


LOCAL STRENGTH
National Recovery



Local Strength, National Recovery

Fine Gael's Local Election Manifesto 2009



Message from Enda Kenny TD

Message from Phil Hogan TD

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Enda Kenny TD, Fine Gael Leader

Guaranteed Change

Fine Gael believes that Ireland can return to growth and prosperity if we have the courage and vision to change the way we run our economy and govern our country.



Ireland is facing its worst economic crisis since the foundation of the State. By Christmas, at least 500,000 people will be out of work. Across the country, anxious families are looking to Government for answers, for a sense that it has a plan to get things moving again. So far, the Fianna Fáil Government's only answer has been to make ordinary people pay the price for its many failures.


Above all Ireland needs a Government that is not afraid of new ideas, and is willing to embrace radical change. Fine Gael can and does embrace change. We are not offering instant, easy solutions to Ireland's many problems. But we do have a bold, ambitious plan, which will also strengthen local democracy, to get Ireland growing again.

Fine Gael's plan for Ireland is built around three elements:

1. A New Approach to Government
2. A Greener, Smarter Economy, and
3. A Fairer Ireland

A New Approach to Government

Over the last ten years, the Government has thrown money at every problem in the public sector, without making any real change to the way the system works. Billions are wasted, even as services for the most vulnerable are cut, and taxpayers are hammered by additional charges and levies.




Fine Gael's approach is very different. We know that no country has ever taxed itself out of recession. Instead, a Fine Gael Government will slash the costs of running the State, and introduce wide-ranging reforms to make the State both more efficient and accountable, particularly at local level:

- Fine Gael will cut the cost of running the State. We will fundamentally change the way Government works, by greatly increasing transparency and introducing incentives across the public sector to encourage greater efficiency.
- Fine Gael will strengthen Local Government, making it more efficient and accountable to local people and communities. 95 State bodies will be merged or abolished, saving millions of Euros for taxpayers every year.
- Fine Gael "NewERA" programme will transform Ireland's Semi-State sector. We will sell State companies that no longer perform a strategic role for the State, and reform and recapitalise the remaining companies, as part of a massive investment programme in a greener, smarter economy.

A Greener, Smarter Economy

The global economy is entering a third "green" industrial revolution, where the winners will be those countries that move quickly and effectively to low carbon economies, powered by clean energy. While the Government has talked a great deal about the Green Economy, real progress has been limited, and the various targets it has adopted for Renewable Energy are too cautious. Fine Gael believes that decisive action needs to be taken now. Fine Gael has developed an €11 billion strategy to rebuild our economy into a low carbon but highly competitive economy that will attract more sustainable jobs in years to come. Realising this vision for a greener, smarter economy will have the added benefit of creating 100,000 jobs over the next four years.

Fine Gael recognises that, in addition to creating new jobs in the Green Economy, it is vital that as many existing jobs as possible be protected in small businesses. For this reason Fine Gael has also published a series of proposals to support Ireland's SME sector, including a reduction in VAT rates; A freezing of Local Authority Rates; A



Loan Guarantee Scheme and a reduction in energy prices. A detailed SME Survival Package will be launched by Fine Gael during our election campaign.

A Fairer Ireland

One of the great failures of the Government over the last ten years has been its inability to create a society that is fair and just. All too often, the education you get and the healthcare you receive depends on how much money you earn. Fine Gael completely rejects the idea that society should be divided between the “haves” and the “have-nots”. In any Republic worth its name, all citizens must be treated equally.

Fine Gael’s new plan for Ireland’s healthcare system, FairCare, will slash waiting lists by imposing rigorous targets on hospitals and by building up a credible primary care system that can keep people out of hospital. By the end of its first term in Government, Fine Gael will introduce the Dutch model of Universal Health Insurance, which will ensure that everyone has health insurance and a free package of GP care.

Fine Gael’s policy on third level education rules out the return of third level fees. In order to make up the funding gap that exists in third level, graduates should contribute to the cost of their courses after they graduate for a set period of time. When fully up and running this system will raise up to €500m per annum – which will be used directly to make our third level sector better and stronger. This graduate contribution will enable us to abolish registration fees.

Local Elections

These Local Elections present an opportunity for the Irish people to signal their strong desire for change. Fine Gael over the past few months has demonstrated its vision of a new, fairer Ireland. No more will we accept more of the same that has brought our country to its knees. On June 5th a vote Fine Gael is a guarantee of change.

Phil Hogan TD

Fine Gael Spokesperson on Environment, Heritage and Local Government

Local Government should be at the heart of our democratic system. It is the system of Government that should be responsive to the needs of our people in every sense. Like every aspect of Government, reform and change is required to ensure greater accountability for taxpayer's money and 21st Century services.



Local authorities are at the heart of our local economy and Fine Gael will support policies that will enhance the prospects of local employment. We want to give power back to the people through their local elected representatives.

