

SUPPORTING HOME OWNERSHIP & SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

**Local Government
Manifesto | 2019**



Foreword

In order for communities across Ireland to achieve their full potential, they need local representatives who want to make a difference. Our party councillors have always been focused on getting things done, working towards a positive vision for their home area rather than just being involved in protest politics.

This kind of commitment is needed now more than ever because having strong and vocal local councillors does matter. Active and effective councillors can improve access to local services and improve standards of living. They help families secure a home, work on the local development plan, ensure roads are invested in and set commercial rates. Their decisions play a significant part in sustaining local economic success. The calibre of people we elect locally shapes our communities and ultimately our country. That's why we need more diversity and women elected to our councils to ensure they reflect the communities they are put in place to represent and can change them for the better.

Local government has gone through a lot of changes over the past few decades. It is, however, still the first port of call for the majority of the public when they need advice about their own area on a range of public services. Positive change starts from the grassroots up and local elections are the critical test in supporting the type of pragmatic politics that prioritises solutions over just giving out about problems.

This manifesto gives an oversight of that change and what our party believes should be prioritised over the next five years at local authority level such as supporting home ownership and tackling climate change. Our team of candidates are drawn from a tradition of public service and are deeply committed to the prosperity of their communities. They live and work in their areas and are deeply rooted in local community and voluntary groups and sports clubs. That is the kind of grassroots leadership that every community needs to thrive and prosper.

Please support your local Fianna Fáil team on May 24th.

Yours sincerely,



Micheál Martin TD

UACHTARÁN FHIANNA FÁIL





Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Foreword | 1 |
| Executive Summary | 5 |
| Supporting Social Homes & Affordable Home Ownership | 8 |
| Safe Communities | 12 |
| Balanced Growth | 12 |
| Clean, Green communities | 18 |
| Vibrant & Inclusive Communities | 20 |
| Keeping communities moving | 24 |



Executive Summary

Fianna Fáil is committed to providing a local government that helps support home ownership, builds communities and sustains jobs locally. Your local Fianna Fáil team is committed to real solutions not just protest politics.

OUR OBJECTIVES ARE:

- Supporting Social Homes & Affordable Home Ownership
- Safe Communities
- Balanced Growth
- Clean, Green communities
- Vibrant & Inclusive Communities
- Keeping Communities moving

In each local authority area, the Fianna Fáil team will also have their own set of complementary priorities that reflect distinct local needs and challenges. The overall national scope of this manifesto sets out a broad, non-exhaustive list of policies that will focus on:

SUPPORTING SOCIAL HOMES & AFFORDABLE HOME OWNERSHIP

Building Social & Affordable Homes

- Double home building to 40,000 units per annum
- Build 50,000 affordable homes and 50,000 social homes by 2024
- Undertake a “Housing first” approach to tackle homelessness
- Reform the tax and planning system for REITs to level the playing field for buyers
- Launch a new Tenant Purchase scheme
- Rolling out a new deal for Tenants & Landlords including a national deposit scheme, measures to tackle rogue tenants and strengthen rent pressure zones
- Change regulations to encourage accommodation for older people in town centres
- Strengthen the right to live in rural Ireland with a new shared sites initiative

SAFE COMMUNITIES

Tackling Crime

- Increase Garda Numbers to 16,000
- Implement new Garda powers & establish “Resident Support workers” in social housing units to tackle anti-social behaviour with enhanced powers including eviction
- Legislate to allow Gardaí to seize and destroy scrambler & quad bikes on suspicion of anti-social behaviour
- Establish a dedicated public transport Garda section
- Fund a “Brighter Streets” campaign to improve public lighting in each local authority
- Expand Local Drug Taskforces
- Set up community policing teams in each area linked to local authorities
- Establish Community Safety Fora in every part of the country
- Establish a €10m community fund to tackle gang violence

BALANCED GROWTH

Saving Irish Towns

- Set up Town Teams to revitalise town and village centres
- Reform and expand the Town and Village Renewal Scheme
- Introduce Commercial Rate relief for rural businesses
- Launch a National Mobile Phone Blackspot project
- Establish Digital Development Offices in each Local Authority area
- Set up One Stop Shops to allow above shop units to be converted into accommodation
- Protect the Post Office Network
- Restore the 4th Western Brigade to ensure a balanced national defence service

Ensuring local taxes deliver local services

- Ensure no overall Local Property Tax increases
- Expand Local Property Tax deferrals for elderly and low-income households
- Maintain local discretion over the LPT rate at 15%
- Introduce Property tax relief for people paying management fees
- Reinvest the Local Property Tax in the local area

CLEAN, GREEN COMMUNITIES

Addressing Climate Change

- Create a competitive Local Environmental Innovation Fund to finance community groups and businesses with a green focus
- Focus on delivering the 119 targeted actions in the National Biodiversity Plan
- Initiate a Bio-Diversity fund to protect our natural heritage
- Launch a Trees in Towns campaign to increase the number of trees in every town
- Region and Social proof our environmental policies
- Launch a national Housing retro fit programme funded by ring-fencing carbon taxes
- Set up a Circular Economy Taskforce in each Local Authority
- Establish an open anti-litter fund to tackle illegal dumping & street litter
- Allow Local Authorities to implement Car Free zone days
- Roll out the Green Dog Walking camping in each Local Authority

VIBRANT & INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Support Local Sports clubs and Community Groups

- Establish an annualised Local Authority Sports Capital Grant in each Local Authority with ring-fenced development levy and LPT revenue
- Expand the Large-Scale Sports Infrastructure Fund to €25m per annum to build more swimming pools across the country
- Commit to a €50m per annum Greenways Initiative Investment
- Create a €10m per annum Playground Building fund for Local Authorities
- Establish a state fund to provide insurance for community groups and festivals

Creating a vibrant local cultural scene

- Ensure every child automatically gets a local Library card on the first day at school
- Expand the Public Piano initiative to all major Bus and Rail stations
- Expand Library opening hours and create “Makers Spaces” with 3D printing facilities
- Remove the €2,555,000 cap on the Percent for Art scheme
- Establish a Local Authority Art Studio spaces scheme utilising vacant units
- Set up a nationwide summer Art Camp programme under Local Authorities

Making Local Government work for you

- Establish Town Councils & a new voluntary community council model
- Introduce Directly Elected Mayors with clear powers
- Revamp the development levy system to assist local sports clubs
- Establish a Community Asset Fund to operate community assets
- Create a Community Right to purchase state land
- Re-establish Údarás Na Gaeltachta elections

