

**FINE GAEL** 

LET'S TAKE  
IRELAND  
FORWARD  
TOGETHER

Local Election  
Manifesto 2019

[finegael.ie](http://finegael.ie)

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# Let's Take Ireland Forward Together



An Taoiseach  
LEO VARADKAR TD

Ireland has come a long way in a short time. Hope and ambition have returned. People have worked hard for this and do not want to see any progress squandered. There is now huge investment in public services and significant job creation, and communities are starting to see the benefit of this:

- 2.2m people in employment – unemployment rate at 5.4%, 3 out of 5 jobs created outside of Dublin since 2016. This is 94,500 jobs.
- Major roads projects - M11 Gorey to Enniscorthy, N25 New Ross Bypass; N4 Collooney-Castlebaldwin commencing.
- Improvements on 1,100 rural roads.
- 18,000 new homes built in 2018
- 128 Primary Care Centres
- Lowest ever pupil teacher ratio - 26:1
- 2,600 Gardai attested since we re-opened Templemore, now at almost 14,000.
- €162m in Sports Capital in 2018
- €1.152bn investment in Water Infrastructure in 2018/2019

Fine Gael is committed to reducing income taxes further and reducing the cost of accessing public services. This is a policy that will make life easier for more than a million people.

Taken together, this translates into the growth that will benefit every family and every citizen across the country. We love our country, and we all care for the places where we live, work, shop, socialise, exercise. There is a legitimate desire that national plans filter down to local implementation so that every part of the country benefits as we take Ireland forward together. That is the Fine Gael commitment we want to realise in this local election.

With progress, come new pressures - Work life balance, housing, transport, new and additional service and amenity requirements in localities so residents have the quality of life they deserve. In this election, Fine Gael candidates are the only ones with a plan that has your interests and your needs at heart. Fine Gael candidates are a part of a strong team at local, national and European level. With a strong Fine Gael representation in local government, with your help, we can work for your best future.

Fine Gael is the only party that can achieve an ambition we all want for Ireland – to have a strong economy and society in which nobody feels left out, with family at its centre, that is technologically responsive, has lower carbon emissions and a highly skilled workforce.

This manifesto outlines these priorities and the Project Ireland 2040 plan that will reach into every parish in every part of the country. Fine Gael is working to provide a strong economy and society in which nobody feels left out, that allows everyone put down roots, access education, start a business or take up a job, feel safe and well. Fine Gael's plan provides certainty that all of this is possible close to home. Together, we can take Ireland forward.

On 24th May Fine Gael Council candidates are asking for your **Number 1 Vote**. By voting **Number 1** for Fine Gael you have certainty that you are voting for the strongest team with a plan as we take Ireland forward together:

## 1. ACCOUNTABLE, TRANSPARENT DECISION MAKING

- **Democratically elected mayors of Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Dublin** – To ensure more effective delivery by a representative of the people.
- **Greater Budget Transparency** – Every Council will provide a statement of accounts to every homeowner and ratepayer; you are entitled to know how your money is spent.
- **A Fair Local Property Tax** – No change until 2021; No increases unless money is ringfenced for specific local projects and services.

## 2. MAKING LIFE EASIER FOR FAMILIES AND BUSINESS

- **More Housing** – Increase number of new homes built every year to 35,000 and increase provision of new social housing to 12,000 a year.
- **Maximise Public Transport & Cycling** – Pursue investment plans for better bus and rail services, better and safer facilities for cycling and walking to benefit citizens and business.
- **Improve Local Roads** – Increase funding for local roads, footpaths and the Local Improvement Scheme.
- **More High-Speed Broadband** – Every home, school and business in Ireland will have access to high speed broadband.
- **Fairer Commercial Rates** – Give Councillors the power to vary local rates to encourage new jobs and business.
- **Safer Society** – More community Gardai and strengthened Joint Policing Committees, and more funding for CCTV in communities.

## 3. BRINGING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

- **Prioritising Play and Recreation** – More open spaces, playgrounds, greenways across the country.
- **Town and Village Renewal** – Support community leaders and initiatives that bring vibrancy to their areas. Improve local environment and amenities, promote tourism, commercial and local initiatives.
- **Exploit Tourism and Sports potential** – Drive Councils to develop tourist attractions and sporting facilities.

## 4. PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

- **Leading on Climate Action** – Ensure Councils adapt ambitious mitigation and adaptation programmes.
- **Cracking down on Illegal Dumping** – Introduce SMART enforcement of our waste laws such as use of drones to identify illegal activity.
- **Creating Clear Air Zones** – Introduce “higher air quality zones” to restrict the burning of certain fuels, limit high emission vehicles, and other measures to raise standards of air quality.



Launch of Cork Mayoral Campaign

# Making Local Government Work For You

## 1. DIRECTLY ELECTED MAYORS

Fine Gael is firmly committed to further increasing the powers, responsibilities and capacity of Local Authorities. We believe that decisions that affect your locality should be made locally.

With this in mind in three Local Authority areas (Cork city, Limerick and Waterford city and county Councils), plebiscites are being held to ask voters if they wish to have a popularly elected mayor. The intent is to ensure more accountability and effective delivery by a representative of the people.

The mayor would provide leadership to their Local Authority and assume the majority of the functions currently carried out by the Chief Executive (such as proposing the budget, the development plan, the works programme, Part 8 housing developments, but not functions relating to individual planning or housing allocations, enforcement and staffing matters). For example, the mayor would play a significant role in strengthening public engagement in the development of strategic planning policy through the development plan and local area plan making processes. The mayor will represent the city/county locally, nationally and internationally.

If approved by the electorate in 24th May, legislation will be brought forward to allow for directly elected mayors to take up office in 2022.

Fine Gael is also committed to a directly mayor for Dublin. As this mayor would represent four Local Authorities (Fingal County Council, South Dublin County Council, Dun-Laoghaire Rathdown County Council and Dublin City Council), as well as a role on national bodies with specific Dublin remits, such as the National Transport Authority, it requires further consideration and consultation as to how best to proceed in a way that enjoys a broad consensus of support. Therefore, Fine Gael in Government is establishing a Dublin Citizens' Assembly to consider what type of local government structure and directly elected mayor, if any, would be most appropriate to Dublin. The Assembly will convene in September of this year. Depending on the outcome of the Citizens' Assembly, a plebiscite will be held on the subject in 2021.

## **2. BUDGET TRANSPARENCY**

Homeowners and businesses fund local government and are entitled to know how their money has been spent.

So, Fine Gael will require each Council to publish an annual statement of accounts to all homeowners and ratepayers giving a breakdown of how revenue was collected and how it was spent. A detailed account of expenditure will be published online with hard copies available for those who wish.

