



Local Election 2024

MANIFESTO

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FOREWORD

Foreword by Taoiseach Simon Harris TD



On Friday 7 June, the people of Ireland will go to the polls in local and European elections. To you, the voter, I want to ask you for your trust, your support and your vote.

Fine Gael believes in the value of public representation. Across the country, our councillors are working to deliver for you, your family and your communities. While others seek to sow division in towns and villages across the country, we want to unite in the face of great challenges. This manifesto sets out our vision for the next five years at local level and the set of priorities that will guide us.

They are:

1. More homes, more home ownership
2. Backing small business and enterprise
3. A new partnership for rural Ireland and farmers
4. Enforcing law and order
5. Firm and fair migration
6. Better public services and infrastructure
7. Healthy and sustainable communities

Fine Gael councillors are at the centre of communities across the country. They need your support to deliver the step-change needed in housing at local authority level.

Fine Gael has overseen the largest investment in community development. However, we need to ensure your towns and villages are cleaner and more accessible.

Communities must have the services for you and your family, whether that be playgrounds, transport, childcare, or sports facilities.

A vote for Fine Gael is a vote for law and order and safer streets.

We have much to be positive about. More people are living in rural Ireland than ever before, more people are working in rural Ireland than ever before and more investment is going into rural Ireland than ever before. But we know we need to do more and balanced regional development will remain a priority for me as Taoiseach. Our urban areas also need investment, including better safety, better transport and better services.

Under my leadership, Fine Gael will work to deliver for you, for your community, for our country. We promise if you give your vote to Fine Gael, we will work, day and night, to help make things better. We will have your back. We will repay your trust. Together, we promise we will deliver. With a new energy. With new leadership.

Working with you.

Working for you.

Simon Harris TD
Taoiseach

RÉAMHRÁ

Réamhrá ón Taoiseach, Simon Harris TD

Dé hAoine an 7 Meitheamh, caithfidh muintir na hÉireann a vótaí i dtoghcháin áitiúla agus Eorpacha.

Ba mhaith liom do chuid iontaobhe, do thacaíocht agus do vóta a iarraidh ortsa, a vótálaí.

Creideann Fine Gael i luach na hionadaíochta poiblí. Ar fud na tíre, tá ár gcomhairleoirí ag obair chun beart a dhéanamh de réir a mbriathair ar do shon, ar son do theaghlach agus ar son do phobal.

Cé go bhfuil daoine eile ag iarraidh easaontas a chothú i mbailte agus i sráidbhailte ar fud na tíre, ba mhaith linn teacht le chéile roimh na dúshlán mhóra atá os ár gcomhair.

Leagtar amach san fhorógra seo ár bhfís do na cúig bliana amach romhainn ar an leibhéal áitiúil agus an tsraith tosaíochtaí a threoróidh muid.

Is iad sin:

1. Tuilleadh tithe, úinéireacht tí níos mó
2. Tacaíocht a thabhairt do ghnólachtaí beaga agus don fhiontraíocht
3. Comhpháirtíocht nua do cheantair thuaithe na hÉireann agus d'fheirmeoirí
4. Dlí agus ord a fhorfheidhmiú
5. Córas imirce atá dian agus cóir
6. Seirbhísí agus bonneagar poiblí níos fearr
7. Pobail shláintiúla agus inbhuanaithe

Tá comhairleoirí Fine Gael ag croílár na bpobal ar fud na tíre. Teastaíonn do thacaíocht uathu chun an t-athrú ó bhonn a chur i gcrích a theastaíonn i dtithíocht ar leibhéal na n-údarás áitiúil.

Teastaíonn do thacaíocht uathu chun stop a chur le bac a chur ar fhorbairtí tithíochta nuair a bhíonn géarghá leo Rinne Fine Gael maoirseacht ar an infheistíocht is mó ná riamh i bhforbairt pobail. Ach ní mór dúinn a chinntiú, áfach, go mbíonn do bhailte agus do shráidbhailte níos glaine agus go mbíonn rochtain níos fearr orthu.

Caithfidh na seirbhísí a bheith ag pobail a theastaíonn uait féin agus ó do theaghlach, agus is cuma más áiteanna súgartha, iompar, cúram do leanaí, nó saoráid spóirt atá i gceist leo.

Is vóta ar son an dlí agus an oird agus ar son sráideanna níos sábháilte é vóta ar son Fhine Gael.

Tá go leor againn le bheith dearfach faoi. Tá níos mó daoine ná riamh ina gcónaí i gceantair thuaithe na hÉireann, tá níos mó daoine ná riamh ag obair i gceantair thuaithe na hÉireann agus tá níos mó infheistíochta ag dul isteach i gceantair thuaithe na hÉireann ná riamh. Ach tá a fhios againn nach mór dúinn níos mó a dhéanamh agus beidh forbairt réigiúnach chothromaithe fós ina tosaíocht dom mar Thaoiseach. Teastaíonn infheistíocht freisin ónár gceantair uirbeacha, lena n-áirítear sábháilteacht níos fearr, iompar níos fearr agus seirbhísí níos fearr.

Faoi mo cheannaireacht, oibreoidh Fine Gael chun beart a dhéanamh de réir ár mbriathair ar do shon, ar son do phobail, ar son ár dtíre. Geallaimid duit má chaitheann tú do vóta ar son Fhine Gael, go n-oibreoidimid, de lá agus d'oíche, chun cuidiú le rudaí a dhéanamh níos fearr. Déanfaimid tú a choimheád. Déanfaimid d'iontaobh a chúiteamh leat. Le chéile, geallaimid go ndéanfaimid beart de réir ár mbriathair. Le fuinneamh nua. Le ceannaireacht nua.

Ag obair leatsa.

Ag obair ar do shon.

Simon Harris TD

Taoiseach

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fine Gael's priorities for the next five years

1. More homes, more home ownership

Building more homes will be our number one priority both nationally and at local level. We are seeing really positive momentum on house building, with 350 homes commencing every working day so far in 2024. This construction activity is happening all over the country, but we need to see more of a regional spread in every county in Ireland.

Fine Gael will build 250,000 homes over the next five years. Our councillors will work with their local authority to develop a Housing Delivery Action Plan, with specific targets for social and affordable homes. Our councillors will hold the local authority to account for their building targets.