Ensuring equality for all from the local level up

- Increase funding for childcare facilities in the community
- Put older people at the heart of their community
- Appoint an Electoral Commission to increase the number of female candidates in local elections with a view to introducing gender quotas and increasing diversity of candidates for Local Elections
- Require Local Authorities to set gender targets in board appointments
- Implement a National LGBTQI Sexual health strategy
- Ensure every school participates in the Local Youth Council/ Comhairle na nÓg Scheme
- Implement a new contract for independent living for people with a disability

KEEPING COMMUNITIES MOVING

Investing in good roads and effective public transport

- Increase roads maintenance funding by €175m per annum
- Make Public Transport more reliable, affordable and attractive
- Reform the NTA to enhance and ensure local consultation
- Launch a new €55m National cycle way strategy
- Establish a new National Infrastructure Commission
- Expand the role of the C&AG on infrastructure spending oversight
- Undertake simple steps to relieve traffic congestion

Supporting Social Homes & Affordable Home Ownership

Building Social & Affordable Homes

MAIN PROPOSALS

We will:

- Double House building to 40,000 units per annum
- Increase Local Authority resources to build 50,000 social homes by 2024
- Cut red tape on Local Authorities to build more homes
- Undertake a “Housing first” approach to tackle homelessness
- Build 50,000 new affordable homes by 2024
- Help first time buyers by reforming the tax and planning system for REITs (Cuckoo Funds)
- Launch a new Tenant Purchase scheme
- Build a new deal for Tenants and Landlords
- Strengthen the right to live in rural Ireland
- Create a new specialised Planning Court to accelerate decisions
- Enable downsizing by choice

DOUBLE HOUSE BUILDING TO 40,000 UNITS PER ANNUM

Just over 18,000 homes were built in 2018. Re-Building Ireland’s targets fall far short of what is needed to grapple with the housing crisis. With the population rising by 60,000 per annum and household sizes falling, we need to double the amount of homes we build to meet demand and achieve genuinely affordable prices.

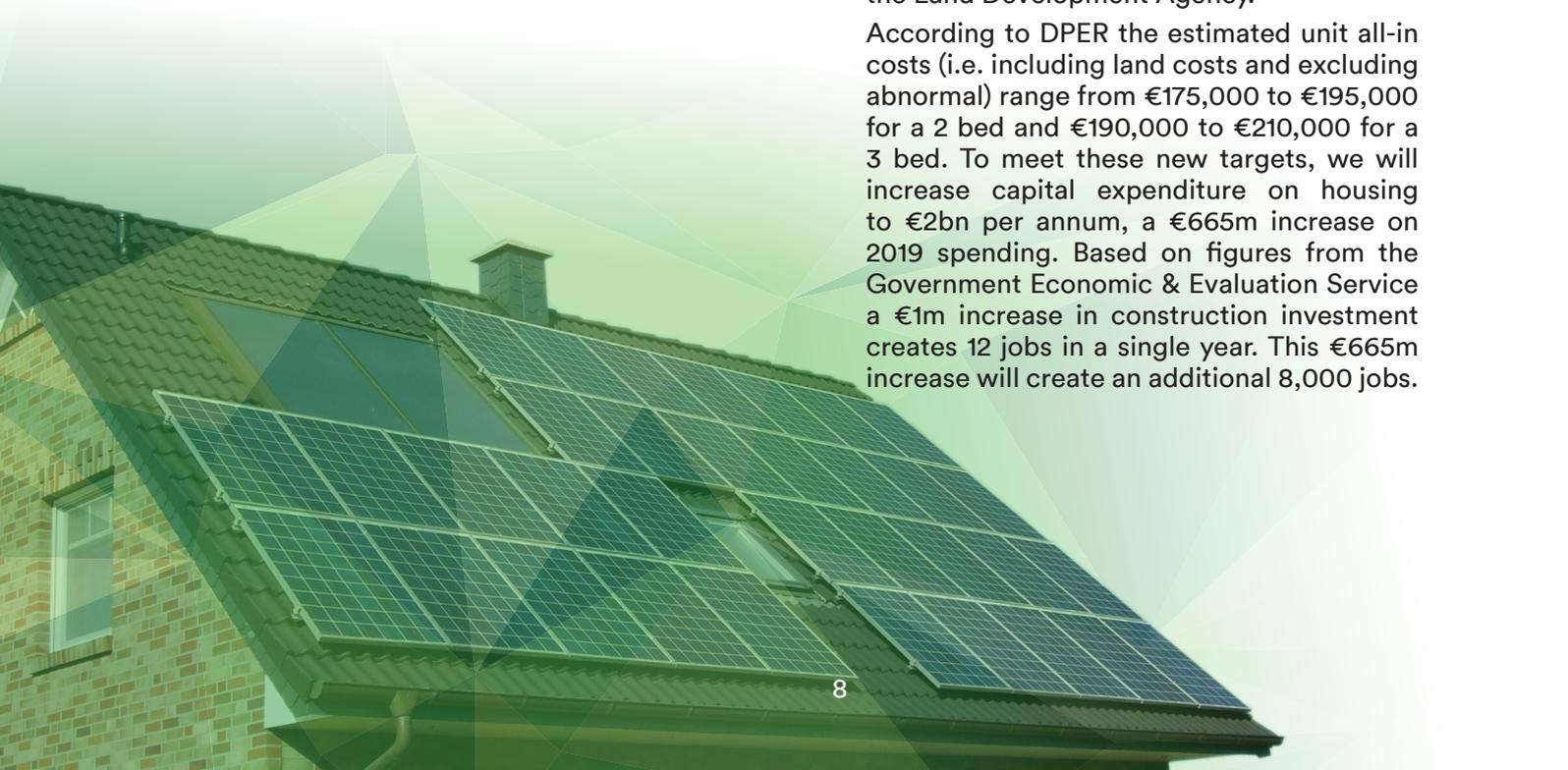
Half of these 40,000 homes per annum will be social and affordable units. We will ensure local authorities’ plans reflect new, ambitious aims for home building across the country.

INCREASE LOCAL AUTHORITY RESOURCES & DISCRETION TO MEET 200,000 NEW HOMES TARGET INCLUDING 50,000 NEW SOCIAL HOUSING UNITS BY 2024

There is currently sufficient local authority owned land zoned for over 38,000 units. Capital funding has already been tripled under Fianna Fáil pressure since 2016 but much more needs to be done.