## **3. MORE FEMALE REPRESENTATION**

Fine Gael in government introduced gender quotas in general elections and this has been a major driver of increased female representation in the Dáil.

In order to encourage greater female representation and diversity, we are now introducing new measures to incentivise parties to run greater numbers of female candidates in the local elections. This includes additional funding to political parties who reach the 30% gender quota; in rural counties that have some of the lowest female representation, a pilot project will be launched to facilitate women to engage the resources and training needed for a role in politics.

Fine Gael is determined to increase the number of female voices at all levels of politics. In this 2019 election, Fine Gael is the first Party to break the 100 female local election candidate mark. In fact, 118 women are running for Fine Gael. We are attracting an extremely high calibre of female candidates because Fine Gael is a party that has a strong team, a plan for the future and is the Party that gets things done.

## **4. WORKING TOGETHER WITH NEIGHBOURING COUNCILS**

Across Ireland, there are eight large cities and towns whose catchment areas spill into a neighbouring county.

They are Athlone, Bray, Carlow, Carrick-on-Shannon, Drogheda, Portarlington, Limerick City and Waterford City. This creates specific challenges to manage the development of those towns and cities. Fine Gael will legislate for the creation of Urban Area Committees and development of a Local Area Plan for the relevant area. The new Urban Area Committees would consist of an equal number of Council members in both counties, as well as the Cathaoirleach of each Local Authority. This legislation will also include provision for participation, on a non-voting basis, for experts in the areas such as transport, housing and economic development.



50 new homes at Fitzgerald Park,  
Monkstown, Dublin

# Delivering More Homes

Fine Gael is the party of home ownership and it is our mission to ensure that home ownership becomes achievable and affordable again for many who today feel it is beyond their reach.

In making this a reality, Fine Gael is determined to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. Separate to the overinflated and oversupplied property market left by Fianna Fáil, the sprawl that took place over the last twenty years, where housing was built far from people's places of employment, was a major and avoidable mistake. It has resulted in parents spending hours in traffic when they should be with their children. By prioritising new development within the infill or hinterland of existing urban centres, we know we can breathe new life into our city, town, and village centres.

With our Councillors, Fine Gael will make planning guidelines that facilitate greater density in city and town centres as well as in the immediate catchment of public transport. Above all, Fine Gael Councillors will support more housing – social, for purchase, affordable, for rent – in their Local Authority areas.

## 5. LOCAL PROPERTY TAX TO PART-FINANCE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Local Property Tax raises approximately €500m for Local Authorities every year and is spent on vital services and amenities like local roads, footpaths, lighting, open spaces, parks, community centres and fire services. So, we want to make sure this revenue base is not undermined as that would have a severe impact on these services.

Fine Gael at a national and local level is committed to a fair Local Property Tax. Due to the significant increase of property values across Ireland since the LPT was introduced, the Government deferred the revaluation of properties due to occur this year. There will be no change in the LPT paid by homeowners until 2021 and most homeowners will see no increase or a very modest one in 2021. This deferral is to build consensus for changes to the LPT which delivers on the following conditions:

- Fairness;
- That any increases in the LPT being charged are modest, affordable and fair;
- Allowing Local Authorities to retain all monies raised in their county or city Council;
- An annual national equalisation fund paid from the Exchequer to ensure that counties that have a lower LPT base are financially supported as is currently the case; and
- Greater discretion for Councillors to adjust the LPT rate for their own area, moving beyond their current ability to raise or decrease the rate by 15%.

Fine Gael Councillors will work to ensure that, where possible, the LPT rate levied by the Council is reduced. Upward local Council adjustments will only be approved by Fine Gael Councillors where it will deliver new specific and additional services – e.g. more street cleaning, greater CCTV for communities.

## 6. AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND RENTS

### Reaching 35,000 homes a year

In 2018, 18,000 new homes were built in Ireland, the highest level of output this decade. We anticipate up to 25,000 new homes being built in 2019. From next year on, we will keep increasing the number of new homes being built with the aim of reaching 35,000 new homes per annum. This level of output will ensure that enough homes are being provided for a growing population and to catch up on recent years without repeating the mistakes of the past.

### Delivering more affordable housing

The most efficient way to provide affordable housing is to increase supply, in particular the supply of starter family homes as well as apartments. However, there are people, particularly living in and around our major cities who are earning good wages, do not qualify for social housing, but are also unable to afford to buy their own homes on the open market. To tackle this, Fine Gael is investing taxpayers' money to:

- Service Council land so that Affordable Housing Scheme homes can be built on that land, and then sold at a discount to people, with the Local Authority retaining an equity share in the home. This €310m allocation will provide 6,200 new homes over the next three years
- Bring vacant and underutilised state land into use for housing, primarily through the Land Development Agency. Where this is done, at least 30% of those homes will be made available through an Affordable Housing Scheme, while at least 10% will be for social housing. The balance will be made available to private homeowners.

Fine Gael Councillors in every Local Authority are committed to delivering more affordable homes.

## Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan

€200m was allocated for the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan over three years, however, the scheme has proven to be more successful than originally anticipated. By the end of March, €106m had been drawn down, helping 575 individuals and families buy their first home. Fine Gael is committed to further funding for the scheme. Specific allocations to Local Authorities for 2019 will be finalised shortly. The scheme remains open and all Local Authorities should continue to receive and process applications up to and including drawdown of funding, as appropriate.

## Homes in Rural Ireland

Fine Gael recognises the importance of living in rural Ireland and in building better homes and communities outside our major urban areas.

Our rural settlements are suitable for a low-density approach to development and tailored design approaches for each local area are needed. Fine Gael Councillors are committed to the National Planning Framework to 'develop a programme for 'new homes in small towns and villages' with local authorities, public infrastructure agencies such as Irish Water and local communities to provide serviced sites with appropriate infrastructure to attract people to build their own homes and live in small towns and villages.'

Fine Gael will take a practical approach to 'one-off' housing which recognises that in rural Ireland many people seek to have an opportunity to build their own homes to live, to work and to rear their families in their local community.

## Encouraging apartments to be built in our urban centres

Construction of new apartments has more than doubled in the last three years, with 2,372 apartments built in 2018. The Government has introduced new rules to enable higher density and taller apartment developments that are sympathetic to their surroundings, to increase availability and decrease costs. Fine Gael is committed to enabling more apartment living in urban centres, close to where many people work and wish to live their daily lives.

## A rental sector with long-term security for tenants and landlords

We know that the vast majority of landlords are responsible and that almost 70% of landlords have just one apartment.

Over the past two years, Fine Gael has significantly strengthened protections for tenants and brought in rent pressure zones. We are introducing sanctions for breaching the rent caps, bringing in rent transparency, and requiring longer notice periods for tenants when their lease ends. Fine Gael has is providing additional funds to the Residential Tenancies Board to increase its staff and enforcement ability, thereby allowing it to protect vulnerable tenants better and pursue rogue landlords.