Fine Gael plans to reform local Government in line with three main principles:

1. Fixing the democratic deficit at local level by removing the centralised top down approach to delivery and responsibility of local services.
2. Using the strengths of local authorities to create employment.
3. Making local Government more relevant to the every day lives of our citizens.

Fine Gael has examined the various agencies and programmes that are funded at local level. We believe that many of those organisations should have their budget and structures accountable to the local authority system. This will ensure a more cohesive approach to create employment. The consolidation of agencies will result in financial savings and help put an end to unnecessary duplication of services. I strongly believe we need to restore trust, services and responsibility to local Government.

June 5th is an opportunity for the people to give power back to communities by voting for the Fine Gael candidates who will deliver real change.

1. Creating Jobs – Getting Ireland Back to Work

Background

Ireland is in the midst of an unemployment crisis. More than one out of every five workers now relies on support from the State to survive and many more are expected to join them on the dole queues as the year goes on. Yes, international influences have caused some job losses but the extent of our current crisis is directly relating to the handling of the Irish economy in recent years. Worryingly, the Government has not produced a single coherent plan to create new jobs when introducing emergency budgets to raise taxes on families. In fact since Brian Cowen became Taoiseach an additional 171,000 people have lost their jobs.

Fine Gael firmly believes that Ireland needs to start over again in order to lay the foundations for future economic and employment growth. Fine Gael did it before and we must do it again. We must rebuild Ireland into a modern, efficient, and competitive economy that can attract world class jobs while allowing our own businesses to survive and thrive.

Fine Gael has this plan: The Rebuilding Ireland Strategy

Fine Gael's Rebuilding Ireland Strategy will:

1. Lay the foundations for future long term economic and employment growth by investing in key infrastructure, such as communications and energy, which will make the Irish economy one of the most competitive in Europe again.
2. Provide immediate jobs in the planning, construction and operation of these key infrastructure projects. Fine Gael estimates 100,000 new jobs can be created over the period 2010 – 2013.

How will Rebuilding Ireland work?

The plan involves an €11bn stimulus plan to kick-start the Irish economy through investment in badly needed new infrastructure. This is managed through a management structure for new and existing State companies that will be responsible for delivering a targeted series of large scale investments.

We propose that the ownership of a wide range of existing and new State companies involved in energy, transport and communications will drive new investment. Among the existing state companies that will be moved under a new management structure will be the ESB, Eirgrid, An Post, Bord Gais, Bord na Mona, Coillte and the Metropolitan Area Networks (MANS). The new commercial state companies will include:

Smart Grid (ESB Networks restructured and split off from the ESB Group) that will invest an additional €3.3 billion between 2010 and 2013 to develop a 21st century "smart grid";

Broadband 21, to invest an additional €2.5 billion in amalgamating and building out the diverse telecom assets of existing State companies;

BioEnergy Ireland will merge together Bord na Mona and Coillte to invest €800 million in 2010-13 to become a global leader in the commercialisation of next generation bio-energy technologies;

Renewable Energy Ireland which will invest in early stage green energy companies and applied renewable energy research, with a particular focus on technologies that can be licensed;

Irish Water will take overall responsibility for providing safe, clean drinking water and treating waste water through an expanded water infrastructure investment programme;

Greener Home Bank will help tens of thousands of home owners across the country upgrade their homes to challenging new energy and waste water standards.

Fine Gael plans to swap old State assets for new State assets

Our plan can be accomplished without adding to runaway Government borrowing. It will be funded through charges on consumers and businesses for the use of new technologies and network infrastructures. The additional €11bn in investments will be funded from a combination of sources such as a draw down of National Pension Reserve Fund and additional forms of borrowing. The NPRF will be replenished from the sale of existing State assets that are judged to no longer serve the strategic goals of a new modern economy. It is important to note that the Fine Gael plan does not impose any greater borrower requirements on the exchequer.

For a full copy of the 'Rebuilding Ireland' plan log on to www.finegael.ie

2. Supporting our Businesses


Fine Gael recognises the need to not only create new jobs but that the State should be doing everything in its power to try and protect existing jobs and businesses. Small and medium sized enterprises are the lifeblood of the economy and account for a staggering 97% of companies in Ireland. Between them they employ over 800,000 people in every part of the country. Instead of working hard to support these businesses the Government is crippling them with high utility costs such as electricity, gas and waste.

Most towns and villages in Ireland are almost totally reliant on the survival of these businesses to provide local employment. Fine Gael will place the survival of these businesses at the heart of Government and Local Government policy.

Fine Gael will:

Freeze business rates for the next five years on Fine Gael controlled local authorities

This action will provide for financial certainty in business planning during these tough times. Any increase in local business taxes could make the economic and employment situation worse.



Introduce a Government-backed loan guarantee for viable small & medium enterprises to provide working capital and help them sustain employment

This scheme could be funded through the National Treasury Management Agency and operated through the commercial banks. This way, the Government could help viable small & medium enterprises to stay afloat during the recession.