We will set up a €100m rolling fund for Local Authorities to procure additional land in cities to ensure there is an adequate supply of appropriate land for future development. This will be co-ordinated with the Land Development Agency.

According to DPER the estimated unit all-in costs (i.e. including land costs and excluding abnormal) range from €175,000 to €195,000 for a 2 bed and €190,000 to €210,000 for a 3 bed. To meet these new targets, we will increase capital expenditure on housing to €2bn per annum, a €665m increase on 2019 spending. Based on figures from the Government Economic & Evaluation Service a €1m increase in construction investment creates 12 jobs in a single year. This €665m increase will create an additional 8,000 jobs.



CUT RED TAPE ON LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO BUILD MORE HOMES

Excessive red tape is frustrating local authorities who want to build more direct homes. Issues like Departmental procedures are constraining the ability of councils to put bricks and mortar in the ground. We will double the discretion spending thresholds to €12m for local authorities. This will reduce red tape and free up councils to get building. We will also utilise the Land Development Agency (LDA) to help unlock appropriate Local Authority sites for development.

UNDERTAKE A “HOUSING FIRST” APPROACH TO TACKLE HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is a national scandal that is a scar on our country’s streets. We cannot allow a desensitised complacency to seep into our view of the plight of homeless families. Instead, we need to be much more ambitious in getting to grips with the crisis. Fine Gael have become so defensive about their housing plan and they keep saying ‘the plan is working’. It clearly isn’t. We will prioritise a Housing First approach drawing on the successful model in Finland and utilising our ramped up social housing targets to address this crisis.

BUILD 50,000 NEW AFFORDABLE HOMES BY 2024

Fianna Fáil believes that home ownership is good for families and good for communities. Our policy will be focused on increasing supply with 200,000 new homes including 40,000 more affordable homes for average income workers. We will ensure the rapid implementation and expansion of the Affordable Home scheme up to 2024. This will be significantly increased with a €2bn fund, some €1.7bn above current commitments over five years and will operate in conjunction with the new Land Development Agency and expanded Part V.

HELP FIRST TIME BUYERS BY REFORMING THE TAX AND PLANNING SYSTEM FOR REITS (CUCKOO FUNDS)

The proliferation of REITs snapping up whole estates and apartment blocks is creating an unprecedented level of competition for first time buyers. Some 3,000 homes were purchased by REIT, a total investment of €1.1bn. REIT enjoys preferential tax treatment since 2013. These large-scale purchases predominantly concentrated in Dublin are effectively pushing first time buyers out of contention for new properties.

The tax framework facilitating this growing trend needs to be fundamentally changed and overhauled with a view to protecting first time buyers and balanced communities. In addition, the planning system should be empowered to ensure that no single buyer can bulk purchase entire developments. A large amount of each development should be zoned for individual purchases. We will:

- Initiate a comprehensive review of REIT’s tax arrangements and implement its recommendations.
- Amend the Planning & Development Act to earmark zoned lands and planning permissions for single unit purchasers.

RESTORE PART V IN FULL

Fianna Fáil supports the principle of fully retaining Part V as a major source of future housing supply and plays an important role in building sustainable communities. Local Authorities should have the power to decide the appropriate nature of the mix based on local considerations, but it should be kept to a minimum of 20%. We will:

- Restore Part V to 20%.
- Create Part V teams in each local authority drawing from the housing and planning sections to ensure a coherent approach. The teams will bring together developers and housing associations to ensure safe design, location, timelines and transfer issues are acceptable.
- Part V can yield up to 12,000 new units over 5 years if the target of 100,000 new private units, of which 60,000 will qualify under Part V criteria, is accomplished. The €10bn social housing programme will be used to purchase these units at cost price.

LAUNCH A NEW TENANT PURCHASE SCHEME

Local Authority Tenants should have a clear path to own their own home. Over decades this has transferred wealth to low income families and allowed them greater financial security. Fine Gael's retreat from this policy risks alienating hard working families and increasing social divides in communities across the country.

A new ambitious tenant purchase scheme with the dividends earmarked for further investment in the social housing stock will help to diversify tenure mix in local authority estates and provides funds for investment in existing and expanding stock. Data from the NESC shows that previous Right to Buy schemes such as over the 2001-2003 period had, per annum, an average of 3,785 homes purchased or 4.3% of the stock per annum as drawn from the 2002 census data.

Extrapolating such a rate to the current 130,000 local authority units some 5,590 units would be sold per annum. Clawback mechanisms will be maintained to ensure properties are not subsequently sold off at a loss to the local authority.

- We will establish a new Local Authority Tenant Purchase scheme with discounts of up to 60%. The income threshold will be reduced to €10,000 per annum with individuals with savings or family support eligible to apply.

BUILD A NEW DEAL FOR TENANTS AND LANDLORDS

A healthy rental market needs affordable prices for renters and a fair return for landlords. The balance between tenants' rights and responsibilities must be clear and stable to allow for certainty in investment. The state should roll out a national investment programme for affordable rent scheme with local authorities and AHBs. Greater steps are needed to protect neighbourhoods from rogue tenants who engage in anti-social behaviour. We will

- Retain and strengthen Rent Pressure Zones.
- Allow the Local Property Tax as a deductible expense.
- Create a National Rent Deposit Scheme.
- Roll out a national Affordable Rent Scheme.
- Strengthen the complaints system and penalties for rogue tenants including eviction in extreme cases.
- Create a rogue tenant's database.

ALLOW OWNER MANAGEMENT COMPANY MEMBERS TO REDUCE THEIR LOCAL PROPERTY TAX BILL

The local property tax was established to fund services such as maintaining public lighting, roads and paths, grounds keeping and managing public parking. However, management fees in Owner Management Companies are now going towards many of these services, which mean that some homeowners are paying on the double.

We will introduce a partial reduction in the local property tax equal to one-third of the management fee, one-third of the local property tax, or €300, whichever is the lower amount. Under the proposed legislation, nobody would ever gain more than €300. There are over 75,000 apartments in Dublin city and over 200,000 across the country which will benefit from this measure.

ESTABLISH AN OMBUDSMAN FOR OWNER MANAGEMENT COMPANIES

Owner Management Companies are operated by volunteer directors who freely give their time to help their developments become a welcome place to live. However, they are governed by a dense web of law and require additional government assistance to ensure they are run properly and reach their full potential. We will appoint an Ombudsman for such companies who will be based within the Property Services Regulatory Authority. We estimate a running cost of €500,000 per annum.