## 7. A LAND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY THAT DELIVERS

The Land Development Agency, with capital of €1.25 billion behind it, is a step change in the State's involvement in the housing market. It will enable the building of thousands of new homes. That includes social housing, affordable housing, private housing and cost rental housing on both publicly and privately-owned land.

Established in September 2018, the work of the LDA is progressing with work on sites in Dublin city and county, Nass, Mullingar, Galway and Cork to deliver 3,000 homes on publicly owned lands.

Over the next twenty years, the LDA is tasked with delivering 150,000 homes across the country. A central part of this will be for the LDA to work closely with Local Authorities to identify locations for future housing growth and for the LDA to develop and promote those sites. It will ensure that any uplift in the value of land accrues to the State and can be reinvested in communities, rather than going to private land developers.

In areas of high long-term housing demand Fine Gael Councillors will insist that the Local Authority works directly with the LDA to actively identify locations of future development potential, for those sites to be master planned and developed, and then housing provided. This approach ensures that there is a long-term supply of good quality housing coming on stream and prevent the historic problems of supply – either too much or too little- that has contributed to successive housing crises.

## **8. PROVIDING 12,000 NEW SOCIAL HOMES EACH YEAR**

In 2018 the number of social homes was increased by over 8,000 through new builds, renovations, acquisitions and long-term leasing. This will rise to 10,000 in 2019 and by 2021 reach 12,000. So between now and 2027, more than 112,000 new social homes will be added to the public housing stock. This will be one of the biggest local housing programmes in Ireland's history. The commitment to maintain this level of investment into the medium term will ensure that the mistakes of the past do not recur. Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that social housing is provided as efficiently and quickly as possible.

### **Developing cost rental as a real option**

Fine Gael is determined that cost rental homes become a major part of our rental landscape in the future, making a sustainable impact on housing affordability, national competitiveness, and the attractiveness of our main urban centres as places to live as well as work. Cost rental are schemes whereby tenants pay a rent that is closer to the cost of developing and maintaining the property and is designed to be lower than the market rent. Two cost rental projects are being led by Dublin City Council and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. Learning from these projects, Fine Gael through its national and local representation will seek to expand the cost rental model in all our cities.

## **9. DISCOURAGING LAND HOARDING & VACANT PROPERTIES**

The hoarding of zoned land and the non-use of vacant properties is a contributor to the housing crisis. The Vacant Site Levy was introduced by Fine Gael in government. It is a site activation measure focused on bringing vacant land in urban areas back into use. The penalty is a 3% levy on such properties left vacant in 2018 rising to 7% for those left vacant in 2019. Local Authorities are responsible for the implementation of the levy, and Fine Gael Councillors are committed to bringing vacant lands into more beneficial use, in particular housing.

Fine Gael in Government has introduced a Vacant Homes Officer in every Local Authority and implemented a Vacant Homes Action Plan. Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that the wide range of existing tools to bring vacant housing back into use are maximised. For example, there are grants and incentives such as the Repair and Leasing Scheme, the Buy and Renew Scheme or the Long-term Leasing Initiative.

Currently Local Authorities have a wide range of powers in relation to compulsory purchase, which have been used well in some counties to bring vacant properties back into use. Fine Gael Councillors will work to ensure that their Local Authority use their powers effectively.



Leo Varadkar TD and Eoghan Murphy TD  
at Dolphin House, Dublin meeting a  
local resident.

## 10. HOUSING OPTIONS FOR OUR AGEING POPULATION

The policy statement 'Housing Options for Our Ageing Population' provides a framework for the creation of more liveable, sustainable and resource effective housing options for older people in every part of the country.

Fine Gael has been working to develop different types of supported housing or housing with care so that older people will have options to choose accommodation that is suited to their needs in their localities. The aim is to ensure that people can grow old and live in a community of their choosing, with dignity and independence. Fine Gael Councillors will progress the outcome of the engagement to provide greater housing and care choice for people as they grow older.



Sligo

# Vibrant Cities, Towns & Villages

By establishing the Department of Community and Rural Development in 2017, we demonstrated our ambition to back local communities in every part of Ireland, urban and rural. The creation of the new Department reflected a deliberate shift and pro-active approach to ensuring economic recovery and investment is accelerated in rural and urban areas, market towns and villages that have not experienced economic recovery to the same extent as our cities.

## **‘Project Ireland 2040’ - our plan for growth for every part of Ireland**

Balanced regional development is at the heart of the Government's 'Project Ireland 2040' Plan and there is scope for the growth of all towns in Ireland. The Project Ireland 2040 Plan ensures sustainable growth over the next twenty years in all parts of Ireland. We are working hard to ensure a more effective balance of development across our country, with the intention that all regions grow at broadly comparable rates.

We want to build up the cities of Cork, Waterford, Limerick, and Galway with each being targeted for population growth of more than 50%, twice the growth range projected for Dublin. Towns with key regional functions such as Athlone in the midlands, Sligo in the north-west, as well as the cross border city-regions of the future like Letterkenny-Derry and Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry will be growth centres under our Plan. Stretching from Kerry to Donegal, the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative will promote economic development along the western seaboard. It will maximise the assets of the region, better utilise the economic hubs and catchments to attract investment, job creation and contribute to an improved quality of life for people who live in the region.

In tandem with this Plan, the largest ever dedicated funding for urban and rural regeneration and development has been established by Fine Gael in Government. With the Government's Project Ireland 2040 plan and funding we can reach our aim - to strengthen the social and economic fabric of all our cities, towns and villages so that they are well placed to benefit from growth and opportunity.

To harness this potential, a one-size fits all approach will not work. Fine Gael is therefore also ensuring supports for business, communities, local groups and individuals in the following ways:

## 11. QUALITY JOBS, ENTERPRISE & INFRASTRUCTURE

### Growing the Regional and Local Economy

There are now more people at work than ever in the history of the State. Over 154,000 jobs have been created 2016. Almost two-thirds of these new jobs have been created outside of Dublin. This is the balance of growth that helps reinvigorate regional towns, gives workers greater choice and ensure the economic progress is spread evenly across the country.

Fine Gael is not complacent about job creation. The Government's new Jobs Plan, *Future Jobs Ireland*, seeks to future proof our economy by focusing on the quality and sustainability of all jobs. In February, enterprise plans for each of the 9 regions were published – again one size does not fit all. They do share one core focus – bringing Councils, state agencies, third level institutions and local stakeholders together to maximise job and enterprise potential around the country. As well as local jobs targets, we will provide competitive funding to boost regional enterprise projects, help deliver further advance facilities by IDA, and create new opportunities and collaboration between business and the new Technological Universities.