Cut both rates of VAT

As Fine Gael proposed in our alternative budget we would temporarily cut the lower rate of VAT 10% until 2011 and cut the standard rate of VAT back to 21%. This would boost economic confidence and activity in the Republic.


Fine Gael will publish a detailed SME Survival Package during our election campaign.

3. Reforming Local Government – Business & Employment

Local Government is in limbo in Ireland, if not in crisis. Since independence Local Government has suffered from an identity crisis as it lacked a strong primary mission. As a result there is a strong disconnect between local authorities, councillors and their respective communities. Local authorities have been constantly sidelined when it comes to providing new services on a local level with central Government either providing services directly or devolving powers to an agency or 'quango'.

Fine Gael will develop a one stop shop for local business support based in Local Government.

Countless new agencies have been set up in recent years that all compete to provide business support, training services and grants to indigenous business. Fine Gael will put a new focus on Local Government to become a 'one stop shop' for the development and support of local businesses and workers which will revolutionise business support in Ireland. The consolidation of the many agencies involved in Local Government will result in millions of taxpayer's money being saved by ceasing unnecessary duplication of services. In addition, having all these business and



employment services under one roof can greatly benefit business support as all these new services can tap into each other's knowledge base, experience and resources.

Further details on Fine Gael's extensive plans to reform Local Government can be found in its 'Power to the People' reform policy document online at www.finegael.ie

4. Fixing the Banks

Fine Gael will create a 'National Recovery Bank' and abandon the Government's €90 billion gamble

Fixing the banking system is in the absolute best interest of every community in Ireland. It would allow credit to flow once again to families and small businesses, some of which are in dire need of credit to make it through these tough times.

But, Fine Gael is totally against the plan put forward by Government to create a new agency to take all the bad property debt from reckless banks. In Fine Gael's view this is nothing more than a bail out of reckless bankers by taking a massive €90 billion gamble using taxpayer's money. Future generations of Irish citizens could end up paying the price if this gamble goes wrong. Fine Gael is also of the opinion that nationalisation does not solve the banking crisis and will leave the Irish taxpayer unacceptably exposed to picking up the tab of toxic assets.

Fine Gael has recently suggested a totally new and radical approach to fixing our banking sector. Based on the idea of creating a "National Recovery Bank" with a clean balance sheet and the capacity to lend, it could be set up very quickly.

This would leave the bad property-related debts with legacy bad banks, with the shareholders and other professional investors in debentures and bonds to absorb the losses. They took the risks. They earned the higher returns in the good years. They should pick up the tab. Fine Gael believes that this alternative model deserves serious assessment and could offer a much better use of scarce taxpayers' resources.

5. Better Planning

Bad planning is a blight on Irish society. It can lead to increased crime and anti-social behaviour, reduced quality family time, and it suffocates business.

The transport needs of local communities have been ignored for far too long as new estates, developments and roads were built without any concern for the public transport needs of the people. Communities have suffered poor transport links as a result and families have been put under unnecessary pressure as parents spend ever more time commuting. This intolerable situation cannot continue and immediate changes are needed in planning laws to address transport deficits.

Fine Gael will ensure local transport plans will be an integral part of Development Plans

Fine Gael proposes to amend planning laws to ensure all local authorities develop a transport plan in conjunction with their County/City Development Plans and Local Areas Plans. A transport plan must make provision for transport infrastructure and state clearly how local communities can access public transport.

We will introduce new guidelines for urban and village centres

Fine Gael will introduce new urban and village guidelines to renew and rediscover the concept of having a genuine public space as the nucleus of any neighbourhood. Fine Gael believes that the local community would be better served with a shared public space at the centre of any urban area that encourages greater interaction between people. Most modern squares do include a retail element but retail should not be the primary reason for the existence of a shared public space. Fine Gael in Government and Local Government will consult with the relevant stakeholders and with communities themselves to draw up new guidelines along these lines.



Make Strategic Development Zones the norm for large developments

The creation of Strategic Development Zones (SDZ) is a relatively new planning process used in urban areas. The development of a SDZ has learned from Ireland's history of bad planning. The SDZ model plans for the provision of public transport, roads, community facilities, schools as well as housing. The success of Adamstown in South County Dublin has proven the model can work. Fine Gael would like to see the SDZ model used for all new developments of 2,000 housing units or more instead of the old Local Area Plan system.

New rules to tackle unfinished estates and developers in breach of planning permission

The recent construction boom saw development at a rapid pace. Local Authorities lacked teeth to force developers to finish developments and new estates to the exact specifications of the original plan. There are countless examples around the country where developers left a site early leaving it unfinished. In the end it is the new homeowner who suffers. Fine Gael would introduce new legislation to allow Councils to impose large fines on developers who breach their planning permission in such ways.