ENABLE DOWNSIZING BY CHOICE

There is an acute shortage of family homes, particularly in the Dublin area. Many older couples whose families have grown up and moved out would consider selling three or four bed family homes which are possibly too big for their current needs and trading down to a smaller house or apartment. The key issue is to give older people a viable choice. We will:

- Introduce Incentives to persons who wish to trade down in such circumstances namely:
 - Exempt the seller from stamp duty on the purchase of a new home subject to set maximums in terms of size and value.
 - Exempt the seller from Local Property Tax on their new home for a period of five years.

STRENGTHEN THE RIGHT TO LIVE IN RURAL IRELAND

Rural Ireland cannot be left behind in the future of home building. Local people have the right to own a home in their community and raise their family there. Fianna Fáil is committed to defending local people's right to build and own their own home in their own community on a sustainable basis.

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

A new shared sites initiative will provide land in each local area for people who contribute to the local area to build their own homes. In addition, where social housing or affordable housing list recipients can also access appropriate rural sites owned by the local authority for minimal cost if they can prove they can afford to build on the site.

CREATE A NEW SPECIALISED PLANNING COURT TO ACCELERATE BUILDING DECISIONS

Long drawn out planning process and judicial reviews are delaying decision making on new buildings. We can tackle that bottleneck by creating a new specialised planning court that focuses on land and environmental issues. Drawing from the example of the Land and Environmental Court in New South Wales, Australia, it will cut down waiting times in critical legal and planning decisions. ■

Safe Communities

Tackling Crime

MAIN PROPOSALS

We will:

- Increase Garda numbers to 16,000
- Set up community policing teams in each area linked to local authorities
- Fund a “Brighter Streets” campaign to improve public lighting in each local authority
- Empower Gardaí to seize and destroy scrambler & quad bikes on suspicion of anti-social behaviour
- Set out new Garda powers and Resident Support Workers to tackle anti-social behaviour
- Establish a dedicated public transport police
- Strengthen powers to evict tenants for extreme anti-social behaviour
- Impose mandatory sentences for knife crime & assaults on older people
- Expand Local Drug Taskforces
- Roll out a €10m community fund to tackle gang violence
- Establish Community Safety Fora in every part of the country

INCREASE GARDA NUMBERS TO 16,000

Boosting Garda numbers is vital to ensuring families are safe in their homes and communities. Additional Gardaí will allow extra resources to be directed towards critical areas such as Community Gardaí and the Traffic corp. This will include a dedicated public transport policing section. In tandem with fundamental internal reform of the Gardaí in light of the series of demoralising scandals fresh numbers will play an important part in renewing the force at a critical time.

- We will increase Garda numbers from current levels of 14,160 to 16,000. In addition, the Garda Training funding will be increased to €20m.

EMPOWER GARDAÍ TO SEIZE AND DESTROY SCRAMBLER & QUAD BIKES

The scourge of loud, intimidating scramblers and quad bikes on public roads and parks are destroying the quality of life in many estates throughout the country. Gardaí require additional targeted powers to get to grips with the spread of this deeply frustrating activity.

- We will implement recently published legislation to allow Gardaí to compulsorily seize and ultimately destroy scrambler bikes and quads on suspicion of anti-social behaviour.

SET UP COMMUNITY POLICING TEAMS ACROSS IRELAND

On the ground policing is the most effective way of preventing crime. Building strong, enduring connections with local areas is an integral part of the strength of An Garda Síochána. A new community policing team structure is a positive step in that direction.

- We will set up teams that will lead the way in ensuring community policing lies at the heart of An Garda Síochána’s strategy to protect the public.

ESTABLISH COMMUNITY SAFETY FORA IN EVERY PART OF THE COUNTRY

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

- We will establish a community safety forum in every District comprising local Gardaí, local communities and other relevant stakeholders including the new Town Teams and restored Town Councils.

ESTABLISH A NEW €10M COMMUNITY FUND TO TACKLE GANG VIOLENCE

Equipping community groups to tackle the underlying factors driving on gang violence is a proven effective method to reduce crime rates. In disadvantaged areas local groups with an on the ground knowledge committed to improving their home area is key in addressing deep rooted causes of violence.

- We will establish a €10m fund to ensure community groups are given sufficient resources to work in affected communities.

IMPOSE MANDATORY SENTENCES FOR KNIFE CRIME AND ASSAULTS ON OLDER PEOPLE

Certain crimes are particularly dangerous to the community and need to be stamped out. Fianna Fáil will take a strong approach to tackling the scourge of knife crime and attacks on older people by imposing mandatory sentences. This will send a clear message that these crimes will not be tolerated.

EXPAND RESOURCES TO LOCAL DRUG TASKFORCES

The scourge of drug abuse is a problem throughout the country. Local and Regional Drug Taskforces need to be adequately resourced in order to rise to the growing challenge. Fianna Fáil will ensure these bodies are equipped to address serious drug issues in their areas with an increased Garda role.

NEW GARDA POWERS AND “RESIDENT SUPPORT WORKERS” TO TACKLE ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Too many homes and communities live in the shadow of intimidation. Anti-social behaviour by a minority damages the whole community. We will give increased powers to An Garda Síochána to deal with antisocial behaviour including new “Public Space Protection Orders”, “Disperse Orders” and “Community Protection Orders”.

- We will also establish the role of “Resident Support Worker”: a person living in an area employed by the Local Authority with a number of powers to assist in the battle against antisocial behaviour.

STRENGTHEN POWERS TO EVICT TENANTS FOR EXTREME ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

A tiny minority of tenants can inflict massive hardship and frustration for an entire community. Fianna Fáil has introduced legislation to allow anyone to make a complaint about anti-social behaviour by a tenant. We believe that tenants should be expected to maintain a basic upkeep of the exterior of the house to avoid it and the surrounding neighbourhood being ruined by unsightly rubbish. In extreme cases the Residential Tenancies Board will be empowered to terminate tenancies.