Assisting the growth of our local economies, the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund - with a budget of €2bn over 10 years - will help to rejuvenate significant but underused areas in Ireland's five cities and other large towns with populations over 10,000. The funding seeks to stimulate new residential and commercial developments, along with new services and amenities.

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund - with a budget of €1bn over 10 years - aims to revitalise parts of rural Ireland by supporting self-sustaining projects in towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000. These projects in sectors such as tourism, agri-food and recreation, will have a knock on economic and social benefit.

The opportunities from both funds are immense (see below for examples of successful projects to date). Fine Gael Councillors and Local Authorities have been to the fore in bringing groups together to bid for project funding. Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that Local Authorities remain active in their collaborations with the public and private sector and civil society groups to access and deliver innovative responses that will lift our communities and futures.

- > Funding for large scale strategic sites on both sides of the river in the **Tivoli/Cork Docklands** Regeneration areas.
- > Regeneration for O'Connell Street and projects in the **city centre of Limerick**.
- > The regeneration of **Athenry Town**, including the completion of the existing Bia Innovator Campus, driving entrepreneurship opportunities.
- > A national mountain-biking project that will develop recreational facilities in four locations across **seven counties (Offaly, Laois, Sligo, Dublin, Wicklow, Limerick Cork)** promoting economic tourism potential.



"Big Top" and Galway Cathedral during Arts Festival

## Arts and Culture

Arts and cultural events are a central part of life in Ireland's cities, towns and villages, providing both a focal point for local communities and making an important contribution to economic and tourist activity. Fine Gael Councillors will work with the main funders of arts and cultural events including the Arts Council, Local Authorities and Culture Ireland to ensure the continued development of world-class national and local festivals and events. Fine Gael in Government will continue to ensure capital funding is made available for the development of theatres, museums and arts centres.

## Nightlife and the night-time economy

A vibrant and diverse night-life is an important part of the cultural offering of any urban area. It makes our towns and cities more attractive and interesting places to live and helps attract domestic and international tourists. Fine Gael wants to see the establishment of local committees and 'night mayors' to advance and improve our night time entertainment, creative and cultural offerings. Consideration will be given to licensing regulations, venue availability and changes will be balanced with the needs of residential areas.

## Supporting Galway 2020

Fine Gael will work with the Galway 2020 board and executive team to drive the project forward in 2019, maximising the funding available and ensuring the expertise and creativity required for a successful 2020 programme is in place.

## Consultation on Poolbeg Stacks

The disused Poolbeg Stacks are a symbol of Dublin City and are still owned by the ESB. Fine Gael will launch a public competition for proposals on their future use.

## Commitment to Cork Events Centre

The vibrancy of Cork already plays an important national and international role. The Cork Events Centre will be key to providing space for the arts, culture and conference activities. Our Councillors will work in partnership with Cork City Council and Government to deliver this project.

## A stronger Local Enterprise Office (LEO)

Fine Gael is committed to our small, local, indigenous businesses. We delivered on our commitment in 2014 and established a network of 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs). Five years on, the LEOs have proven a remarkable success in assisting small business and creating jobs in every county, urban, suburban and rural. In order to build on this success, we have increased the budget for the LEOs by 25% for 2019.

Fine Gael is also determined to expand the powers of the Local Enterprise Offices so they can further encourage local job creation. At present, the LEOs can only provide direct grants to businesses with 10 employees or less while Enterprise Ireland usually target larger companies who have exporting potential. This means a cohort of businesses with more than 10 employees operating exclusively in the domestic market are currently not eligible for LEO's expertise. Fine Gael wants to change this.

With our Councillors, Fine Gael will ensure all ambitious companies, regardless of their size, have access to LEOs. As part of *Future Jobs Ireland*, we will strengthen the capacity of Local Enterprise Offices to provide a comprehensive range of tools for indigenous Irish businesses and entrepreneurs.

Fine Gael Councillors will demand more ambitious jobs creation targets are met in each county and that further attention is given to boost more start-up businesses.

Fine Gael wants to ensure that new and local businesses are able to avail of the many benefits from having an online presence. We have introduced a new pilot competitive scheme for eligible SMEs in the retail sector. The new scheme will allow retailers to strengthen their online trading capabilities in order to compete internationally. This is in addition to the Trading Online Voucher Scheme available through the Local Enterprise Office.

## High speed broadband

Fine Gael will ensure that every home, school and business in Ireland - regardless of how remote or rural - has access to high speed broadband. This will be achieved through a combination of commercial investment across Ireland; and a State intervention in those areas, mostly rural areas, where commercial operators acting alone are unlikely to invest.

In 2016, 50% of Irish premises (homes, businesses and farms) had access to high-speed broadband. Today, that stands at 75%. The last 25% are the most isolated and difficult to reach. Fine Gael will ensure that every part of the country can partake in the digital future and the opportunities that presents.

For premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be implemented through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to overcome obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and Local Authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing. Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in Local Authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards by ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements. We will ensure that a local digital strategy for each Local Authority area is developed so that the benefits of infrastructure development under the National Broadband Plan are fully realised economically and socially.

Local Authorities can play a much bigger role in communications. Fine Gael Councillors will work to ensure that Local Authorities:

- Enable street lighting to be used for the purposes of siting small cell technologies, which would greatly improve the speed of 5G rollout.
- Share lists of all scheduled Road Improvements and provide reasonable access to Local Authority infrastructure to all Telecom operators to assist in scheduling of network improvements and installation of essential infrastructure.

- Agree a standardised procedure for seeking planning permission for new mast sites –including: taking account of County Development Plan, pre-planning meetings and standardised Application Pack.

### **Education and skills as drivers of balanced regional development**

Fine Gael is investing in education because we believe education is the single best route to a better life. Almost €10 billion is being invested in education this year – our highest ever budget. This means smaller class sizes, more subject choice at second level, and much wider options for students at third level, from apprenticeships to the newly established Technological Universities. We will make multi-campus Technological Universities a driver of regional development; provide greater choice to students by strengthening the further education options to build the skill base of sustainable regional sectors. TU Dublin was established in January this year and TU Munster submitted their application in February. We also support the application for a TU for the south east region and Connaught Ulster.

We believe that Education and Training Boards in every part of the country can drive balanced regional development. They will achieve this by providing key resources to boost strong enterprises with a skilled workforce and innovative services, capable of building diversified and sustainable markets.

### **Affordable and accessible childcare**

For the first time ever there are more than 200,000 children benefiting from childcare initiatives across the country. In November this year, the new National Childcare Scheme will commence and is designed to extend further subsidies and quality services to parents. Ensuring greater accessibility for families to childcare is also a priority. With the support of City/County Childcare Committees, increased capital funding allows for the creation of new childcare places by providers.