Fine Gael will reform and enhance An Bord Pleanála

The demand on the national planning appeals board has increased dramatically in recent years and has placed An Bord Pleanála under severe pressure. Since 2008 there has been a continued deterioration in appeal disposals. Fine Gael will introduce an 18 week statutory period for dealing with cases referred to An Bord Pleanála (with the exception of where an oral hearing is required). Fine Gael would reallocate excess planners from some Local Authorities to An Bord Pleanála in order to process the backlog of planning appeals.



Fine Gael will extend planning permission deadlines

The reduction in disposable income in most families caused by increased Government taxes and charges coupled with a reduction in wages has meant that many small building projects have been put on hold until their economic outlook is more stable. As a result Fine Gael proposes to extend all 5 year planning permissions to 7 years.


6. Climate Change & the Environment

Fine Gael will transform the Irish economy into a low carbon economy

Fine Gael's 'Rebuilding Ireland' NewERA strategy details how we would have unprecedented investment in renewable energy projects, energy storage, next generation communications and lay the structures for the electrification of the car transport network.

A radical transformation of the Irish economy that will dramatically reduce emissions from the energy and transport sectors is needed if we are to meet our challenging Kyoto and EU emissions reduction targets. Ireland currently imports over €6.5 billion worth of fossil fuels every year to feed our cars, homes and electricity grid. This is neither economically nor environmentally sustainable.

Over 42% of all of Ireland's carbon emissions comes from energy industries and the transport sector. These also continue to be the hardest sectors in which to reduce emissions. Fine Gael's strategy to create new renewable energy companies will drive serious investment in emerging technologies such as ocean energy and develop market share in developing technology such as wind. New energy storage projects will play a much bigger role in renewable energy generation.



Fine Gael will use Local Government to create a more sustainable Ireland

Local Government has its role to play in climate change along with the rest of us. In fact, a number of its activities could significantly reduce carbon emissions across a number of sectors once a proper strategy is adopted.

Climate change reforms required for planning can be divided into three separate areas.

- **Buildings:** The vast majority of Ireland's current housing stock was constructed at a time when issues such as insulation and energy efficiency were not highly regarded. It will require a massive effort to retrofit these houses. In this regard local authorities must ensure that all future buildings and major extensions approved for construction meet the highest standards in building design and construction.
- **Pedestrian & cycle friendly urban designs:** the dominance of the private car has meant that we use our cars for ever shorter journeys. The 2006 census confirmed that over 44,000 primary school children were driven less than 1 km to school. Local Authorities when drafting LAPs and SDZs need to include smarter plans to improve accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists. This doesn't necessarily mean more laneways but smarter layouts of roads and footpaths. Long continuous roads only encourage people to drive relatively short distances as the crow flies.
- **Renewable energy planning guidelines:** Local Government needs to develop new procedures to expedite planning applications for renewable energy installations on single houses. Central Government and local authorities need to work together to develop new procedures and guidelines dealing with large planning applications by large energy companies for new sizable facilities such as pump storage, hydro, wind, and wave power generation plants.



7. Reducing Waste – Improving Water

FG would end Council dual regulatory and service provider functions

Fine Gael is proposing that Local Government should regulate competition in their waste market as opposed to being a competitor. Each Local Authority should seek out private operators and put to tender a number of waste routes of both profitable and PSO supported routes.

Fine Gael would centralise a new waste waiver scheme in social welfare

The different policies adopted by the Councils in relation to a waiver scheme for low income families is causing a lot of upset among those left without. A new waiver scheme should be considered in the context of social welfare instead of ad hoc policies being implemented in different localities.

Fine Gael will develop a single National Waste Strategy and incorporate regional waste plans

Each Local Authority is required to develop waste management plans for the prevention, minimisation, collection, recovery and disposal of waste. They are also empowered to prepare joint plans, but more needs to be done to better co-ordinate the waste plans of Local Government. Fine Gael believes there needs to be a serious effort by Government to co-ordinate regional waste management plans to attract investment in waste infrastructure in a way that maximises potential economies of scale, competition and enables the market to pass on the benefits to businesses and households.



Water Services

Recent water crises in Ireland have highlighted just how precious this important resource is. Recent EPA investigations show many of our ground water supplies are contaminated with human or animal effluent. Drinking water crises along the west coast in recent years have again highlighted the constant challenge to protect drinking water supplies.

Septic tanks need to be improved and certified

There are possibly hundreds of thousands of leaking, poorly equipped and badly installed septic tanks in Ireland today. The consequences of this are obvious and our ground water supplies are heavily polluted as a result. Poor enforcement of building standards and guidelines has meant that the problem has become a significant one with no quick or cheap solutions. However, Ireland must meet EU water standards as set down in the Water Framework Directive and to do this we must address septic tanks.

Fine Gael will introduce new regulations which will compel homeowners to upgrade and fix their septic tanks to meet basic standards before they are allowed to sell their properties. Similar to the recently introduced BER rating, all houses must have a properly functioning septic tank, certified by the Local Authority, before being allowed to be sold. Fine Gael will also examine a grant scheme to meet part of the costs in upgrading these tanks as part of future job creation and green strategies.

