type of local government structure and directly elected mayor, if any, would be most appropriate for Dublin. The assembly will convene in September of this year. Depending on the outcome of the Citizens' Assembly, a plebiscite will be held on the subject in 2021.

Directly elected mayors in other local authority areas

If there is demand in any local authority area for a directly elected mayor, we will enable the holding of plebiscites in these areas in 2024. Demand will be demonstrated either at the request of the local authority itself, or by way of a petition from 20% of registered voters.

Resourcing local authority members to deliver on their functions

The role and duties of county council members have expanded significantly since 2014. We will ensure that their

supports reflect these additional responsibilities.

Reforming the Local Property Tax (LPT)

Fine Gael believes that money raised locally should be spent locally. Local authorities should have the maximum level of discretion over how money raised through the LPT should be spent and the level of the rates charged.

Fine Gael, at a national and local level, is committed to a fair LPT. Therefore, we deferred the scheduled revaluation to ensure the emergence of a consensus on the best way forward. We will legislate for a local property tax on the basis of:

- fairness
- most homeowners will face no increase
- new homes, which are currently exempt from the LPT, will become liable for it on the same basis as all other homes
- the understanding that money raised locally is spent locally
- the understanding that those counties with a lower LPT base are adjusted via an annual national equalisation fund paid from the Exchequer, as is currently the case
- there will be more discretion for councillors to change the LPT rate for their own area, moving beyond their current ability to raise or decrease the rate by 15%.

Extending the presidential franchise

We support extending the franchise at presidential elections to Irish citizens resident outside the State. This referendum will take place within

the first year of Fine Gael being returned to Government. If passed, this will allow Irish citizens in Northern Ireland and around the world to vote in the next presidential election, in 2025.

Improving the participation of young people in politics

Fine Gael will ensure a comprehensive national consultation with young people – as to how better their voice can be heard and the issues that they want their Government to focus on for their future. We will develop a new National Strategy on Children and Young people’s Participation in Decision-making 2021-2025.

Introduce a plain language requirement on all public service communication

Plain language is a way of presenting information that helps people understand it the first time they read or hear it. Using plain language saves time and money and reduces mistakes and complaints. It gives people information they understand and enables them to make informed choices. Many state bodies are already using plain English – for example, the newly established government website, gov.ie, is in plain English. We will build on this and introduce a requirement that all communication from state bodies is in plain language.

Strengthening the Regulation of the Lobbying Act

The Lobbying Register has been very effective in bringing a greater level of transparency to public decision-

making. Currently, it only relates to lobbying activities aimed at elected representatives and central and local Government. However, it does not capture lobbying activity targeted at state agencies, many of which either have significant policy-making autonomy and/or make decisions on significant budgets. Therefore, we will extend the lobbying register so that the lobbying of senior officials in bodies like the Central Bank of Ireland, Comreg, the NTA and the HSE will need to be reported.

Reforming the voting procedures in Dáil Éireann

The integrity of the voting process in the Dáil chamber is essential to accountability and the democratic process. Public trust in Dáil voting has been damaged in recent times by the ‘Votegate’ scandal. We must restore confidence. We will support the Oireachtas Commission’s recommendations to enhance the voting system in the Dáil chamber, to ensure that members’ votes are recorded accurately and definitively.

A new expenses regime for politicians

We recognise that we need to ensure accountability and transparency at every level of the political system. We also recognise that rules made for politicians, by politicians, achieve neither accountability nor transparency. Fine Gael will introduce a new system, external to the political structure, where the use of public funds by TDs and senators can be effectively scrutinised to prevent potential abuses.

Budgetary assumptions and costings

We face a clear choice in this election: between a future to look forward to and a return to the mistakes of the past.

A Fine Gael-led government that will deliver a strong Brexit trade deal with the UK, reduce debt so we can keep investing in schools, hospitals and homes and ensure that you pay less tax on more of your earnings.