Howth harbor

## 12. SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING OUR AGRI-FOOD & FISHERIES SECTOR

### Brexit

Fine Gael remains deeply committed to supporting and developing our agri-food and Fisheries sectors.

Brexit is the biggest challenge facing Irish farmers, fishermen and the food industry and Fine Gael's focus in Brexit negotiations has been to maintain as close to current arrangements as possible, both in terms of trade and access to fishing waters. Fine Gael is working with the European Commission to ensure the traditional market supports and exceptional aid provisions under the Common Agricultural Policy will be made available to assist farmers, as well as increased flexibility under State Aid regulations, in a no-deal Brexit scenario. We are fully committed to supporting farmers and fishermen through the challenges ahead.

### A new CAP

An adequate budget for the CAP post 2020 will be vitally important to support farmers in the years ahead, in a post Brexit environment. Fine Gael is prepared to increase Ireland's net contribution to the EU, but only if core policies, including the CAP, are protected.

In the period 2014-2020 Fine Gael delivered investment of €12.5bn in EU and exchequer funding for the agriculture sector under the Common Agricultural Policy. This has allowed us to invest in every locality across the country. Fine Gael is committed to securing a good deal post 2020 to continue this investment in rural areas through a range of farm gate schemes. This will allow us to build on the supports we have provided to date for farmers and rural communities and rural infrastructure. We will also ensure a greater focus on climate action and environmental protection in the new CAP.

### Fisheries and coastal communities

The Government has doubled the funding available under the European Maritime Fisheries Fund for fishermen and coastal communities, investing €240m in the fisheries sector over the period 2014-2020. We are investing in sustainability and the protection of fishing stocks,

securing fish stocks for the long-term in the interests of both fishermen and the environment. Fine Gael is also investing in harbour infrastructure, providing fishermen and coastal communities with better fishing and marine leisure facilities. The rollout of schemes such as the FLAG programme in coastal communities is also encouraging job creation and social wellbeing in local fishing communities across the country.

### Protecting the rural environment

Farmers and fishermen are custodians of the rural and coastal environment. We will deliver further progress on climate action, supporting the ambition of the new CAP which proposes to direct 40% of funding towards environmental and climate action measures. We are investing millions of euro in measures aimed at protecting the rural environment such as afforestation, beef genomics, carbon footprinting farms, agri-environment schemes, knowledge transfer measures, water quality, solar equipment on farms, organics and the removal of plastics from the waters around Ireland. We must and will do more to protect our natural resources for future generations.

## 13. TOWN, VILLAGE, MAIN STREET ENHANCEMENT

The creation of the Department of Community and Rural Development has added momentum to the work of communities, Chambers and other groups by helping to develop inclusive and sustainable projects around the country. These measures and initiatives are wide ranging and significant in the impact they make towards community engagement, regeneration and revitalisation.

All Fine Gael Councillors will work towards the development and implementation of Local Authority-led tailored masterplans. These plans will ensure that our cities, towns and villages are well positioned to utilise the wide variety of funding streams available. Fine Gael Councillors are strong advocates and encourage participation by Local Authorities and community groups in these funding streams.

We firmly believe in a ground up approach and it is vital that these plans and initiatives are developed in close consultation with local residents, Chamber of Commerce, Town Teams, who are best placed to identify the needs in their own locality.

### Financial supports for every community

The Town and Village Renewal Scheme seeks to improve a local environment and amenities, promote the potential for tourism and as a commercial centre in the interests of residents, businesses and visitors. Initiatives such as the development of an education and enterprise hub and community centre (Glenamaddy, Galway), a fitout of a business hub in an old bank building (Edgeworthstown, Longford), and the development of playground tourism (Kildavin, Carlow) help increase sustainability as a place to live and work. €53m has been allocated for this scheme since 2016 alone. Fine Gael Councillors advocate strongly for Council utilisation of these schemes.

The LEADER Programme is a well-known scheme for rural environment, enterprise development and social inclusion projects for both individuals and groups. Over 1,700 projects have been approved for funding since 2016.

Together with the CLAR Scheme, which seeks to attract people to live and work in areas of population decline through small infrastructure projects, towns and villages are receiving greater investment. It is a priority of Fine Gael Councillors that these investments become a tangible benefit to local residents and communities. Fine Gael is entirely committed to the continuation of these schemes.



Leo Varadkar TD and a friend in Macroom, Cork

## Play and outdoor recreation

Fine Gael recognises the critical developmental and social importance of providing play and recreation spaces for children and young people. We are committed to ensuring the development, refurbishment as well as new and innovative play and recreation spaces for families. In 2019, Fine Gael in government has increased funding for projects under the Capital Grant Scheme for Play and Recreation by €10,000 to €30,000. Together with local community groups, Fine Gael Councillors continue to press for the provision of more play facilities in their areas and their upgrade. We are committed to increasing funding to Local Authorities on an annual basis.

Providing more outdoor recreation amenities ranging from outdoor gym equipment to walk/cycleways and greenways has been a priority for Fine Gael. Over 600 projects have been invested in less than three years. The benefits are obvious – residents have recreational opportunities close to home, and visitors are attracted to the area which has knock on business advantages.

This is a priority for Fine Gael. We are committed to increasing and promoting the benefits of play and recreation for children and families across the country.

## Heritage buildings

Heritage-led regeneration brings economic benefits enabling our historic towns to prosper through increased visitor numbers and decreased numbers of vacant buildings and commercial premises. Assistance available to Local Authorities and community groups allows for enhancement, repair and conservation of historic and important buildings in our towns and cities. Fine Gael Councillors are committed to leveraging these funds for localities to ensure long term benefits such as increased visitor throughput, business and employment development as well as enhancing the local landscape for residents and preserving communities' built heritage.

## Commercial rates

The Local Government Rates Bill 2018 provides for the modernisation of the legislation governing commercial rates, which currently dates back to the 19th century. Included in the provisions are:

- the removal of the requirement for ratepayers to pay their annual bill in two instalments (moieties) and provision to allow ratepayers to pay rates by instalments or a payment plan agreed with the Local Authority;
- schemes for the abatement of rates on vacant properties;
- the levying of interest on unpaid and overdue rates;
- the rendering of unpaid rates to be a charge on relevant property; and
- In particular it provides for Local Authorities to introduce rates alleviation schemes to support specific national and Local Authority policy objectives. This will be a reserved function of Councillors. This will be an important mechanism to allow Councillors to introduce alleviation schemes, for example, to reinvigorate town and village centres across the country which in many locations have been disrupted, to say the least, by the construction of large out-of-town developments. The Bill will be enacted later this year.

## Enhanced community support

While many towns have bounced back economically from the recession, there are others in need of further targeted support.