FUND A “BRIGHTER STREETS” CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE P UBLIC LIGHTING IN EACH LOCAL AUTHORITY

Many bus stops, train stations and streets have inadequate lighting that discourages people from using them at night. Local Authorities must take their responsibilities in this area seriously and ensure streets and key public transport points are properly illuminated. We will allocate funding to Local Authorities to correct known blackspots in their localities. ■



Balanced Growth

Sustaining Irish Towns

MAIN PROPOSALS

We will:

- **Deliver High Speed Universal fibre to the Home Broadband**
- **Launch a National Mobile Phone Blackspot project**
- **Establish Digital Development Offices in each Local Authority area**
- **Launch Local Digital Strategies in each Local Authority area**
- **Set regional targets for employment**
- **Set up Town Teams and revitalise town and village centres**
- **Reform and expand the Town and Village Renewal Scheme**
- **Introduce Commercial Rate relief for rural businesses**
- **Set up a new specialist IDA, Enterprise unit for rural towns**
- **Protect the Post Office Network**
- **Restore the 4th Western Brigade to ensure we have a nationally balanced defence service**

DELIVER HIGH SPEED UNIVERSAL FIBRE TO THE HOME BROADBAND BROADBAND

The delays and controversies that have hit the National Broadband Plan cannot be allowed to fatally undermine its ultimate delivery. Bridging the digital divide is vital to ensuring all parts of the country benefit from economic growth.

Following the withdrawal of key bidders, the viability for the government approach should have been fundamentally re-assessed. Fianna Fáil will ensure the NDP is delivered and universal fibre optic to the home is rolled out. We will support the roll out of fibre optic broadband directly to all premises in the state through commercial operators and direct state intervention.

LAUNCH A NATIONAL MOBILE PHONE BLACKSPOT PROJECT

Endemic problems with mobile phone coverage have frustrated businesses and families have rural Ireland for years. The government has yet to fully implement the forty recommendations set out by the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to boost mobile phone coverage across the country. It is a vital missing piece in the social infrastructure of a modern community.

- We will roll out a national mobile phone blackspot project building on the pilot project currently in Donegal.

ESTABLISH DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICES IN EACH LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA

Digital Development is essential to future economic growth. We will establish Digital Development Offices in every Local Authority and implement a Local Digital Growth strategy. The role of Broadband officer should be retained and expanded in each county with a new Digital Development office. This office will be tasked with ensuring adequate access to digital technology in the area and implementing Local Digital Growth strategies.

DEVELOP REGIONAL DIGITAL HUBS

The Digital Hub Development Agency (DHDA) has been a success in terms of job creation and promotion of digital related learning and training opportunities. Since its establishment in 2003 it has provided flexible office space and business support services to growing technology companies in Dublin. We will:

- Build on the success of the DHDA by engaging with local authorities to ensure that rural Ireland also benefits from the development of the digital sector.
- Provide up to €1m of funding to each local authority. This will support entrepreneurship throughout the country and enable tomorrow's entrepreneurs to grow businesses and jobs in their home county.

SET REGIONAL TARGETS FOR HIGH-VALUE AND SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT

Balanced regional employment is critical to ensuring all parts of the country share in the benefits of growth. We will:

- Set targets for sustainable employment growth and high-value jobs on a regional basis.

SET UP TOWN TEAMS AND REVITALISE TOWN AND VILLAGE CENTRES

Towns and villages are the focus of local life and need specific supports if they are going to meet their full potential. We will:

- Roll out a national Town Centre Health Check Programme & establish a national database of Town Centres.
- Establish Town teams to lead the way in revitalising towns across the country.

INCREASE FUNDING FOR THE TOWN & VILLAGE RENEWAL SCHEME

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme has been weakened by red tape and underspend. It needs to be overhauled and additional supports for investing in derelict properties put in place. We will:

- Increase the Town and Village Renewal scheme to €25m per annum and link it to the Town Teams initiative.
- Launch a new pilot renovation grant schemes for Towns and Villages should be rolled out to incentivise people to invest in their properties.

INTRODUCE COMMERCIAL RATE RELIEF FOR RURAL BUSINESSES

The Commercial Rates system is in dire need of reform. Too many businesses are sinking under the weight of a model that is stifling innovation and enterprise. We will:

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

SET UP A NEW SPECIALIST IDA, ENTERPRISE UNIT FOR RURAL INVESTMENT

Far too many communities across Ireland are neglected by the IDA. Concentrating investment in a smaller and smaller part of the country will only lead to grave regional imbalances and damage the economic and environmental sustainability of our country.

- We will set up specialist IDA/Enterprise Ireland unit focused on securing investment in rural areas.



PROTECT THE POST OFFICE NETWORK

Post Offices are an intrinsic part of a vibrant main street in every town and village. Fianna Fáil will maintain the current network, and then take meaningful action to ensure the long-term viability for An Post. This will include expanding the range of services that post offices can offer and providing a Public Service Obligation payment to post offices that comply with this including:

- State Services Hub
- Financial Services
- Multi-Use Community Centre

ENSURING LOCAL TAXES DELIVER LOCAL SERVICES

MAIN PROPOSALS

We will:

- **Ensure no overall Local Property Tax increases**
- **Expand Local Property Tax deferrals for elderly and low-income households**
- **Maintain local discretion over the LPT rate at 15%**
- **Introduce Property tax Relief for residents paying fees to Management Owner Companies**
- **Reinvest the Local Property Tax in the local area**

ENSURE NO OVERALL LOCAL PROPERTY TAX INCREASES

Fine Gael has cynically played politics with this issue by continually delaying a decision on the future reform of the charge despite receiving legal warnings from their own Attorney General. This just prolongs uncertainty, runs the risk of legal challenges and the possibility of massive hikes in the tax next year.

Instead we believe that localised rates, broken down to the smallest level using CSO statistics, should be introduced to replace the 0.18% current tax rate to reflect the increase in property values since 2013. The national overall revenue from the Local Property Tax will remain at approximately €500m.

EXPAND LOCAL PROPERTY TAX DEFERRALS FOR ELDERLY AND LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS

There are four separate categories of deferral of LPT, Income Threshold, and Personal Representative of a Deceased Person, Personal Insolvency and Hardship Grounds. In 2018 there were 58,000 claims for deferral made, nearly 56,300 of which were claims made on grounds of the income threshold. Currently there are many pensioners who have received increases in their pension payments and who could now exceed the income thresholds and will be unable to defer their LPT payments.

Deferrals can be 100 per cent or 50 per cent and they are payable later. Outstanding LPT remains a charge on the property until it is paid. Deferred LPT must be paid in full if the property is sold or transferred to another person. The interest charged on the deferred amount is currently set at 4 per cent per annum. Fianna Fáil believes this is an excessive interest charge considering the financial hardship that many people who qualify for the deferral are experiencing.

We will reduce the LPT interest rate to 2 per cent and introduce a 20% increase in the income thresholds for full and partial deferral of LPT liability.