Fine Gael will retain the Help to Buy scheme and the First Home scheme, two crucial supports to help people purchase their own home.

We will continue to increase the rent tax credit to help people save for their deposit.

Fine Gael wants to help people build on their own land.

2. Backing Small Business and Enterprise

Fine Gael representatives and the Fine Gael Small Business & Enterprise Council have been travelling around the country, listening to businesses and the challenges that they face. When elected leader, Simon Harris TD promised to bring forward a package to address rising costs for small businesses and within weeks, he delivered.

Our team of Ministers Peter Burke, Heather Humphreys, Patrick O'Donovan, Paschal Donohoe, Emer Higgins and Neale Richmond worked together to develop a 15-point plan, which provides certainty and some much-needed

relief, based on feedback from businesses up and down this country.

This is just a start. Under Fine Gael, we will ensure every decision taken by Government is assessed for its impact on small and medium enterprises.

We will build allegiances between education and enterprise with a specific focus on the needs of each region. We will help fund the upskilling and reskilling of workers taking the cost off the employer.

We will reform commercial rates.

3. A new partnership for rural Ireland and farmers

We are investing more money in rural Ireland than ever before.

Fine Gael established the Department of Rural and Community Development and it is rolling out a range of grants, schemes and funds that are transforming our villages, towns and cities.

Fine Gael will develop practical supports to help the farming community.

Agriculture is a vital part of our economy and farmers' work must be rewarded and valued.

We have held 15 meetings across the country with farmers – to listen to them and understand their concerns. Our agricultural group has now developed a series of proposals which we plan to implement over the medium term. We have listened on succession, on retirement and other worries facing the farming community.

Under Taoiseach Simon Harris' leadership, we want to engage in a new partnership on agriculture where farmers are central to the changes we are making.

4. Enforcing law and order

Fine Gael will always stand for law and order. We are the party that founded An Garda Síochána. A vote for Fine Gael is a vote for a party that stands shoulder to shoulder with the men and women of An Garda Síochána and the families that support them. This party has taken several measures to support Gardaí on the beat and we will do more.

We are increasing penalties for knife crime. We are deploying body-worn cameras for Gardaí in Dublin City Centre, Waterford, and Limerick in 2024, with nationwide roll-out to follow.

Drug use is causing serious harm to communities and families across the country. Fine Gael is committed to addressing this. We will work with communities to tackle drug use. Working with An Garda Síochána and families, we will continue to ensure we inform people of the dangers of drug use and the consequences of purchasing drugs.

We will strengthen the use of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs) to combat the challenges of anti-social behaviour.

5. Firm and fair migration

Ireland will maintain a migration system that is firm, fair and enforced and we will do so in accordance with international law and fundamental rights. We are very conscious that communities want to play their part but the system to date has not been good enough, placing unfair pressures on communities around the country.

Taoiseach Simon Harris is leading efforts to ensure all state agencies and communities are working productively together.

We will move away from the emergency use of hotels for housing asylum seekers. It is not acceptable that the only functioning hotel in a town can be taken away from a community overnight.

The Government is working to put in place facilities for those seeking protection on state land. We will not stand for any more unnecessary delays in making state land available for accommodation.

We cannot and should not lose sight of the benefits of migration. Our economy is built on being open: we need workers in all sectors like agriculture, in our health service and to build homes. We have to help those in need and we cannot achieve that without rules-based systems that dismantle the criminal trafficking gangs.

We acknowledge we have not got everything right, but some political parties speak out of both sides of their mouths when it comes to migration. One day, they want more migrants, the next they want an end to open borders. We won't play politics on migration. We will focus on taking swift action in the best interests of all people in Ireland.

6. Better public services funded by a strong economy

Due to Fine Gael's careful management of the public finances, we are now able to spend record levels on infrastructure and put money away for future generations. This year, €13 billion is being made available for investment to provide more schools, homes, roads and hospitals.

As we have learned, increased funding does not always lead to better services.

We will work at local and national level to improve the quality of services in a range of areas, from childcare, disability, to education and transport.

We need to maintain our road infrastructure and invest in public transport. Fine Gael will also strive to improve access to bike schemes across the country, including a new bike to college scheme.

Fine Gael is the party that delivered the Technological Universities to the regions. Fine Gael will be the party to invest in each TU to ensure each thrives.

Fine Gael believes all money collected locally through the Local Property Tax should be retained within the county. We also want to maintain councillors' discretion to decide the Local Property Tax rate for their area. Taxpayers deserve to know where their money is being spent. Fine Gael will work at local and national level to detail where your money is being spent.

7. Healthy and Sustainable Communities

Local authorities have an important role to play in creating communities in which we want to live, work and raise a family.

With record levels of investment in Health, Fine Gael will encourage greater co-operation between the new Health Regions and local authorities in addressing the health needs of each region.

Councillors can input on the range and operation of local health services through Regional Health Forums. In this new approach, strong representative voices will become even more important, and Fine Gael will ensure that we have the team to advocate for better local health services.

Keeping our streets clean, tackling illegal dumping and improving access to bins will be a key commitment of Fine Gael councillors.

Fine Gael will fund improved public lighting, better access to dog parks, and ensure that new, innovative play and recreation spaces are provided in every county – both urban and rural.

We will increase funding to libraries and sports facilities in every county.

Our councillors are committed to engaging with and listening to people with disabilities and disability organisations so that we can work together to ensure our towns and cities work for everyone.

We will ensure our communities feel the benefits of our economic success through balanced regional development ensuring communities benefit from large- and small-scale renewable energy projects. We will work on new ways to unlock the potential of the circular economy and improve waste management.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tosaíochtaí Fhine Gael le haghaidh na gcúig bliana le teacht - achoimre fheidhmeach

1. Tuilleadh tithe, úinéireacht tí níos mó

Beidh sé mar chéad tosaíocht dúinn tuilleadh tithe a thógáil ar leibhéal náisiúnta agus ar leibhéal áitiúil araon. Tá dul chun cinn thar a bheith dearfach le feiceáil againn faoi láthair maidir le tógáil tithe, agus cuireadh tús le hobair ar 350 teach gach lá oibre go dtí seo in 2024. Tá an ghníomhaíocht thógála sin ag tarlú ar fud fad na tíre, ach teastaíonn uainn leathadh réigiúnach níos mó a fheiceáil i ngach contae in Éirinn.