Since 2015, the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) has assisted 110,000 people and 5,000 groups. Real results have come from the programme including:

- 5,801 people got new jobs;
- 15,900 new businesses, creating 1,695 full-time new jobs;
- 9,700 higher education qualifications
- 38,300 people participated in lifelong learning courses
- 12,473 young people not in employment, education or training were supported

Fine Gael is committed to ensuring significant funding is put behind this and other programmes such as CLAR, LEADER and the Community Enhancement. Potential projects that can benefit neighbourhoods and reinvigorate the locality with the backing of Local Authorities includes renovation of community centres and amenities, improvements to town parks, CCTV equipment and energy efficiency initiatives. Fine Gael Councillors will work to ensure that their locality has an equal opportunity to gain from these schemes.

## Alcohol and substance misuse in our communities

Unfortunately, alcohol and drug misuse takes place across our country and its impact is felt by every community. The 24 Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces play an important role in identifying local need, channelling funding, and ensuring co-ordinated action to deliver a targeted response in communities. Services on the ground are delivered by the HSE, Drug and Alcohol Taskforces, as well as Community and Voluntary Sector organisations. Fine Gael is committed through the National Drugs Strategy to pursue a health-led rather than a criminal justice approach to drug and alcohol misuse.

In order to reduce drug-related intimidation, work is ongoing to strengthen the effectiveness and public awareness of the drug-related intimidation reporting programme by An Garda Síochána and the National Family Support Network.

## Healthcare close to home

Sláintecare is all about delivering care closer to home. This year the Government launched a €20m Sláintecare Integration Fund to encourage initiatives to deliver integrated care and the shift to community care. We will build on this in the coming years. Under Sláintecare, Fine Gael in Government is delivering a number of key initiatives to benefit local communities:

- The new agreement with GPs will see a 40% increase in funding for General Practice over the next four years. This will benefit patients and support GP practices across the country. It includes moving more services to primary care and widening access to free and subsidised health care, including extending free GP care to children aged 6 to 12.
- Around the country, there are now 127 Primary Health Care Centres, with the majority of these delivered by Fine Gael in Government at a rate of ten new openings each year. Around 80 additional centres are at various stages of development and 11 will open this year. Fine Gael Councillors will help implement Sláintecare by advocating the expansion and development primary and community care through support for a similar approach to the DEIS model in education for primary health care in designated disadvantaged areas.
- The Government is investing almost €1bn a year into mental health services around the country. This investment could not succeed without the vital support provided by community, voluntary and advocacy groups to people with mental health difficulties, their families and carers. Fine Gael in Government has recently launched a new €3 million Community Mental Health Fund to allow local groups apply for financial support for the initiatives and programmes they run.
- 17 Local Authorities, through their Local Community Development Committee, have already joined the National Healthy Cities and Counties of Ireland Network. The Healthy Ireland Fund also assists key community initiatives, including the Active School Flag, a 'Healthy Ireland at Your Library' initiative, Age Friendly Ireland, and Get Ireland Walking Swimming/Cycling/Running strategies developed in partnership with Sport Ireland. Fine Gael Councillors want all Local Authorities to join.
- Under Sláintecare we will deliver the right care, in the right place and at the right time. Regional Integrated Care Organisations (RICOs) will be established enabling regionally planned care that is right for the needs of the population. In doing so, we will strengthen governance to drive improvements in performance and accountability.

## Disability Inclusion

For too long in the past society has placed obstacles in the path of many of our citizens with disabilities - obstacles that prevented them reaching their potential. Fine Gael wants to give people with a disability greater independence and choice in accessing services which best meet their individual needs. We will continue to work with Local Authorities to ensure that the Housing Adaptation Grants are accessible and available to those who need it the most. Fine Gael Councillors will support investment and adaptations that provide improved access in towns and villages, playground, local sporting facilities to those with a disability.

## Bringing communities together

The Tidy Towns Competition and more recently Men's Sheds are two household names across Ireland. They have gone from strength to strength and will continue to be advocated for by Fine Gael at national and local level.

Local services and initiatives that enhance and sustain their communities will continue to receive Fine Gael backing. They are the backbone of our society. The Community Services Programme which provided over €40m in 2018 to more than 400 community organisations countrywide. Fine Gael Councillors will continue to endorse locally developed projects that improve the lives of dependent residents.

Successful projects providing invaluable community services include

- > **Tralee Community Care provides daily hot meal to older people and to a local creche and special needs school.**
- > **Energy Action provides home insulation and energy efficiency services for older people in the Dublin area.**

### **Realising the potential of our public libraries**

A key resource across Ireland are the more than 300 public libraries under the leadership of our Local Authorities. Fine Gael in Government is committed to ensuring continued innovation and expansion of projects such as My Open Library, enhanced digital capacity, new builds and new mobile libraries. All of these projects allow our library network reach out and attract more patrons on a 24-7-365 basis.

### **Bringing creativity to every community and school**

The Creative Ireland Programme is bringing creativity to communities across Ireland, with over 500 community-based celebrations of culture and arts taking place last year as part of Cruinniú na nÓg and Creative Schools, involving thousands of children and young people and nurturing their imaginations and inventiveness. Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that their Local Authority is fully engaged with Creative Ireland over its remaining four years, in particular that their Local Authority's Culture and Creativity Teams, ensuring that the programmes benefits are felt in a meaningful way in communities throughout Ireland.

### **A sustainable post office network**

As communications technologies change, the role of the postal services must evolve so that they continue to serve their communities effectively. An Post's Plan will make sure that communities across Ireland have the same access to goods as in major world cities; re-invent the post office network so every town in Ireland has a modern post office, providing the financial technology services customers need in a cashless society; develop new strategic partnerships to leverage its network.

A €30m loan to An Post has been made available to assist the renewal of the post office network and to ensure that we can continue to have 5 day per week mails delivery service. Our priority now is to look at how we can deliver new accessible services for all:

- A new Digital Assist scheme is being piloted in 10 post offices, where post offices are kitted out to help citizens engage with services online.
- Ensure we use the post office network to deliver services to those citizens who do not want to use, or are unable to use services online.
- Promote locally the "Trading Online Voucher" so local business keeps up with the changing consumer patterns
- Support community education for digital literacy
- Diversifying and growing its financial service offerings

## **14. IMPROVING TRANSPORT LINKS FOR ALL PARTS OF IRELAND**

Fine Gael has always placed importance on accessibility for all parts of the country. This is recognised in 'Project Ireland 2040', which provides funding for an extensive road building programme ensuring that all parts of Ireland are linked not just to Dublin, but also to each other. It also places a particular focus on improving the access to the North-West, which was neglected when it came to roads investment during the Celtic Tiger.