MAINTAIN LOCAL DISCRETION OVER THE LPT RATE AT 15%

Local Authorities are struggling to make ends meet since Fine Gael slashed the local government grant. Not every authority can afford to reduce the LPT rate by 15% as a result and a number have increased it to fund projects. We believe that local representatives are best placed to know what their local communities need.

INTRODUCE LOCAL PROPERTY TAX RELIEF FOR RESIDENTS PAYING MANAGEMENT FEES

Management fees pay for some of the services that the Local Authority would otherwise provide, including keeping the grounds, maintaining the roads and paths, maintaining public lighting and managing public parking. The Local Property Tax was established to fund those services. This means some home owners are paying for the same thing on the double. Drawing on CSO statistics the average reduction would be around €86 across over 200,000 units and would cost the state around €17.5m a year. This is about ensuring we have a fair property tax system where nobody pays on the double for the same services.

We believe there should be a recognition that people are paying on the double, and to that end we propose a partial reduction in the local property tax equal to one third of the management fee, one third of the local property tax, or €300, whichever is the lower amount.

REINVEST THE LOCAL PROPERTY TAX IN THE LOCAL AREA

Finance is the litmus test of a truly independent and strong local government system. The government introduced a local property tax claiming it was to fund local services. In reality it was siphoned off to fund the setup and running of the Irish Water and to cover over the drastic reductions in the local government grant. Flexibility and discretion is needed to ensure local people have a real say to make sure money raised locally is spent locally.

We will ensure that local authorities are empowered to consult local people on where a certain amount of local money is spent. This would mean that a new participatory budgeting mechanism would operate operating through community and Town councils. ■

Clean, Green Communities

Addressing Climate Change at a local level

MAIN PROPOSALS

We will:

- Create a competitive Local Environmental Innovation Fund to finance community groups and businesses with a green focus
- Empower Local Authorities to reduce commercial rates on businesses that meet low carbon targets
- Focus on delivering the 119 targeted actions in the National Biodiversity Plan
- Initiate a Bio-Diversity fund to protect our natural heritage
- Roll out local public climate awareness programmes
- Implement the Special Oireachtas Committee recommendations
- Fully administer Local Climate Change Action Plans
- Launch a Trees in Towns campaign to increase the number of trees in every town and village
- Establish a National Infrastructure Commission
- Region and Social proof our environmental policies
- Launch a national Housing retro fit programme
- Introduce a bottle deposit scheme and move towards banning non-recyclable single use plastics
- Set up an open anti-litter fund to tackle illegal dumping & street litter
- Increase fines for littering and expand the number of litter wardens
- Allow Local Authorities to implement Car Free zones
- Launch a new €55m National cycle ways strategy
- Earmark funding for cycle lane maintenance and clean up
- Allow Local Authorities to issue grant support and guidance on micro-energy generation
- Roll out the Green Dog Walking campaign in each Local Authority
- Alter grid rules to allow homeowners, schools and businesses to sell renewable energy to the grid
- Ensure fair and transparent planning & community benefit over windfarm, solar and other renewable energy projects

Climate Change is the most pressing challenge facing the globe. The actions we take now to address this existential crisis will define our legacy to future generations. Fianna Fáil supports the implementation of the Special Oireachtas Committee recommendations in achieving a major shift in our climate change policy. We need to lead with decisive, committed and innovative policy shifts to reduce our carbon dependence and create a greener island.

Local Authorities through their climate action plans and in co-operation with the government have an important part to play in this process. A major retrofit programme for social housing should be led by Local Authorities.

A National Infrastructure Commission should be established to fully co-ordinate decarbonisation and assist Local Authorities in implementing their own individual plans.

Local Authorities should be given more flexibility to incentive local efforts to decarbonise. A new competitive environmental innovation fund open to both Local Authorities and community groups will help to finance new ideas to tackle climate change.

Flexibility over commercial rates and county climate change action plans will allow each area space to innovate and promote climate friendly policies.

Ireland has a beautiful countryside that we have a duty to maintain and protect. Keeping clean streets and a pristine countryside is an important duty of Local Authorities. Ramped up fines, litter wardens and a new fund to support innovative ways to reduce littering will be crucial to ensuring we protect our country from being spoiled.

Funding for new anti-litter campaigns will be allocated to a competitive pot for any group or local authority to apply to. Fianna Fáil Councillors will focus resources on ensuring Green Dog walking campaign is rolled out in each local authority area.

Your local, national and EU Fianna Fail teams are committed to working together to implement these 20 pledges on climate change and much more. ■

Vibrant & Inclusive Communities

Helping Local Sports Clubs and Community Groups

MAIN PROPOSALS

We will:

- Establish an annualised Local Authority Sports Capital Grant in each Local Authority with ring-fenced development levy and LPT revenue
- Establish a Community Asset Fund to own & run community assets
- Create a Community ability to reclaim unused state land
- Establish a state fund to provide insurance for community groups & festivals
- Launch a revamped development levy system where major construction projects should integrate a contribution to local sports clubs such a land or monetary contributions
- Expand the large-scale infrastructure fund with a €25m allocation per annum to build more swimming pools
- Allocate €50m per annum to a revamped national Greenways Initiative
- Create a €10m per annum Playground Building fund for Local Authorities