Tógfaidh Fine Gael 250,000 teach sna cúig bliana le teacht. Oibreoidh ár gcomhairleoirí lena n-údarás áitiúla

chun Plean Gníomhaíochta um Sholáthar Tithíochta a fhorbairt, agus spriocanna sainiúla ann le haghaidh tithe sóisialta agus inacmhainne. Tabharfaidh ár gcomhairleoirí an t-údarás áitiúil chun cuntais maidir lena spriocanna tógála.

Coinneoidh Fine Gael an scéim Cabhair le Ceannach agus scéim an Chéad Tí, dhá thaca ríthábhachtacha chun cuidiú le daoine a dteach féin a cheannach.

Leanfaimid le creidmheas cánach ar chíos a mhéadú chun cuidiú le daoine airgead a shábháil dá n-éarlais.

Is mian le Fine Gael cuidiú le daoine tógáil ar a dtalamh féin.

2. Tacaíocht a thabhairt do Ghnólachtaí Beaga agus don Fiontraíocht

Bhí ionadaithe Fhine Gael agus an Chomhairle um Ghnólachtaí Beaga & Fiontraíocht de chuid Fhine Gael ag taisteal ar fud na tíre, ag éisteacht le gnólachtaí agus faoi na dúshláin a bhíonn rompu. Nuair a toghadh mar cheannaire é, gheall Simon Harris TD chun pacáiste a thabhairt chun tosaigh chun tabhairt faoi chostais atá ag méadú do ghnólachtaí beaga, agus laistigh de roinnt seachtainí, rinne sé an beart de réir a bhriathair.

D'oibrigh ár bhfoireann Airí Peter Burke, Heather Humphreys, Patrick O'Donovan, Paschal Donohoe agus Emer Higgins le cheile chun plan 15 pointe a fhorbairt, lena soláthraítear cinnteacht agus faoiseamh lena bhfuil géarghá, bunaithe ar aiseolas ó ghnólachtaí ó cheann ceann na tíre.

Ní hé sin ach tús. Faoi Fhine Gael, cinnteoidimid go ndéantar measúnú ar gach cinneadh a ghlacfaidh an Rialtas maidir lena thionchar ar fhiontair bheaga agus mheánmhéide.

Forbróimid comhaontais idir oideachas agus fiontraíocht, ag díriú go sainiúil ar riachtanais an réigiúin. Cuideoidimid le huasoiliúint agus le hathsciliú oibrithe a mhaoiniú agus an costas á bhaint ón bhfostóir.

Déanfaimid rátaí tráchtála a athchóiriú.

3. Beart nua do cheantair thuaithe na hÉireann agus d'fheirmeoirí

Tá níos mó airgid á infheistiú againn i gceantair thuaithe na hÉireann ná riamh.

Is é Fine Gael a chuir an Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail ar bun agus tá raon deontas, scéimeanna agus cistí á chur i bhfeidhm go céimneach aici atá ag athrú ár sráidbhailte, ár mbailte agus ár gcathracha ó bhonn.

Forbróidh Fine Gael tacaíochtaí praiticiúla chun cuidiú leis an bpobal feirmeoireachta.

Is cuid ríthábhachtach dár ngeilleagar í an talmhaíocht agus ní mór cúiteamh agus meas a thabhairt ar shaothar feirmeoirí.

Rinneamar 15 chruinniú a thionól le feirmeoirí ar fud na tíre - chun éisteacht leo agus chun an imní atá orthu a thuiscint. Tá sraith moltaí forbartha anois ag ár ngrúpa talmhaíochta agus tá sé beartaithe againn iad a chur i bhfeidhm thar an meántearma. D'éisteamar le himní maidir le comharbas agus scor mar aon le himní eile atá os gcomhair an phobail feirmeoireachta.

Faoi cheannaireacht Simon Harris, ba mhian linn páirt a ghlacadh i gcomhpháirtíocht nua maidir le talmhaíocht ina mbeidh feirmeoirí ina gcuid dhílis de na hathruithe atá á ndéanamh againn.

4. Dlí agus ord a fhorfheidhmiú

Seasfaidh Fine Gael i gcónaí do dhlí agus ord. Is muidne an páirtí a chuir an Garda Síochána ar bun. Is ionann vóta ar son Fhine Gael agus vóta ar son páirtí a sheasann gualainn ar ghualainn le fir agus le mná an Gharda Síochána agus leis na teaghlaigh a thacaíonn leo. Rinne an páirtí seo roinnt beart chun tacú le Gardaí ar an stádar agus déanfaimid níos mó.

Tá pionóis maidir le coireacht scine á méadú againn. Tá ceamaraí éide á gcur in úsáid againn do Gardaí i Lár Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath, i bPort Láirge, agus i Luimneach in 2024, agus cuirfear i bhfeidhm go céimneach iad ina dhiaidh seo ar fud na tíre.

Tá úsáid drugaí ina cúis le dochar tromchúiseach do phobail agus do theaghlaigh ar fud na tíre. Tá Fine Gael tiomanta do dhul i ngleic leis sin. Oibreoidimid le pobail chun dul i ngleic le húsáid drugaí i mbailte agus i sráidbhailte ar fud na tíre. Trí obair a dhéanamh leis an nGarda Síochána agus le teaghlaigh, leanfaimid lena chinntiú go gcuirtear daoine ar an eolas faoi na contúirtí a bhaineann le húsáid drugaí agus faoi na torthaí ar dhruagaí a cheannach.

Déanfaimid úsáid orduithe um iompar frithshóisialta (ASBOnna) a neartú chun na dúshláin a chomhrac a bhaineann le hiompar frithshóisialta.

5. Córas imirce atá dian agus cóir

Coimeádfaidh Éire córas imirce atá dian, cóir agus forfheidhmithe agus déanfaimid sin ar aon dul le dlí idirnáisiúnta agus le cearta bunúsacha. Tuigimid go maith gur mian le pobail lámh a bheith acu i gcúrsaí ach ní raibh an córas go dtí seo maith go leor, agus cuireadh brúnna míchothroma ar phobail ar fud na tíre.

Tá an Taoiseach Simon Harris i gceannas ar iarrachtaí chun a chinntiú go mbíonn gníomhaireachtaí stáit uile ag obair go héifeachtach le chéile.