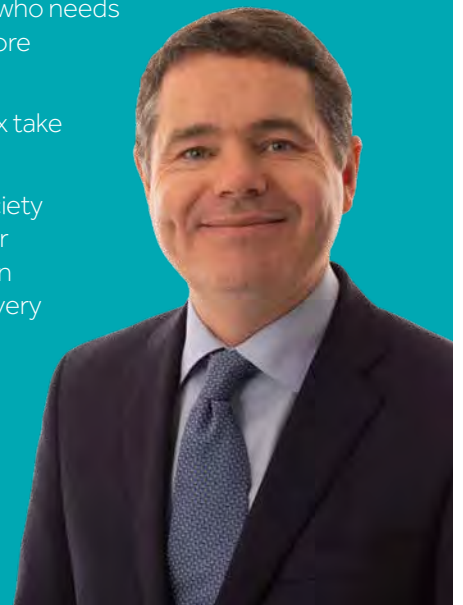
Under Fine Gael our economy has grown strongly, there is a job for everyone who needs one and wages are rising. That is why for two years in a row we are taking in more revenue than we are spending.

Running a surplus like this makes sense as it protects us from any fall in the tax take from multinationals, which is a clear risk once global tax rules change.

We have also used our strong economy to invest in the infrastructure our society needs – that is why we have doubled capital spending in recent years. With our *Project Ireland 2040* plan, we will continue to invest in the future, so that we can tackle climate change and provide the broadband and public transport that every part of the country needs.

All of these proposals assume the economic outlook noted in this annex. Crucially, this manifesto assumes the achievement of a good outcome to the Brexit process.

Paschal



FINE GAEL ECONOMIC PLAN

Our country deserves a better future. To ensure this, our plan is:

To responsibly manage the public finances

Fine Gael will manage the public finances responsibly based on the following principles:

- When the economy is growing, increases in day to day spending will match the pace of economic growth and inflation;
- We will achieve and then maintain a surplus of at least 1% of GDP (€3.8 billion) by 2021 to protect against the inevitable decline in corporation tax revenue; and
- We will reduce our public debt level to around 85% of national income by 2025 and then to 60% by 2030.

In the event of a shock to the economy, such as a hard Brexit deal or a greater than expected decline in corporation tax receipts, Fine Gael will:

- Relax the debt rule to 90-95% of national income by 2025;
- Allow the surplus to decline.

This is prudent management of the economy.

Investing now for the future

By 2040, we will have a population of 6 million. That is why we brought forward *Project Ireland 2040*, which consists of a €116 billion *National Development Plan* and is based on the *National Planning Framework*. This means that for the first time in Ireland's history our planning and capital investment plans are aligned. This will help ensure that future population and economic growth are more balanced than was the case in the past.

This year's budget will increase capital expenditure at an average annual rate of 5.8% out to 2024. In 2020, we will invest 4.4% of GNI* in public infrastructure and maintain it at around this level throughout the next Government.

We believe this level of investment is ambitious and prudent and will provide for the right level of investment in infrastructure to meet our current and future needs, without exposing the economy to risks of overheating, the crowding out of private sector investment, or the development of imbalances in the economy as occurred in the past. Our capital investment commitments for social housing, hospitals, universities, public transport and all other projects - are based on existing *Project Ireland 2040* and Government capital ceilings.

Increasing take home pay

Fine Gael will always prioritise the improvement of people's living standards. As people's wages increase, it is critical that the taxation system does not prevent them from seeing improvements in their take home pay by failing to keep pace with this wage inflation.

In order to prevent people's taxes increasing as their wages increase, we will change the point at which an individual pays

the higher rate of tax to €50,000 over the next 5 years.

The average full-time wage in Ireland is €47,596. However, people start paying the top-rate of tax at €35,300. This is deeply unfair.