A new national Irish Water company will have responsibility for new investment in water infrastructure.

As described in Fine Gael's March 2009 Job Creation Strategy, Rebuilding Ireland, we would set up a new semi State company called 'Irish Water' to take over responsibility for investment in new water infrastructure. This will ensure access to secure and safe water supplies which is core to sustainable national economic recovery and the development of key growth centres in Ireland over the next decade.

8. Creating a FairCare Health System

www.faircare.ie

Fine Gael will implement 'FairCare', our revolutionary approach to the development of the Irish Health Services.

Our health system is broken. The quadrupling of the Irish health budget since 1997 has proved one thing - a poorly organised and managed health system cannot be fixed with money alone. Ireland is spending close to the EU average on health, on a per capita basis, but Irish people are receiving a level of service well below the EU average. Ireland's health service is ranked 15th in Europe for quality and 24th in terms of value for money.

Our poor health system continues to affect every city, town and village in Ireland.

Fine Gael will:

- abolish long-term waits on trolleys in A&E
- slash waiting lists in hospitals
- eliminate the unfair and inefficient public/private divide by introducing Universal Health Insurance (UHI).
- reform the Primary Care system to ensure that more patients are treated safely outside hospitals by their GPs.

Five Key Principles of FairCare

Fine Gael's approach to healthcare reform is essentially pragmatic. We are not bound by ideology or dogma, but will apply to Ireland best practice from other successful health systems. However, FairCare is underpinned by five key principles:

1. Access is a right - not a privilege
2. Transparency and efficiency are not optional extras
3. Fairness: Equal treatment for equal need
4. Choice for all
5. Accountability: The buck stops where?

Primary Care Reform is Crucial

Fine Gael will give Primary Care the priority it deserves. By the end of our first term in Government, we will have a comprehensive network of new Primary Care centres to serve our communities. The centres will also include rooms for visiting specialists and will accommodate a robust community mental health service.

A 3-Phase Programme

The FairCare programme is divided into three distinct, but over-lapping phases that will allow us to gradually introduce reforms in a way that is both carefully planned and affordable.

Phase 1: Maximise what we have (Implemented from Year 1)

In the first phase of FairCare, we will change the way hospitals work and will also significantly strengthen Ireland's Primary Care system.

Fine Gael will as part of our hospital reform programme:

- Make the Minister of Health directly responsible for hitting key targets;
- Measure progress daily by real time information systems;
- Establish a Special Delivery Unit to assist the Minister.

A similar unit was successfully used in Northern Ireland to cut waiting list times by 80% from 2004 to 2008 without significantly increasing expenditure.

Fine Gael recognises that significant bed capacity in hospitals could also be freed up if patients facing delayed discharge or requiring rehabilitation could be treated in the Community. We will be publishing specific proposals on this issue over the next few months to address the current deficits in long-term care and rehabilitation.

Phase 2: Introduce “Money Follows the Patient” (Year 3)

Under the current system of fixed budgets, each additional patient is effectively a “cost” to the health service. This system provides no incentives for efficiency or productivity. Under Money Follows The Patient (MFTP), health providers will be paid for how many patients they treat. Patients will be a source of “income” rather than a “cost”, just as they are in private hospitals today. Long term, we expect MFTP to increase efficiency by as much as 10%.

Phase 3: “Universal Health Insurance” (Implemented in Year 5)

Once the first and second phases of FairCare have been successfully implemented, Fine Gael will introduce Universal Health Insurance (UHI), a system that is widely used in Europe and in Canada.

Fine Gael will introduce the Dutch model of UHI in Ireland, with mandatory health insurance for everyone, to be chosen from a selection of providers. The Netherlands spends only slightly more than us on health on a per capita basis, but is ranked number 1 in Europe for quality and Number 2 for value for money.

Our goal is to transform the Irish health service into one of the best in Europe, and create a health system that we can all be proud of. For more information log on to www.faircare.ie.

Local Hospitals Have a Key Role to Play under FairCare

Fine Gael has a very different view of the role to be played by local hospitals than the Government, which seems intent on downgrading them.

Local hospitals must be safe, and patient safety must be our first priority. International research suggests that complex trauma and complex surgery is not appropriate in a local hospital setting. However, there is also a very strong argument that local hospitals must have the ability to deal with complex medical conditions and less complex surgery. Safety is not simply about surgical competence, but is also about timely access. Time to treatment, particularly in remote geographical locations, is absolutely crucial. Over the summer Fine Gael will be further developing its policy on local hospitals.

9. Tackling Anti Social Behaviour

Communities all around Ireland are plagued by anti social behaviour. Fine Gael recognises the seriousness of the problem and that existing measures to tackle antisocial behaviour have failed. Seemingly minor crimes, such as graffiti, underage drinking, driving a “souped up” car around built up areas late at night and loitering in a menacing way, can make life hell for communities. We believe that the implementation of our proposals will protect communities and vindicate the right of each citizen to live peacefully and safely in their neighbourhoods.