Bogfaimid ó úsáid éigeandála óstán chun cóiríocht a chur ar fáil don lucht iarrtha tearmainn. Níl sé inghlactha gur féidir an t-aon óstán atá ag feidhmiú i mbaile a bhaint de phobal thar oíche.

Tá an Rialtas ag obair chun saoráidí a chur ar bun dóibh

siúd atá ar lorg cosanta ar thalamh an stáit. Ní chuirfimid suas lena thuilleadh moilleanna neamhriachtanacha ar thalamh an stáit a chur ar fáil do chóiríocht.

Ní féidir linn agus níor cheart dúinn dearmad a dhéanamh ar thairbhí na himirce. Tá ár ngeilleagar tógtha ar bhonn oscailte: teastaíonn oibrithe uainn i ngach earnáil amhail talmhaíocht agus inár seirbhís sláinte agus chun tithe a thógáil. Ní mór dúinn cuidiú leo siúd atá i ngátar agus ní féidir linn sin a dhéanamh gan chórais atá bunaithe ar rialacha lena gcuirtear deireadh leis na dronga gáinneála coiriúla.

Aithnímid nach ndearna muid gach rud mar is ceart, ach cuireann páirtithe polaitiúla áirithe ráitis nach bhfuil ag teacht le chéile amach nuair a bhíonn imirce i gceist. Ar lá amháin, teastaíonn a thuilleadh imirceach uathu, ach an lá dár gcionn teastaíonn deireadh le teorainneacha oscailte uathu. Ní bhainfidimid leas as imirce ar mhaithe le cúrsaí polaitíochta. Díreoidimid ar bheart sciobtha a dhéanamh chun leas na ndaoine uile in Éirinn.

6. Seirbhísí poiblí níos fearr arna maoiniú ag geilleagar láidir

Mar gheall ar bhainistíocht chúramach an airgeadais poiblí ag Fine Gael, anois táimid in ann leibhéal airgid níos mó ná riamh a chaitheamh ar an mbonneagar agus airgead a chur i leataobh do na glúnta le teacht. I mbliana, tá €13 mhiliúin á gcur ar fáil le haghaidh infheistíochta chun a thuilleadh scoileanna, tithe, bóithre agus ospidéal a chur ar fáil.

De réir mar atá foghlamtha againn, ní bhíonn seirbhísí níos fearr ina dtoradh ar mhaoiniú méadaithe i gcónaí.

Oibreoidimid ar leibhéal áitiúil agus náisiúnta chun cáilíocht na seirbhísí a fheabhsú i raon réimsí, ó chúram do leanaí agus míchumas, go hoideachas agus iompar.

Ní mór dúinn ár mbonneagar bóithre a chothabháil agus infheistíocht a dhéanamh in iompar poiblí. Déanfaidh Fine Gael a dhícheall freisin chun rochtain ar scéimeanna rothar a fheabhsú ar fud na tíre, lena n-áirítear scéim nua um dhul ar rothar go coláiste.

Is é Fine Gael an páirtí a sholáthair na hOllscoileanna Teicneolaíochta do na réigiúin. Beidh Fine Gael ina pháirtí chun infheistíocht a dhéanamh i ngach OT chun a chinntiú go rachaidh gach ceann acu ó neart go neart.

Creideann Fine Gael gur cheart an t-airgead uile a bhailítear ar bhonn áitiúil trí Cháin Mhaoine Áitiúil a choinneáil laistigh den chontae. Teastaíonn uainn freisin rogha na gcomhairleoirí a choimeád chun ráta na Cánach Maoine

Áitiúla a shocrú dá gceantar féin. Tá sé tuillte ag íocóirí cánach go mbíonn a fhios acu cén áit a bhfuil a gcuid airgid á caitheamh. Oibreoidh Fine Gael ar leibhéal áitiúil agus náisiúnta chun sonraí a thabhairt duit faoin áit a bhfuil do chuid airgid á caitheamh.

7. Pobail Shláintiúla agus Inbhuanaithe

Tá ról tábhachtach ag údaráis áitiúla maidir le pobail a chruthú ar mhaithe linn bheith inár gcónaí iontu, obair a dhéanamh iontu agus clann a thógáil iontu

Trí leibhéal infheistíochta níos mó ná riamh i Sláinte, spreagfaidh Fine Gael comhoibriú níos mó idir na Réigiúin Sláinte nua agus údaráis áitiúla chun tabhairt faoi riachtanais sláinte gach réigiúin.

Beidh comhairleoirí in ann cur le raon agus le hoibriú na seirbhísí sláinte áitiúla trí Fhóram Réigiúnach Sláinte. Sa chur chuige nua sin, beidh guthanna ionadaíochta láidre níos tábhachtaí ná riamh, agus cinnteoidh Fine Gael go mbeidh an fhoireann againn chun labhairt ar son seirbhísí sláinte áitiúla níos fearr.

Beidh sé mar phríomhghealltanas ag comhairleoirí Fhine Gael ár sráideanna a choinneáil glan, dul i ngleic le dumpáil mhídhleathach agus rochtain ar ghabhdáin a fheabhsú.

Maoineoidh Fine Gael soilsiú poiblí feabhsaithe, rochtain níos fearr ar pháirceanna madraí, agus cinnteoidh sé go gcuirfear spásanna súgartha agus áineasa nua agus nuálacha ar fáil i ngach contae - i gceantair uirbeacha agus thuaithe araon.

Méadóimid maoiniú do leabharlanna agus do shaoráidí spóirt i ngach contae.

Cinnteoidimid go mbainfidh ár bpobail tairbhí as ár rath eacnamaíoch trí fhorbairt réigiúnach chothromaithe chun a chinntiú go mbainfidh pobail leas as tionscadail fuinnimh in-athnuaite ar an mórchóir agus ar an mionchóir. Oibreoidimid ar dhóigheanna nua chun ligean d'acmhainn an gheilleagair chiorclaigh agus bainistíocht dramaíola a fheabhsú.

Tá ár gcomhairleoirí tiomanta freisin do dhul i dteagmháil le daoine faoi mhíchumas agus le heagraíochtaí míchumais agus d'éisteacht leo ionas gur féidir linn oibriú le cheile chun a chinntiú go n-oibríonn ár mbailte agus ár gcathracha ar son gach duine.