Fine Gael will ensure that there is a strong pipeline of future road development projects so that there can be steady and sustainable improvements in our road network in the decades ahead.

Fine Gael is conscious that despite the strong recovery in the public finances, we have not yet reached the level of roads funding that is necessary to properly maintain our regional and local roads. The €4.5 billion in regional and local roads funding under 'Project Ireland 2040', in addition to the €7.3 billion regional road accessibility in national roads, will remedy this and ensure that a 'steady state' funding is achieved from next year.

We will work to ensure that with regard to local and regional roads, Local Authorities have the greatest level of discretion into which roads projects are prioritised and funded.

### **A decisive move to public transport (Trains, Trams, Buses and Bikes)**

'Project Ireland 2040' is the first time that public transport has been placed at the heart of government expenditure and in the planning process. Over the next decade, more than €7 billion is committed to new public transport projects in our cities, while future planning and development is required to place public transport at its centre.

Fine Gael is fully committed to over the next decade delivering the BusConnects programme in Dublin, Cork and Galway. This will significantly reduce journey times on buses, provide more direct routes and make the bus a significantly more attractive prospect for commuters. It will also segregate bikes from other traffic, thereby making cycling a safer, more enjoyable, and more attractive prospect also.

Fine Gael acknowledges that real concerns have been raised with individual BusConnects routes. It is important that the National Transport Authority works with Local Authority members and communities to ensure that legitimate concerns are dealt with and resolved, while also delivering the broader benefit of the project to commuters stuck in buses and cars for hours every week.

Fine Gael in government will also ensure the delivery of the Metrolink and DART Expansion projects in the Greater Dublin Area. This will ensure that Dublin has a transport network on a par with its European and global peers. As stated in 'Project Ireland 2040', the new Cork Transport Strategy will evaluate the potential of a Light Rail Corridor or a Bus Rapid Transit to serve the envisaged huge increase in population in the Cork area. Further movement away from cars and towards walking, cycling, bus, tram and rail will help reduce our emissions. The decision outlined within 'Project Ireland 2040' to ensure that all new buses purchased for the urban bus network from mid-2019 are low emission will mean that the emissions from public transport will be reduced.

### **Improving Rural Transport**

Fine Gael recognises the value of rural transport to rural communities, particularly for the elderly and those vulnerable to social isolation. We have expanded the Local Link service which provides safe, secure and reliable public transport in local and rural areas. In addition, Fine Gael is continuing to explore other avenues to see how rural transport can be improved for communities throughout Ireland.

### **Commitment to the Local Improvement Scheme**

Fine Gael in Government re-established the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS). €48 million has been allocated to LIS since it was reintroduced in 2017 with over 1,100 rural roads improved in the last year. Funding will be increased in the years ahead for this important rural roads' improvement scheme.

## 15. NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL TOURISM

Tourism is at the heart of the Irish economy, providing opportunities in all parts of the country – urban and rural. 2018 was a record year for Irish tourism creating jobs and business revenue in all parts of the country.

Local Authorities are central to this success and Fine Gael will ensure that close partnership continues in the years ahead. At a national level, we will ensure that Tourism Ireland is supported to effectively market Ireland overseas. We will also ensure that Fáilte Ireland is enabled to increase its capital investment programme, as well its backing for festivals, events and targeted campaigns.

New routes off the Wild Atlantic Way are being developed to encourage wider touring. The Shannon Estuary Drive was completed in 2018, relieving congestion in local tourism hotspots. In addition, €1.1m has been awarded to nine projects under New Horizons grants scheme for Skellig/Connemara coasts and Aran Islands. In all 31 areas, we will ensure that Local Authorities place tourism at the centre of their economic development plans. Fine Gael Councillors will fully back their Local Authority bids for funding to develop towns in their area as 'destination towns' for tourists.

Over the next 4 years, €56m will be invested into delivering tourism greenways. We are determined to stimulate rural tourism opportunities and build on the success of established greenways, biking trails. Fine Gael intends to create a significant network of greenways that are attractive to domestic and foreign tourists alike and encourage longer stays in more rural areas. Fine Gael Councillors will champion projects with such tourism potential.



Leo Varadkar TD meets with some players in his constituency

## 16. MORE SPORTING OPPORTUNITIES

In 2017, the Government approved the first ever Sports Policy for Ireland with a commitment to double the spend in sport (incl. community, high performance, Women and Disability Sports) by 2025. At the heart of this are policies to improve sporting participation and Local Authorities are central to the delivery of this. Local Authorities have a key role to play in the delivery of the public spaces and infrastructure that we need for sport and physical activity. Fine Gael will ensure that the provision of public spaces for sporting activities are to the fore of all development plans within their own Local Authority area.

Fine Gael Councillors will also demand that each Local Authority develops a local sports plan consistent with the overall vision and objectives of this National Sports Policy. These local plans will be developed and implemented in cooperation with Local Sports Partnership, clubs, communities, schools and partners within and beyond sport. In parallel, Fine Gael will ensure that each Local Authority carries out an audit of the sporting facilities within their boundaries. This audit will help identify the sporting resources available within the county, and will help ensure that future funding by central and local government is best used. Improving access to sporting facilities to ensure the greatest level of sporting participation will be central to these local sports plans

## 17. FIGHTING CRIME

This year, we will see more Gardaí out on the beat through the redeployment of an additional 500 Gardaí from administrative roles to frontline policing duties, through continuing recruitment which will see 600 new recruits in 2019, and through the implementation of the report of the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland (CFPI) which places community policing and Garda visibility at the heart of its recommendations. In total almost 2,600 recruits have attested as members of An Garda Síochána since the Garda College was reopened in 2014. It is important that the increase in Garda numbers results in effective community partnerships to reduce crime in our localities.

Each Council area has a Joint Policing Committees (JPC). Their purpose is to provide a dedicated forum to encourage consultation, cooperation and synergy on policing and crime issues between An Garda Síochána, Local Authority officials, elected representatives and the community and voluntary sectors.

The network of Joint Policing Committees (JPCs) all around the country have the potential to be really valuable local forums, bringing the community together with local Gardaí to reduce crime. But, in most cases, that potential has not been realised to date. An analysis of the JPCs by the CFPI has shown that while some JPCs work particularly effectively, most do not. Fine Gael will work to change this situation and to ensure that Joint Policing Committees really work in every locality. Fine Gael Councillors will be a strong and active voice to ensure that the concerns of local people about crime are clearly communicated to An Garda Síochána so that they can be dealt with effectively.

### Community CCTV

Community Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) scheme is important to communities. The CCTV scheme can be seen as an additional deterrent that helps to prevent crime and to assist the Gardaí in apprehending criminals where a crime takes place in a locality. In Government, Fine Gael has provided funding for a multiannual Community CCTV scheme, allocating €1,000,000 per annum for the period 2017-2020. The scheme assists local organisations by providing a grant of up to €40,000. Within this limit, grants of up to 60% of the total capital costs of the scheme may be awarded. Since the scheme was established, 20 Community CCTV schemes have been established in five counties.