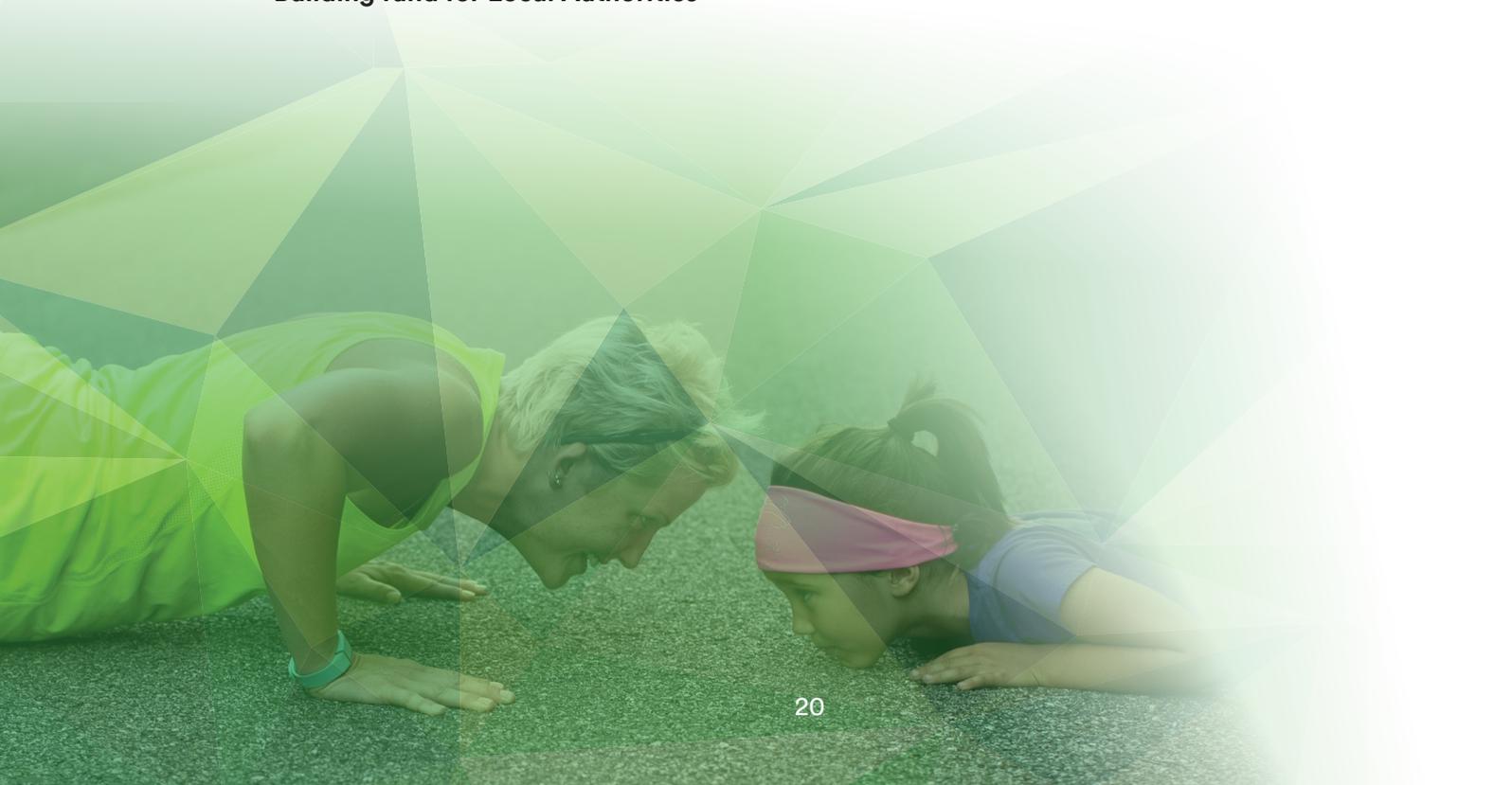
Sports clubs and community groups are the lifeblood of Irish life across the country. The spirit of volunteerism that inspires so many people to spend time as coaches, directors and a wide host of other roles is the glue that keeps our communities together. The government has a clear role to play in helping and assisting local authorities to assist those people to ensure clubs reach their full potential and positively impact as many people as possible.

Additional funding, with new laws would allow communities to get the first option of buying key local assets and recognition in the planning system will help to give local clubs a real boost. Fianna Fáil is committed to fully supporting these groups to allow them to flourish and continue to play a central role in Irish life into the future.

Increasing funding for sports capital grants to clubs and community groups will help to open up sports to more and more people.

In addition, large scale funding for sports halls and swimming pools will help to expand sports participation across the country.

Insurance is a growing issue for many community groups and local festivals. The government should step up with a state led insurance fund to ensure these vital strands in local life can flourish into the future.



CREATING A VIBRANT LOCAL ARTS & CULTURE SCENE

MAIN PROPOSALS

We will:

- **Establish a Local Authority Art Studio spaces scheme utilising vacant units in towns and villages**
- **Expand the Public Piano Initiative to all major transport hubs**
- **Set up a nationwide summer Art Camp programme under the Arts Council and Local Authorities**
- **Ensure every child automatically gets a local Library card when they start school**
- **Create a new fund to support new services in local libraries such as 3D technology “Makers Spaces” and expanded opening hours**
- **Ensure that Local Authorities implement a local arts action plan which benefits local communities and local artists**
- **Remove the €2,555,000 cap on the Percent for Art scheme.**
- **Utilising Local Authorities to promote pop up Gaeltacht’s and promoting the national language in all their services**
- **Ensure each local authority has a full time Irish language officer and that new housing developments are given appropriate local Irish names**

Ireland has a proud artistic and cultural heritage that we need to cherish and foster. Local Authorities have an important role to play in cultivating and supporting local artistic and cultural groups.

A clear local arts action plan, expanding art studio spaces, ensuring every child has access to a library, a new summer art camp scheme and fully embracing our national language are all key objectives for Fianna Fail.

In addition, we should increase the artistic aspect of our capital investment plan to promote commissioning new art works across the country. Our councillors will work to ensure that a vibrant arts and cultural scene is at the heart of every community across Ireland.

Our library network forms a vibrant base for learning and cultural enrichment across Ireland. We should draw on those strengths and ensure that libraries continue to play a central role in Irish life into the future with a few simple but effective measures. We will ensure every child gets a library card when they start school and expand library opening hours and facilities with new 3D printing technology that will encourage a new wave of library users.

Our national language is an invaluable cultural asset that must be actively cherished and promoted. Local Authorities have an important role to play in maintaining the integrity of place names, utilising Irish language officers and putting forward new ways to use and enjoy the language.

MAKING LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORK FOR YOU

MAIN PROPOSALS

We will:

- **Establish Town Councils & a new voluntary community council model**
- **Protect and promote local journalism by reforming the license fee and funding bursaries**
- **Re-establish Údarás Na Gaeltachta elections**
- **Allow local people to re-invest the Local Property Tax**
- **Introduce Directly Elected Mayors**
- **Revamp the development levy system to assist local sports clubs**
- **Establish a Community Asset Fund to operate community assets**
- **Create a community ability to reclaim land**

In recent years local democracy in Ireland has been systemically weakened by Fine Gael and our country now has one of the weakest systems of local government in Europe. The financial resources, powers and services of local authorities have been systematically whittled away.

This is critically undermining the first tier of democracy in the state and further distancing local people from local decision making. We believe that a series of actions are required to empower local people to be involved in community development. This is a core part of our plans to build vibrant, inclusive communities across the country.