More homes, more home ownership

Fine Gael is the party that got homebuilding off the ground after the financial crisis. We are now building over 32,000 homes per year, compared to fewer than 7,000 homes when Fine Gael entered government in 2011. Social housing building has recovered from a little over 1,000 per year in 2011, to over 8,000 per year now, the highest since the 1970s.

We need to build much more, especially starter homes for young people. We want to build 250,000 homes over the next five years.

Build more homes

Fine Gael will:

- Develop a credible Housing Delivery Action Plan for each local authority, with specific targets for social and affordable homes.
- Work to develop an up-to-date nationwide audit of land. We believe there should be a map and list of zoned, zoned and serviced and unzoned land for each local authority area which is publicly available, easily accessible and regularly updated. This will help increase transparency and inform policymaking. It is essential that there is enough housing land available in the right places to fulfil the ambition of the National Planning Framework.
- Promote new housing developments, unlike other political parties.
- Empower the Land Development Agency, our State-owned land developer, to unlock State lands and ensure there is better engagement between it and the local authorities.
- Take a practical approach to one-off housing which recognises the value of building thriving communities,

especially in rural Ireland.

- Ensure every local authority has a full-time Vacant Homes Officer and prioritise this work.
- Request each local authority to have an up-to-date plan for unlocking serviced sites – that is, serviced sites with the necessary infrastructure in place, such as electricity, water and wastewater.

Deliver more social housing

- Work to deliver a quicker turnaround of social housing that becomes vacant (voids) and ensure social housing is well maintained.
- Work to release new housing more quickly, cutting down on the delays like water connections that can occur.
- Back choice-based letting. We want all local authorities to adopt and promote choice-based letting, whereby social housing stock is openly advertised, allowing applicants to register an interest.
- Fund the Local Authority Home Loan for the next five years.
- Ensure local authorities acquire approximately 1,500 social homes each year under the Tenant in Situ Scheme. This applies when a tenant in receipt of social housing receives a Notice of Termination due to the landlord's intention to sell the property.



More home ownership

Fine Gael will:

- Extend the Help to Buy Scheme for five more years, helping first time buyers with the cost of their deposit.
- Extend the First Home Scheme, helping first time buyers bridge the gap between their deposit and mortgage and the price of their new home.
- Seek to prevent the bulk purchase of homes. We have already introduced measures to prevent this practice and we will keep them under active review.

Protect Renters

- Ensure local authorities are monitoring compliance with specific planning permissions for certain private student housing developments. 51-week leases are not desirable for the vast majority of students.
- Continue to promote apprenticeships to build the workforce needed to deliver the housing we need.
- Build better links between further education, universities and technological universities to deliver the skillsets we need to meet our housing needs.
- Continue to increase the Rent Tax Credit.
- Work to keep landlords in the market. For every renter, there has to be a landlord, and we will work to ensure landlords are encouraged to provide predictable, longer-term tenancies.
- Work to help families avoid entering emergency

accommodation and help them exit it as soon as possible if they do.

Reform

- Examine if staged payments of the very successful Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant can be introduced as part of a comprehensive review of the scheme.
- Explore the possibility of allowing businesses to use the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant, or a new version of the grant, to bring a vacant or derelict commercial building back into commercial use.
- Work with local authorities to improve and promote the Town Centres First policy and draw down all available funding streams.
- Work to repurpose 'over the shop' spaces, extending the current planning regulations to exempt these spaces from planning permission to 2030.
- Work with local and national government to see what further financial supports can be provided to make converting over the shop spaces into residential homes more viable.
- Work to roll out the various new measures contained in the Planning and Development Bill, once enacted. This is the largest overhaul of planning law in a generation, designed to bring greater clarity, consistency and certainty to how planning decisions are made.

Backing Small Business and Enterprise

Fine Gael ministers and the Fine Gael Small Business & Enterprise Council have been travelling around the country, listening to businesses about the challenges that they face.

When elected leader, Simon Harris TD promised to bring forward a package to address rising costs for small businesses and within weeks, he delivered.

Our team of Ministers Peter Burke, Heather Humphreys, Patrick O'Donovan, Paschal Donohoe, Emer Higgins and Neale Richmond worked together to develop a 15-point plan, which provides certainty and some much-needed relief to small businesses.

We will continue to engage with our cafes, our butchers, our hairdressers, our publicans and our corner shops. These are the backbone of our local economy and provide much valued employment up and down this country.

Fine Gael will:

- Ensure everyone who wants a job can get one.
- Rigorously implement an enhanced SME test at national level to ensure any major new policies do not have an adverse impact on businesses.
- Ensure that the range of planned reforms, such as auto enrolment and the living wage, are sequenced fairly and in such a way that is affordable for viable businesses.

- Enhance the role of Local Enterprise Offices.
- Ensure companies that grow beyond 10 employees continue to be supported and have access to State loans, grants and vouchers.
- Reform commercial rates, enhancing fairness and transparency.
- Work with local authorities to consider how our commercial rates system can facilitate new start-up businesses and discourage vacant units.
- Improve transparency in regard to how commercial rates are spent. This can include housing, public lighting, fire services, the promotion of local economic development, roads, traffic, leisure and community services. Small business owners need to know more.
- Support the continued waiver of street furniture licence fees for tables and chairs associated with outdoor dining.



A new partnership for Rural Ireland and Farmers

Agri-food and Fisheries are an integral part of the Irish economy and society, especially for our rural and coastal communities. The sector contributes strongly to the Irish economy with exports valued at almost €19 billion. This underpins jobs for almost 165,000 people across 135,000 farms, 2,000 fishing vessels and aquaculture sites and some 2,000 food production and beverage enterprises.

Fine Gael is committed to the sector and has a strong team of local councillors and candidates that are experienced in helping farmers and dealing with their issues.

A fair share of CAP funding

Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan has a budget of just under €10 billion for the 2023-27 period, with about 60% allocated to direct farm income support and 40% to sectoral support and rural development measures.

These funds are crucial to delivering a vibrant agricultural sector.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to secure a well-funded CAP as part of upcoming EU budget negotiations and ensure the voice of farmers is heard during the next set of CAP reforms. This will allow for much needed supports to flow into local communities through a range of farm-gate schemes.