Fine Gael will:

Target Bad Planning & Anti Social Hotspots

The idea of ‘community’ must become central to the planning process, with due care taken of the social implications of large numbers of houses and people in close proximity. Bad environmental planning can, and does, have a critical impact on the levels of anti social behaviour which develop in an area. In effect it can result in the creation of an area where anti social behaviour can potentially thrive. Fine Gael will develop a Good Practice Guide for planners and developers to make housing developments, streets and parks safer, better places. The aim of the guide will be to draw attention to crime prevention principles.

Promote Joint Policing Committees and Community Policing

Fine Gael welcomes the roll out of Joint Policing Committees and the opportunity for a greater level of engagement and co-operation between An Garda Síochána and the local community. With the type of crime differing substantially between one local authority area and another, it is vital that the Gardaí, public representatives, and the local community come together in a structured way to discuss matters affecting their areas. Fine Gael has been a strong proponent of establishing a proper system of community policing to work in tandem with community involvement on Joint Policing Committees. We will change Garda organisational structures to reflect a focus on community based policing and an acknowledgement of the value of the Gardaí



involved in it, which will include a new grade of Community Garda, a review of the Garda Reserve and immediate implementation of the Garda Inspectorate's recommendations on Garda rosters.

Roll out Estate Managers for all Estates

Often, Resident Associations do not know who the owner of privately rented accommodation is. This can cause frustration particularly if there are difficulties with the tenant or maintenance of the property. Most local authorities have Estate Managers who maintain estates and make local authority estates better places to live in. This is being rolled out now into some private estates. We will ensure that all estates – private or local authority – have an Estate Manager assigned to it. As part of this increased co-operation between residents and the local authority, the Private Residential Tenancies Board will also be required to share contact information for landlords and their tenants with the estate managers.

Introduce Repair Orders for Commercial or Publicly Owned Property

Based on the success of the Anti Social Behaviour policies adopted in other jurisdictions (e.g. Broken Windows in New York) we propose amending legislation to oblige the owners of defaced or dilapidated commercial or publicly owned property to repair any vandalism in public view within one week. In default of appropriate action, the local authority will be required to serve a Repair Notice, and if necessary, carry out the repairs. Except in exceptional circumstances the local authority would then recover the cost from the property owner.

Some local authorities have a poor record of looking after their own property. We will expect all local authorities to comply fully with the high standards demanded of them in this regard.

Enforce law on modified 'Souped up' Vehicles

Convoys of "souped-up" cars patrol certain areas causing nuisance and intimidation. The presence and actions of these "boy racers", with tinted privacy glass, noisy engines, and modified registration plates and lights, can frighten and intimidate those in their vicinity. The legal limit for exhaust noise is 80 decibels, yet roadside checks have revealed readings of up to 130 decibels. With regards to privacy glass, many after market fittings do not conform to the legal standards. Companies fitting both loud exhausts and tinted windows know that the Gardaí do not have the equipment to measure the standards of these products. By breaching these requirements, it also becomes a road safety concern which affects all motorists.

We want to enforce the law and protect the public from such nuisance and fear. It is possible to bring forward prosecutions on souped-up vehicles once the Gardaí receive the necessary detection equipment. We will facilitate the monitoring and detection equipment in all main Garda stations.

10. Supporting Communities

Fine Gael is committed to delivering public services we can be proud of that responds to the needs of all citizens and provides people with the quality of life they deserve.

Fine Gael will:

Develop a National Carers Strategy

Fine Gael is committed to developing and implementing a comprehensive national carers strategy that will address the immediate and long term concerns of carers, including: financial support, provision of services, assessment of need, recognition of young carers, and further training.



Develop and Encourage Home Support

Fine Gael will prioritise the development and roll-out of support services for older people who wish to remain in their in their own home, including: home help, home care, meals-on-wheels and other services that promote independent living.

Fine Gael will encourage Local Government to organise a handypersons service where volunteers will provide basic assistance to older people such as changing light bulbs, delivering shopping and so on.

Promote Supported Housing

Fine Gael will actively promote supported housing schemes to enable older people to live comfortably and independently in their community for as long as possible, with adequate access to community and health facilities. Fine Gael sees Local Government playing a central role in identifying and responding to the supported housing needs of its community.

Implement Disability Strategy

Fine Gael is committed to ensuring that the National Disability Strategy and the departmental Sectoral Plans will be implemented in full; that people are supported in living as independently as possible and are enabled to participate fully in society.

Reform Homeless Service and Facilities

Fine Gael believes that homeless facilities and services should be the prime responsibility of Local Government. To date, HSE funding problems has restricted the delivery of homeless service. Fine Gael plans to remove the health service as provider of homeless services, thus restoring decision making in this area to Local Government. See the Fine Gael reform document 'Power to the People' for further information.