A new local government structure with directly mayors, re-established town councils and a new community council system will be at the core of a local government system that delivers for communities. In addition, new powers over taxes and development will ensure it can play a positive role in communities.

Allowing communities to take over underused state lands and buy assets will give local people a greater say over local infrastructure. This power will help people to shape their home area as they see fit.

In addition, we will launch a series of investments in the local media sector to ensure citizens can continue to access quality local news and journalism that is vital to local democracy and communities.

PUTTING OLDER PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF COMMUNITIES

MAIN PROPOSALS

We will:

- **Incentivise the creation of specialised accommodation for older people in town centres by amending Part V to encompass specialised older people accommodation**
- **Fully restore Housing Adaptation grants**
- **Tackle loneliness amongst older people**
- **Establish a local Social Enterprise fund for older people**

Local Authorities must help to ensure that older members of the community can play a meaningful role in it. Age should not be a fundamental barrier to a thriving life.

From housing rights to financial assistance to targeted funds Local Authorities will be tasked with ensuring that older people can live safely at their heart of their communities in their homes for as long as possible.

A CONTRACT FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

MAIN PROPOSALS

We will:

- **Publish an implementation plan for rights of persons with a disability**
- **Ensure that adequate provision for people with a disability is made in new social housing units**
- **Implement key recommendations from the “Accessibility of Public Transport for People with Disabilities” report**
- **Support the building of accessible infrastructure**
- **Ensure ETBs promote and encourage engagement with people with a disability**
- **Support local disability groups to participate in local decision-making processes**
- **Expand the Autism Friendly towns initiative nationwide**

A key goal for Fianna Fail at local and national level is ensuring people with a disability are empowered to take their place at the heart of the community. From implementing a comprehensive change to physical infrastructure to political changes it is vital that independent living is placed at the heart of overall policy.

Building sufficient accessible housing should be central to housing construction. Creating an accessible infrastructure such as playgrounds and sports clubs etc. must also be a core component of future construction.

People with a disability will also be equipped to play a greater role in local decision-making drawing on the implementation of the UN Convention on the rights of persons with a disability.

Fianna Fáil will work to ensure that people with a disability are fully empowered to live independently.

ENSURING EQUALITY FOR ALL FROM THE LOCAL LEVEL UP

MAIN PROPOSALS

We will:

- **Increase funding for childcare infrastructure in the community**
- **Appoint an Electoral Commission to increase the number of female candidates in local elections with a view to introducing gender quotas and increasing candidate diversity**
- **Expand the cash incentives for parties to enable more women to become involved in local politics**
- **Require Local Authorities to set gender targets in board appointments**
- **Implement a National LGBTQI Sexual health strategy**
- **Support female participation in sports**

- **Introduce financial penalties for organisations funded by the taxpayer that fail to operate gender equality in terms of employment practices**
- **Establish a new agency for Traveller accommodation**
- **Initiate further steps to encourage immigrant participation in local democracy**
- **Ensure every school participates in the Local Youth Council/ Comhairle na nÓg Scheme**

As a republican party, a commitment to fighting discrimination in all forms is a core value for Fianna Fáil. We want to create a republic which is founded on the equality and dignity of every citizen. Equality should start from the ground up with a systematic engagement in tackling gender imbalances and barriers to full participation in community for all groups.

Local Authorities can act as a building block in full participation in the political process as well as an important forum in key local decision making. Encouraging immigrants to play a greater part in their community is vital to integration which has to start at a local level.

While Travellers were rightly recognised as an indigenous ethnic group in March 2017, they still face many challenges accessing suitable sites, houses and other services across the country. The accommodation crisis affecting the Traveller community is dire. We need a new agency committed to tackling the crisis head on and ensuring money is actually spent on suitable accommodation sites.

Inadequate childcare provision is a key impediment to women fully participating in the work place. We will increase funding for additional childcare places by ramping up investment in community childcare facilities. We will also commit to reducing commercial rates for child care centres as insurance costs are actually jeopardising some of the centres from operating. ■

Keeping Communities Moving

Investing in good roads and effective public transport

MAIN PROPOSALS

We will:

- **Increase Roads maintenance by €175m**
- **Establish a new National Infrastructure Commission**
- **Expanding the role of the C&AG on infrastructure spending oversight**
- **Make Public Transport more reliable, affordable and attractive**
- **Allow Local Authorities to implement Car Free Street days**
- **Commit to a new €55m National cycle ways strategy**

Across the country too many roads are in dreadful condition. The public transport system is creaking under the pressure of growing numbers and insufficient state support. We need to bring our road network up to standard after years of inadequate funding by the state. Public transport links must be strengthened through both long-term capital investment guided by a National Infrastructure Commission but also an appropriate Public Service Obligation (PSO) to ensure it can deliver the services commuters need.

Local Authorities must take the lead in creating a safe environment for cycling and walking to build up liveable streets for all the community. We will empower Local Authorities to introduce car free zone days where they deem it appropriate and additional recourse to invest in segregated, safe cycle lanes.

In addition, a number of simple measures to help address congestion can be quickly undertaken such as:

- **Promote Off Peak Travel.** Vehicles using an e-tag should be rewarded for undertaking their journeys at off-peak times rather than at peak times via an annual tax credit. Employers should be given a PRSI reduction for allowing workers to use flexitime in starting/finishing work at off-peak travel times, if they so choose.
- **Smarter Planning:** Any construction/road works or resurfacing should have to take into account effects on traffic volumes etc. and as a rule should be done at off-peak times and summer periods.
- **Information Systems:** Traffic accidents are costly not only for the direct damage they cause but also for the congestion they produce. There is a need to enhance information signalling of accidents to motorists to prevent traffic escalation. We should introduce a national accident signalling system.
- **Revise Ireland's legislation to support carpooling:** Irish legislation effectively prevents people from carpooling with colleagues. We will amend legislation to make it easier for colleagues to share lifts to work, reducing emissions and congestion.
- **Promote mixed work place starting times**
- **Boost Funding to existing Public Transport Services**
- **Pilot Bus Lanes on Motorways:** As has already been done in Northern Ireland and the UK, we will pilot using bus lanes on motorways in order to provide a more attractive journey and compete with vehicle users. We will provide Park and Ride facilities at key points on the outskirts of Dublin, so that commuters can complete their journey by bus.
- **Making Use of Port Tunnel**
- **Roll out new Park and Ride facilities** ■



FIANNA FÁIL
AN PAIRTÍ POBLAHTÁNACH