The same is true for the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) which underpins the Common Fisheries Policy.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to ensure Ireland's coastal communities secure an appropriate share of Fisheries funds. This is so important given the impact of Brexit on the Irish fishing industry. The current programme runs until 2027 with funding of €258 million and it is vital that Irish interests are represented in future negotiations.

Local Authorities working with farmers

County councils have an important role to play in agriculture particularly in the area of environmental legislation and agricultural planning applications. It is crucial to have people at the table who know and understand agriculture.

Fine Gael will:

- Encourage local authorities to engage in a partnership approach with farmers in areas like water quality. Where inspections do take place, they should be proportionate in their approach and there should be a willingness to work with farmers and their representatives. There is an opportunity through the new €60 million Farming for Water EIP to increase co-operation in this area.

Agricultural Shows

Our Agricultural Shows are an integral part of rural life. They support the farming and agri-food industry as well as local artisan producers. We have put in place a €1 million national fund which provides grants to Agricultural Shows to assist them with their running costs.

Fine Gael councillors will:

- Push for further increases in funding for our Agricultural Shows in the years ahead, as resources allow.

Retaining the Nitrates Derogation

The derogation is a critical element to an economically viable operating model for many farms which also requires them to comply with a higher set of standards to protect water quality across the country.

Fine Gael councillors will:

- Work in partnership with Government, state agencies, local authorities, industry and farm organisations to bring forward practical solutions which benefit farmers and help Ireland retain our derogation after 2025.

Enforcing Law and Order

Fine Gael will always stand for law and order. We are the party that founded An Garda Síochána. A vote for Fine Gael is a vote for a party that stands shoulder to shoulder with the men and women of An Garda Síochána and the families that support them.

This party has taken several measures to support Gardaí on the beat and we will do more. Fine Gael will work with families and communities to stop the scourge of drugs and to combat the challenges of anti-social behaviour.

We are investing more than ever before in An Garda Síochána to support a strong and visible police presence.

While there are currently around 14,000 Garda members working around the country – an increase of 9% since 2015 – we want to see more Gardaí on our streets and working in our communities.

Fine Gael will:

- Grow the size of An Garda Síochána and increase the number of Gardaí in every county.
- Deploy body-worn cameras for Gardaí in Dublin City Centre, Waterford, and Limerick in 2024, with nationwide roll-out to follow.
- Use facial recognition technology to help detect serious crime.
- Build modern Garda stations.
- Improve the pay and conditions of members of the force.
- Design a safety plan for each community.
- Drive community safety programmes and interventions that respond to local needs.
- Support more front-line Gardaí, increased Garda visibility and a wider range of policing services for people in their local area.
- Establish the new Community Safety Partnership model in every area in the country.
- Implement new powers to roll out CCTV in key areas to improve public safety.
- Support An Garda Síochána to roll out a nationwide text alert initiative to allow for a new and innovative way to report issues directly to An Garda Síochána.
- Increase penalties for knife crime and strengthening the use of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs).
- Introduce Community Safety Partnerships around the country, to develop Community Safety Plans for every area.
- Expand youth justice and youth diversion measures.
- Introduce Facial Recognition Technology to help investigate and prosecute cases of serious crime.
- Provide the funding necessary to strengthen the equipment available to An Garda Síochána for public order policing, including the deployment of tasers and stronger incapacitant spray.
- Propose solutions to public order and anti-social "wicked problems" through the Local Leadership Programme which brings together local stakeholders in a structured manner.
- Clamp down on the dangerous use of scrambler bikes. We have introduced legislation to provide stronger Garda powers to tackle the use of scramblers. This has resulted in the nationwide seizure of 44 quad bikes and 133 scramblers by An Garda Síochána since the start of 2023. The deployment of body worn cameras on Gardaí will also provide assistance to Gardaí in tackling this issue.
- Work with the new Dog Control Stakeholder Group to ensure local authorities play their part in keeping animals and the public safe.

Alcohol and drug misuse

The impact of alcohol and drug misuse is felt in every community, both urban and rural. The 24 Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces (DATFs) play a vital role in identifying the services required at a local level, while also co-ordinating actions and channelling funding to service providers. Services on the ground are delivered by the HSE as well as Community and Voluntary Sector organisations.

Fine Gael will:

- Enforce laws to tackle the practice of children being groomed into a life of crime by drug gangs.

- Pursue a health-led rather than a criminal justice approach to drug misuse. This aims to provide healthcare and other supports to people suffering from drug addiction.
- Ensure people caught in possession of drugs for sale or supply will continue to face criminal sanction.
- Work to strengthen the effectiveness and public awareness of the drug-related intimidation reporting programme by An Garda Síochána and the National Family Support Network.

Sale and supply of illegal drugs

Drug use is causing serious harm to communities and families across the country. Fine Gael is committed to addressing this. We will work with communities to tackle drug use in villages, towns and cities. Working with An Garda Síochána and families, we will continue to ensure we inform people of the dangers of drug use and the consequences of purchasing drugs.

We are investing record amounts in An Garda Síochána to target those involved in the sale and supply of illegal drugs through Operation Tara. Operation Tara has a strong focus on tackling street-level dealing across the country. It seeks to disrupt and dismantle the drug trafficking networks that impact on our communities and prosecute those involved at every level.

Fine Gael has increased the maximum sentence for conspiracy to murder from 10 years to life in prison to tackle those who direct gangland and drug related crime. We have also introduced new legislation criminalising the grooming of children into a life of crime.

Fine Gael will:

- Roll out a support programme to break the link between gangs and the children they try to recruit.
- Strengthen Criminal Assets Bureau's ability to target the proceeds of crime and speed up the process to dispose of the asset for the benefit of the State.

Dublin City Centre Taskforce

It is time to have pride again in our capital city. The Taoiseach has convened a Dublin City Centre Taskforce bringing together An Garda Síochána, Dublin City Council representatives, the National Transport Authority, business & trade union representatives, community/ service provider representatives and cultural and arts providers.

The goal is to make Dublin City Centre a more thriving, attractive, and safe cityscape; and a desirable location to live, work, do business and visit. Taking an evidence-based approach to its work, the Taskforce will deliver a cohesive and focused list of recommendations to deliver on a shared vision of central Dublin's public space.