Reform Rural Transport

Fine Gael will ensure resources provided for rural transport services are used adequately in the best interests of the community and ensure more services are rolled out across the country to meet the needs of those living in isolated communities.

Protect Community Services

Fine Gael is opposed to the continued withdrawal of rural services and is committed to retaining an adequate network of rural post offices, Garda stations, supports for the elderly living alone and is committed to delivering targeted community services where they are most needed.


Immigration

Fine Gael is committed to putting in place a system of immigration which is fair and transparent, tough on fraud and addresses Ireland economic needs and circumstances in a manner which is respectful of the rights of potential migrants.

11. Improving our Universities

Improving the quality of our universities and increasing the number of students attending those universities is absolutely necessary to maintain our status as a highly skilled and flexible work force. This was part of our former economic success and will form part of our future success.


The challenges facing the sector are significant. The sector has globalised. The funding of the third level sector has not kept up with either education inflation or the increased number of undergraduate students participating. Specialisation within third level colleges will be critical to their success in the future.



In March, Fine Gael published *The Third Way* – a Green Paper on Higher Education Reform (available at www.finegael.ie).

Fine Gael will:

- **Oppose the re-introduction of third level fees (and existing registration fees):** We see fees (and existing registration fees) as a barrier to participation at third level. We believe that the funding gap for third level sector cannot be met from general taxation.
- **Develop a new graduate contribution scheme:** We have proposed the idea that graduates should pay through a system of deferred contribution – after they graduate. Once graduates begin to gain the economic benefit from their education, they should pay up to 30% of the cost of their degree programme. The contribution will be collected through the PRSI system. The funds raised should be ring-fenced for the reform of the third level sector into a Third Level Change Budget. The institutions can then compete for some of the Third Level Change Budget for reform purposes.
- **Establish an integrated qualifications and quality assurance body:** It would bring together the agencies currently involved in awarding qualifications and measuring quality in the sector. This body would have overall responsibility for value of course content, teaching performance and research output within every institution across the country. Linked to quality assessment is the requirement to introduce an effective mentoring system.
- **Review the current maintenance grant system:** to ensure that there is reasonable support available for those who want to go back to College.
- **Promote third level specialisation and expertise:** We have seven Universities and 14 Institutes of Technology in the Country. It is Fine Gael's view that each third level institution should examine where its strengths lie, what area of expertise it has the most potential to succeed in and produce a plan outlining its intentions and strategic vision for this area of education



provision. An overarching umbrella University or federation for the entire Institute of Technology sector should be introduced. In devising new course programmes, an industry and labour markets needs survey should be a mandatory pre-requisite.

12. Improving our Schools

Fine Gael recognises that all children should receive a quality education, providing each individual child with the opportunity to achieve his/her full potential in a well-resourced, supportive learning environment. However, across the country schools are now under-funded, under-resourced and insufficiently supported. Schools are buckling under the pressure of mounting running costs, voluntary contributions from parents have become a necessary burden and cloakrooms posing as classrooms have become an all too frequent occurrence.

Fine Gael Proposals:

Fine Gael would completely reform the School Building Programme

The current School Building Programme is lacking in transparency, accountability or any level of efficiency. Fine Gael would carry out a thorough reform of the programme designed to speed up delivery of new and extended schools, provide schools and parents with a clear indication of where their schools sits on the building waiting list and ensure the system is based on need rather than the political motivation favoured by the current Government

Make Local Government legally responsible for identifying and zone school sites

If Local Government was given full responsibility for sites for schools they could bring a better level of co-ordination at local level to make the best use of local resources for the community. Fine Gael has already proposed that Compulsory Purchase Orders should be considered for school sites in the absence of any other options.



Eliminate levels of waste involved in providing temporary accommodation.

Direct engagement with suppliers of temporary accommodation in order to bring down rental costs of prefabs and reduce exorbitant level of funding currently wasted on temporary accommodation at the expense of new and improved schools.

Protect Frontline Services

Eliminate waste and streamline delivery of educational services, particularly in relation to the wide array of quangos introduced under the current Government in order to encourage greater efficiency, quality of delivery and protect frontline staff in all schools.

Publication of Annual Reports

Introduce a system of Annual Reports for schools, providing parents with a well-rounded view of local schools and to ensure the substantial level of information needed to make a real and informed choice on their child's future education is made available.

ICT Systems in Schools

Reform the ICT system within schools, upgrading the current inadequate levels of ICT infrastructure available and providing students with exposure to the latest technology needed to ensure our educational system is in line with other developed countries and introducing the groundwork needed to develop a competitive and well educated workforce.

Primary Pupil Database

We will prioritise the development of a Primary Pupil Database to track the progress of all children through the primary school system throughout the country on to second level education, helping to tackle issues such as absenteeism, special needs requirements and providing a means of assessing the various bodies involved in co-ordinating and delivering support services to schools.