The annual benefit for the average earner at the end of five years is just under €3,000, which will ensure that tax levels keep up with projected income growth. If we don't make this change, more of people's incomes will go to tax as their wages increase.

In addition to that, we will raise the Earned Income Tax Credit for the self-employed to match the PAYE Tax Credit and maintain that parity into the future. We will also increase the Home Carers Tax Credit to €1,650 so that it is equal to the PAYE Tax Credit, and maintain that equalisation in future years, to recognise the work of parents who stay at home.

ECONOMIC AND BUDGETARY ASSUMPTIONS

Our proposed Budget package commitments are predicated on the current economic forecasts from the Department of Finance.

Table 1: Department of Finance Economic projections 2020-2025

Change	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Gross Domestic Product (% increase)	3.9	3.0	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.5
New jobs	42,000	40,000	38,000	39,000	40,000	38,000

Budgetary Assumptions

Table 2 below provides an overview of the budgetary packages we propose out to 2025. We have included all current and capital pre-commitments in line with the methodology applied in the 2019 *Summer Economic Statement* and as set out in the medium-term fiscal strategy published by the Department of Finance on 9 January.

These pre-commitments include the carryover cost of 2020 budgetary measures, the costs relating to the Public Service Stability Agreement, the cost of meeting demographic pressures in areas like health, education and social protection and increases in capital expenditure under *Project Ireland 2040*. Post 2022, the allocation of capital expenditure by Departments remains to be finalised, but will be in line with *Project Ireland 2040*.

In keeping with the approach adopted in Budget 2020, any supplementary estimates in a given year will be excluded from the available resources in the following year.

These annual budgetary packages will enable us to achieve a surplus of €3.8 billion by 2021. Achieving a budgetary surplus is the first line of defence for the inevitable shocks that the economy will face over the short- and medium-term.

In order to protect the public finances from the clear risks in corporation tax receipts, we are projecting an annual decline in corporation tax revenue from 2022 onwards. This is in line with estimates from the Revenue Commissioners.

We have also assumed a €500m contribution to the Rainy Day Fund from 2021 onwards but it should be noted that this does not affect the general government balance.

Table 2: Budgetary Overview 2020-2025

€ million	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
BEPS / Corporation Tax Safeguard		-500	-1,000	-1,500	-2,000
Tax Revenue	66,500	69,200	71,600	74,300	76,800
Voted Expenditure	73,400	75,700	78,400	81,200	84,000
GGB Surplus (% of GDP)	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.3
Inclusive of:					
Tax package	-600	-600	-600	-600	-600
Spending increase	3,000	2,300	2,700	2,800	2,800
TOTAL budget package	3,600	2,900	3,300	3,400	3,400

Proposed Budgetary Packages 2021-2025

The table below proposes budgetary packages for each year. It includes the following assumptions:

- Existing spending commitments in line with the *Summer Economic Statement and Budget 2020*
- Proposed revenue raising measures of a widened property tax base and changes in tax on tobacco as well as the introduction of specific taxation measures targeted at e-cigarettes and vaping.
- Provision for payment of a new transitional pension
- An annual tax package each year of up to €600 million
- €5 billion additional Health spending over the next five years
- A social welfare package of €5 on all working age payments except for Job Seekers Allowance
- An assumption of public pay increases of 2.5%
- All capital projects are included in the *Project Ireland 2040* plan.

The assumed rate of public pay increase is in line with the current wage agreement. Fine Gael remains committed to a change in carbon tax of €6 per tonne in each budget. This is not included in this analysis as all revenue raised from these changes will be ring fenced for investment in just transition measures, public transport and protecting our vulnerable. This will maintain the approach of Budget 2020.

Table 3 below lays out larger manifesto commitments, and the amount of each budget package per year that is still available to be allocated.