Domestic Violence

The societal impacts from domestic, sexual, gender-based violence (DSGBV) are wide ranging, systemic and have generational impact. It's imperative that we disrupt, prevent and take a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of DSGBV in our society, in our communities, our workplaces, our governing bodies, protection agencies, public works, our places of education and our homes. Eliminating DSGBV in our communities will have positive impacts to empower families experiencing this form of violence to live free from fear and to move from surviving to thriving. Happier, safer and stronger communities benefit everyone. DSGBV requires an all of society response. We need training, learning and development programmes to upskill people. Everyone who needs refuge accommodation must have access to it.

We will continue to promote the work of the Fine Gael Women's Network to advance gender equality and the election of more women into public office.

Fine Gael will:

- Double the number of domestic violence refuge spaces as part of our Zero Tolerance Plan to tackle DSGBV.
- Work to ensure domestic violence victims have a point of contact within the Housing Department of the local authority to highlight their specific circumstances. This means the applicant would not have to disclose any traumatic information to administrative staff and the relevant staff can assist the applicant as sensitively as possible.
- Work with local authorities to ensure sufficient pathways from refuges to alternative safe and long-term housing options for women and children.



Firm and Fair Migration

Ireland will maintain a migration system that is firm, fair and enforced. Migration is an unprecedented challenge, but we will meet it by remaining united and taking comprehensive action every day.

Taoiseach Simon Harris is leading efforts to break down silos or “not-my-problem” attitudes to ensure all state agencies and communities are working together. While we work to increase accommodation places for migrants, we will not allow encampments to remain in place for months again. It is unsafe and against the law.

The Government is working to stand up more facilities quickly on state land. We cannot stand for any more unnecessary delays in making state land available for accommodation. We will step up our efforts in this regard across government.

Getting through applications faster is a key lever we control. We have doubled the number of people working on it and slashed the amount of time it takes for decisions. Minister Helen McEntee is taking action to free up 100 more Gardai from desk duties to work on enforcement, including deportations. People being granted asylum in Ireland will know sooner and people denied will leave sooner. This system works. Since introducing fast-processing, the number of people applying from safe countries has halved. It gives protection quickly to those who need it, while also demonstrating to applicants who don't need it that there is nothing to gain from going down the asylum route.

We cannot and should not lose sight of the benefits of migration. Our economy is built on being open: we need

workers in all sectors like agriculture, in our health service and to build homes. In all, 66,000 people have permits allowing them to work here — 21,000 of those are caring for our families in hospitals or minding our elderly in nursing homes.

Having once called for an expansion of our asylum system and an increase in the number of refugees we accept, Sinn Féin are now distributing leaflets to households calling for an end to open borders. We won't play politics on migration. We will focus on taking swift action in the best interests of all people in Ireland.

Talk of enforcing rules on migration can be painted as inhumane, but that couldn't be further from the truth. We have to help those in need and we cannot achieve that without rules-based systems that dismantle the criminal trafficking gangs.

Fine Gael will move away from the emergency use of hotels for housing asylum seekers. We will work with Government and State agencies to ensure local communities are provided with an appropriate level of extra services if asylum seekers are accommodated in their locality.

Fine Gael's Intercultural Network is promoting the voices and perspectives of our new communities and those from a migrant background in our party and in politics. We believe more can be done to better integrate migrants into Irish society. For example, we will work to ensure all local authorities have a racism protocol and engage in anti-racism training.

Better Public Services and Infrastructure

Due to Fine Gael's careful management of the public finances, we are now able to spend record levels on infrastructure, and put money away for future generations through the Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund.

This year, €13 billion is being made available for investment to provide more schools, homes, roads and hospitals.

Fine Gael in Government established the Department of Rural and Community Development in 2017. We are now seeing the fruits of that decision:

- More people are living in rural Ireland than ever before
- More people are working in rural Ireland than ever before and
- More investment is going into rural Ireland than ever before, including an additional €1 billion from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund for towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000 people.

Roads and Active Travel

This year we are investing around €650 million in regional and local roads – up €32m on last year. This is vital investment and will allow for 2,640km of regional and local roads to be maintained to required standards, and a further 2,160km strengthened to improve the overall road quality on the network.

Fine Gael announced a record funding allocation of €40 million for repairs and improvement works on non-public rural roads and laneways under the Local Improvement Scheme (LIS). The funds are for works to be carried out across 2024 and 2025 on roads not normally maintained by the local authorities. This means almost €170 million has been allocated to local authorities under the Scheme since it was re-introduced in 2017.

Fine Gael will continue to advocate for increased investment in road maintenance to improve road

conditions and reduce the risk of crashes.

Fine Gael will continue investing in active travel initiatives that promote safe cycling and walking in towns and cities, and to invest heavily in consistent and reliable public transport.

Some €360 million per year is provided to fund these vital projects, which both reduce congestion in our urban areas while also encouraging people of all ages to walk, cycle or scoot.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to ensure Local Authorities have the greatest level of discretion on which roads projects are prioritised and funded.
- Put in place a roads budget for maintenance from 2025, separate to a new roads building programme.
- Work to provide increased funding for the vital Local Improvement Scheme.
- Continue to provide feedback to central government on how the LIS scheme can be improved, providing greater flexibility to local authorities to better plan their work programmes in more favourable weather.
- Drive delivery of active travel and greenways programmes through our local authorities.
- Work with schools to avail of funding through the Safe Routes to School Programme. This programme funds 'front of school' infrastructure to improve access and safety, improves walking and cycling infrastructure and expands cycle parking.
- Promote a universal design approach in active travel, safe routes to school, greenways and local transport options to improve accessibility and increase the number of people, including people with disabilities, who can participate fully and independently in our communities.
- Promote the take-up of walking and cycling where

possible through better infrastructure. Any new cycleways or segregated pathways must be introduced with community support. They must also take the needs of people with restricted mobility into account.

- Work with constituents and local authorities to deliver the BusConnects programme in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford and in such a way that has community support. BusConnects is reimagining the way we get around and helping meet climate targets.
- Work with the National Transport Authority to devise new ways to support the provision of local taxis in rural and urban Ireland.

Best start for every child

Fine Gael has ensured that investment in high-quality Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) is at an all-time high, meaning that parents' costs are reducing, quality has improved and we are providing additional assistance for children with a disability and who are experiencing disadvantage. We must also support the further development of childcare facilities.