13. Transport

The lack of serious investment in transport by the Government during our boom years was a lost opportunity. It was a mistake that will make it even harder for Ireland to emerge successfully from the economic recession. For many of us it is still as difficult to move around within our own towns and cities as it was ten years ago. In fact recent figures show that usage of private cars within Dublin city centre has actually increased in recent times. These transport failures are because there has not been a fundamental shift in transport policy with this Government, including the Green Party.

Fine Gael would prioritise the needs of pedestrians

The needs of the pedestrian should be paramount in transport and urban planning. Fine Gael would require each local authority to develop a 'Pedestrian Charter' outlining the needs of pedestrians in their house and policy principles that should be incorporated into all relevant Council policy and action plans.

Making cycling a mainstream transport option

The only way to promote cycling is to provide a safe and sensible cycling environment to encourage people back on to their bikes. To this end Fine Gael proposes the following.

Future road construction to include sensible segregated cycle lanes

It has been obvious to all cyclists that Government policy of painting a white line on the road and calling it a cycle lane has failed. The cheap option has actively discouraged cyclists and led to a creation of a dangerous environment. All future planned road reconstructions for QBCs, road works and utility installations should include designs for a new segregated cycle lane as part of the rebuilding works.



Cycling should be central in the planning process

Cycle strategies should become a mandatory part of any 'transport plans' associated with large planning applications to ensure developers provide cycling facilities and paths through any large developments

Bicycle Parking

County Councils need to incorporate large bike parking facilities into their urban designs. These facilities need to be in secure, public, and bright locations. While some modes of transport already have provided bicycle parking facilities there needs to be greater pressure to roll out of parking facilities at all rail stations where possible and along QBC routes.

The creation of cycle highways

Fine Gael realises that Government and local authorities find themselves in an extremely challenging economic situation due to the mishandling of the national finances. However, plans should be made for future development of new cycling facilities to be implemented when finances recover or as budgets allow.

Ireland, and Dublin in particular, has massive potential for the development of exclusive cycle paths or 'cycle highways'. These lanes would have long stretches of path without having to encounter traffic or many junctions. The Canals, Luas Lines, Dublin Bay, old primary routes and disused railway lines are all prime locations for additional cycle lanes. For more information see the Fine Gael Local Government Reform policy, 'Power to the People'.



Fine Gael will fast track bus competition

The public transport commuters of Ireland, and in particular Dublin, have remained nearly totally reliant on State owned transport companies for their travelling needs. Fine Gael has long argued that this protected and sheltered market should be opened up to eager private operators which would improve services levels for all commuters.

Fine Gael will create new 'Park & Ride' facilities and bus lanes

After years of promises the Government continues to fail to implement the simplest transport policies that would make a big impact on commuting times. There is still no national network of park and ride facilities around major urban centres. Fine Gael will ensure that the Dublin Transport Authority and local authorities will deliver on creating new high capacity parking facilities outside major urban centres that are linked by QBCs.

14. Developing Agriculture

The current economic climate highlights more than ever the importance of existing sustainable indigenous industries and provides an opportunity for the agricultural sector and the farming community to play a strong role in revitalising the economy. Fine Gael is committed to overcoming the challenges facing the agricultural sector and retaining our strong family farm tradition while also fostering an environment where those involved in the industry are provided with new and exciting opportunities for development and change.

Fine Gael Proposals:

A sustainable future for the agricultural community


Fine Gael recognises that targeted State supports and clever use of available funds are needed to support the farming community and is committed to retaining and investing in programmes aimed at revitalising and sustaining the agricultural sector.

EU Funds

Fine Gael is committed to the use of unused CAP funds in a targeted and specific way to revitalise ailing areas of the agricultural industry such as the sheep sector.

Reduction of Red Tape and Needless Bureaucracy

The Agricultural Sector more than any other industry has been subject to the introduction of endless amounts of red tape and excessive levels of bureaucracy. There is a simpler way of doing business and Fine Gael is committed to streamlining the amount of paperwork and the inspection system currently in place to provide farmers with the freedom to farm.



Playing a Key Role in Rebuilding Ireland

Fine Gael's plan for Rebuilding Ireland will free up available funds within the Department of Agriculture so existing schemes will be protected, allow farmers the opportunity to develop additional incomes through a revitalised afforestation programme supported by a newly developed bioenergy sector and to earn significant extra income through investment in micro generation on their lands and the sale of unused energy to a national grid.

Exploiting the Potential of the Agri-food Sector

Fine Gael recognises the potential of the agri-food sector to stimulate job creation and economic growth and is committed to reforming food traceability and monitoring systems to eradicate any weaknesses in the system, to reduce the myriad of agencies involved in regulating the sector and ensure Irish producers are competing on a level playing field with other countries.

WTO Talks

Fine Gael will not support any more agricultural concessions at WTO talks and is committed to protecting the agricultural sector from the unrealistic demands put forward in the last round of Doha negotiations.