Clarification on the impact of new data protection laws on the Community CCTV Scheme has been provided by the Data Protection Commission confirming that data protection is not a barrier to the establishment or maintenance of authorised CCTV. We will introduce new elements to the current scheme to allow communities to draw down grants to allow for the upgrading and extension of existing schemes.

### Senior alert scheme

Fine Gael Councillors will advocate for the increased provision of personalised monitored alarms for older people through the Senior Alert Scheme. It provides confidence and allows independent living for many. Since the scheme began in 2015, almost 45,000 people have received approval.

## 18. AN GHAELGE A CHUR CHUN CINN I BPOBAIL

Tá cur chun cinn na Gaeilge i bpobail ar fud na tíre Iárnach do thodhchaí na teanga agus d'fhonn na cuspóirí atá leagtha amach sa Straitéis Fíche Bliain don Ghaeilge a bhaint amach.

Tá oideachas ríthábhachtach maidir le forás a chur faoin teanga. Chomh maith leis na haidhmeanna atá leis an gcéad Pholasáí ón Stát don Oideachas Gaeltachta a seoladh sa bhliain 2016, caithfimid súil ar na bealaí is fearr chun forbairt Gaelscoileanna agus naíonraí a spreagadh i bpobail lasmuigh de na ceantair sheanbhunaithe Ghaeltachta. Tá tábhacht ar leith leis sin i dtaobh an phróisis pátrúnachta nua ina bhfuil vóta i gceist leis chun tuairimí tuismitheoirí agus caomhnóirí a fháil i leith scoileanna nua.

Tá rannpháirtíocht an phobail ríthábhachtach chun cur le líon na gcainteoirí Gaeilge. Spreagfaimid eagraíochtaí áitiúla chun imeachtaí Gaeilge a eagrú - ranganna agus gníomhaíochtaí eile ina measc.

Táimid i bhfách go mór le Líonraí nua Gaeilge a fhorbairt - in éineacht le líonraí atá ann cheana i gCluain Dolcáin, Inis agus Baile Locha Riach atá riachtanach chun tacú le ceantair nua Ghaeltachta a chruthú agus tacú leo.



Small islands near Westport town along the Wild Atlantic Way.

# Protecting Our Environment

## 19. LEADING ON CLIMATE ACTION

Local Authorities can be leaders in delivering climate action and set an example of how they can be in the vanguard of public service bodies responding to climate disruption.

We will shortly publish a Climate Action Plan which sets out the actions that we need to take to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate action. Fine Gael Councillors will work to make Local Authorities leaders in the public service in responding to climate disruption, and as a Year 1 priority ensure their Councils to adapt an ambitious climate mandate backed by specific programmes and regular benchmarking of performance across key areas of their Authority.

Local Authorities have a key role to play in combatting climate disruption. We will ensure that Local Authorities develop mitigation and adaptation strategies for their areas. Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that local plans match Fine Gael's national ambition to be a leader in this area. We will push Local Authorities to set new targets, including a 50% improvement in energy efficiency by 2025 (on 2009 levels).

Fine Gael is establishing regional climate action offices to enable Local Authorities to work together in responding to climate change. Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that Councils work within their regional structure to:

- Audit good practice and promote mainstreaming of exemplars
- Help form networks across Local Authorities in their region to develop and implement climate initiatives (hosing stock, EV networks, modal shift, waste reduction)
- Facilitate the establishment of Sustainable Energy Communities in their area under the SEAI backed model
- Help form Climate Action Partnerships where Local Authorities partner more widely in their area (enterprise, sporting, public and voluntary sectors)
- Promote the creation of One Stop Shop access to information for citizens on waste management, energy efficiency, and climate initiatives

The Climate Action Fund offers Local Authorities an opportunity to access additional resources for innovative actions. It has already awarded a coalition of 27 Councils up to €17.5 million to retrofit all remaining 326,000 non-LED Local Authority public lights to high efficiency LED Lanterns.

## 20. A CLEAN AIR STRATEGY

Air pollution is a major cause of illness and premature death. In Ireland it is estimated that there are 1,600 premature deaths due to air pollution with the overall health-related costs being over €2 billion per year.

As part of the forthcoming Clean Air Strategy, each Local Authority will have discretion to introduce "higher air quality zones" within their control. Within these high air quality zones Local Authorities will be able to restrict the burning of certain fuels, limit high emission vehicles, and other measures to maintain standards of air quality.

Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that these higher air quality zones are utilised so that we can enjoy the best quality air possible, while having regard to what is best for each local area.

## 21. BETTER WASTE MANAGEMENT

In accordance with the waste hierarchy (reduce, reuse, recycle), and keeping in mind that 66% of Co<sub>2</sub> comes from materials, Fine Gael Councillors will require Local Authorities:

- To develop initiatives to reduce packaging and waste, improve the level of capture, and reduce contamination through recycling streams.
- To report on the elimination of single use plastics, resource use plans and green procurement.
- Work with the EPA to review the effectiveness of Local Authority waste enforcement through the regional offices and prioritise most pressing enforcement challenges, including a focus on sites of serious illegal waste activity and an initiative to deter illegal dumping.

We will monitor, review and implement appropriate incentives and measures to encourage residential sector to minimise output of household waste and improve recycling.

We will roll out a 2019 anti-dumping plan that will place an increased emphasis on all those who facilitate the unauthorised movement and disposal of waste. Through the Environment



Some of the Fine Gael Climate Action Team - Hildegard Naughton TD, Richard Bruton TD and Martin Heydon TD

Fund we will back projects across all 31 Council areas, remediating black spots and equipping Local Authority enforcement officers with the latest technologies available to support SMART enforcement of our waste laws, including access to drones.

Our Councillors will ensure that Local Authorities prioritise illegal dumping and unaccounted for waste; construction and demolition activity and capacity challenges; dealing with sites containing illegally deposited waste. Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that Local Authorities have incorporated these priorities into their Environmental Inspection Plans.

Building on the end of the purchase single-use plastic cups, cutlery and straws for use within public bodies, Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that every Local Authority reports by end-October 2019 on the measures it is taking to minimise waste generation and maximise recycling.

Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that each Local Authority will develop resource efficiency action plans. These plans will help staff make savings in energy and water use as well as preventing food waste and maximising recycling.

Recent decisions by countries, most notably China, to limit their intake of recycling waste increases the need for us to reduce the level of waste packaging being produced greater and also the need to increase the capacity within Ireland and the European Union for recycling to be carried out here.





# FINE GAEL



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