Table 3: Detailed Budgetary Packages 2021 – 2025 (m):

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Proposed Budget Packages (1)	3600	2900	3300	3400	3400
Plus LPT Reform	18	6	6	6	6
Plus Compliance	50	50	50	50	50
Plus Tobacco & Vaping Tax	50	50	50	50	50
Total Budgetary Packages	3718	3006	3406	3506	3506
From this the following commitments are subtracted:					
Minus Pre-committed current expenditure	1,000	500	500	500	500
<i>Consisting of:</i>					
<i>Public Pay</i>	300				
<i>Carryover</i>	200				
<i>Demographics</i>	500	500	500	500	500
Minus Pre-committed capital expenditure (2)	1,000	200	300	600	500
Minus Tax reductions	599	594	553	532	535
Total Un-Allocated	1119	1712	2053	1874	1971
From this the following Manifesto Commitments and Assumptions are subtracted:					
Extra Funding for Health Services	525	640	730	640	670
New Public Pay Deal	0	500	500	500	500
Social Welfare	316	320	324	328	332
New Transition Pension	150	4	4	4	4
Remaining for New Policies	128	248	495	402	465

- (1) Forecasts from Department of Finance
- (2) Forecast from Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Pre-committed capital expenditure comprises the resources allocated to fund *Project Ireland 2040*.

New Spending Commitments

Health Funding

This plan delivers an increase in current health funding of €5 billion over the next 5 years. This is in line with the expected growth in health demand during that period.

In 2021 total extra current health funding will be €883 million. This comprises extra funding of €525 million in addition to €150m for demographics, €128m from the PSSA and an €80m carryover from Budget 2020.

From 2022 onwards we will increase current health funding by at least an extra €1 billion per year. This consists of additional funding of at least €640 million as well as €150m for demographics and €210m for the health element of any new pay agreement.

Table 4 below lays out itemised spending per year for additional specific manifesto commitments. These are funded by the amounts remaining for allocation to new policies in Table 3 above.

The budgetary resources available to fund new spending commitments exceeds the total cost of new policies.

Table 4: Additional manifesto commitments 2021-2025

SPECIFIC MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
7 week increase in parental leave	-	-	45	31	-
Increase childcare investment	40	50	100	100	110
Free primary school books	-	20	22	-	-
Schools capitation increase	4	14	14	14	14
Hot school meals	9	18	18	18	18
Pupil teacher ratio reduction in small schools	-	1	1	-	-
Increase SUSI grant threshold	10	-	-	-	-
Increase support to Local Enterprise Offices	1	1	1	1	1
Increase sports spending	7	12	15	20	20
Double culture spending	10	15	50	30	60
Cross border school collaboration	1	1	-	-	-
Remove charges for school transport	3	3	3	3	4
Extend coverage for school transport	-	4	-	-	-
Defence Force medical support	-	10	-	-	-
Directly elected mayors	-	5	-	-	-
Equalization fund LPT	-	-	30	30	40
Higher education funding	-	30	75	75	100
700 additional Garda recruits	32	32	32	32	32
Extension of Micro-finance to €50,000	-	2	-	-	-
Establishing the online-retail scheme	-	4	-	-	-
Expansion of disadvantaged areas taskforces	6	9	18	18	18
Tourism Ireland regional marketing	2	-	-	-	-
Sheep Welfare Scheme	-	10	-	-	-
TOTAL cost of new policies	125	241	424	372	417

TAX PLAN

This plan assumes that up to €600 million each year is used for tax reform and reduction. In any given year the indicative tax package is below this level to ensure that the total budgetary package delivers our surplus targets. Key commitments on an annual basis are:

Table 5: Tax Commitments per Year

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Increasing the Standard Rate Cut Off Point	477	477	477	477	477
Increased tax credits (Earned Income and Carers)	3	21	15	-	-
Help to Buy Expansion	65	30	30	30	30
Capital Acquisitions Tax Reform	12	9	6	5	8
Small Business Tax Package	15	20	25	20	20
Increase USC exemption	27	37	-	-	-
Total Cost	599	594	553	532	535



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