Each local authority should develop a local strategy to support the best start for every child in their area, informed by national policy.

Fine Gael will:

- Support City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs) which work with early education and childcare service providers, and which are often the first point of contact for providers and parents.
- Ensure the important functions of the City/County Childcare Committees are maintained and enhanced once the new dedicated state agency for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) in Ireland is established.
- Task local authorities with agreeing Sports Partnerships between sports clubs and schools to develop new facilities and achieve better utilisation of existing facilities. This will be facilitated by a protocol developed between the Departments of Education and Sport.
- Seek to expand and develop our network of Family Resource Centres.

While overall capacity in the childcare sector has increased, so too has demand and there are indications that capacity is not being fully utilised, particularly childcare facilities built by developers as part of larger residential developments that are now lying idle. This is causing significant stress and difficulty for parents. In other instances, the required childcare facility is not yet built, even though all the new homes have been.



Fine Gael will:

- Ensure updated planning guidelines for the development of childcare facilities are published in draft form for public consultation in 2024.
- Advocate that 'Technical Guidance' should be provided to local authorities for each type of childcare facility, similar to what the Department of Education has for school buildings. These regulations must be mandatory in nature.
- Strengthen the role of planning authorities in relation to childcare places and strengthen local Childcare Committees.
- Implement effective assessment and decision-making on planning applications in relation to childcare.
- Explore the proposal to introduce a new model of state acquisition for childcare facilities built by developers as part of large-scale residential development. A new model could build on learnings from the existing Part V requirement, which compels developers to include social and affordable housing in new developments.
- Explore the possibility of co-locating childcare provision in new school developments.

Education

Fine Gael believes in equality of opportunity for all and believes education is the greatest leveller in society.

Fine Gael has overseen record investment in our school building programmes and opened more special schools than any other Government.

This party also established the Technological Universities in our regions ensuring students do not have to travel long distances to access third level education.

We will also be the party to invest in TUs to ensure students choose to study and live in the regions.

Fine Gael will:

- Ensure that the Department of Education engages with local authorities regularly so that we are planning for school place demand, particularly in areas with significant new residential developments.
- Request the Department of Education to produce an annual report for each local authority area setting out the existing school capacity within the local authority and the planned school capacity in five, ten and fifteen years and the population projections underlying those.
- Work with our Technological Universities to deliver student accommodation in the regions.

- Forge links between education and enterprise to address the skills needs in the region and attract jobs and investment.
- Work with the Education and Training Boards to develop apprenticeship and training facilities that are fit-for-purpose.

More transparency on your Local Property Tax

Fine Gael believes all money collected locally through the Local Property Tax should be retained within the local authority. We also want to maintain councillors' discretion to decide the rate for their area. Taxpayers deserve to know where their money is being spent.

Prior to setting the Local Property Tax, it is a statutory requirement that a local authority undertakes a public consultation on the matter. This is being done, but it seems these consultations are public in name only. Each taxpayer should receive a report annually, informing them how the LPT was spent in the previous year and seeking their views on the proposed changes to the LPT. This consultation will provide LPT payers with specific information about what the different changes to the LPT will mean for them.

Fine Gael will:

- Work with local authorities and the Revenue Commissioners to ensure LPT payers receive a report on how LPT revenue is being spent, broken down by sector.

Flood relief and defence measures

€1.3 billion is being invested in flood relief schemes over the lifetime of the National Development Plan to protect homes, farms and businesses under threat from river and coastal flood risk.

Fine Gael will:

- Step up engagement between the local authorities and the OPW to speed up the number of schemes at design, planning and construction stage.
- Ensure interim measures are put in place for communities at immediate risk of flooding.

Rural Water Schemes**Fine Gael will:**

- Work to improve the waste water collection and treatment needs of villages and settlements without access to public waste water services.

- We will seek further funding nationally and ongoing planning for such works at local authority level.
- Ensure there is an adequate water improvement funding stream under the National Development Plan.

Energy

Decarbonising our energy system will bring huge benefits to consumers and local communities, leading to cheaper bills in the long run and better security of supply. We will ensure that the State and local authorities do their part but also that individuals are empowered to make their own contribution.

As we step up our level of ambition on renewable energy, we must ensure that local authorities and other national bodies are adequately resourced and skilled to deal with the strategic and practical planning required.

Fine Gael will:

- Undertake a communications campaign locally, to help people get the best use out of their smart meter to save money on their energy costs.
- Install solar panels in all suitable schools that wish to have them.
- Review the capacity of the Sustainable Energy Communities in each local authority area, looking at how we can grow and implement even more ambitious plans. There are 800 Sustainable Energy Communities around the country.
- Install solar panels or district heating in all public buildings that are suitable for the technology.
- Continue the support schemes to help medically vulnerable households install solar panels on their homes to keep their energy costs down.
- Pilot two group retrofitting projects in each local area, where we will offer a group of neighbours the option to retrofit their homes together and help them through the process. We will take the learnings from those projects and expand as appropriate.
- Ensure that when social homes are being retrofitted in an area that all local private homes in the same estate have the option of retrofitting their home, at a cost adjusted for the grants that are available, where feasible.
- Continue to provide substantial grants of up to 50% for those who wish to retrofit their homes.
- Insist on communities benefitting from renewable energy generation in each local authority area.



Healthy and Sustainable Communities

Fine Gael is the party of community.

We have worked over successive Governments to invest in towns and villages, to invest in community centres, sports facilities and libraries.

Fine Gael councillors will work with communities to deliver for you and your family.

Fine Gael will:

- Support Ireland's network of post offices and ensuring the potential of the network is fully utilised to benefit local communities.
- Work to expand the services provided by credit unions.
- Support new legislation to provide continued sufficient access to cash and to ensure that the future of evolution of cash infrastructure is managed in a fair and transparent manner for consumers.
- Deliver high speed fibre broadband to 1.1m people across homes, farms and business in all 26 counties by end 2026.
- Work to surpass the target of 400 remote working hubs nationwide by 2025.
- Push for dedicated space within these hubs for local entrepreneurs and start-ups.
- Work to ensure that adequate childcare measures are put in place to support access to remote working hubs.

Reform of local health structures

As part of Sláintecare, the Health Service Executive (HSE) is undergoing major structural reform, splitting into six operational areas, called Health Regions.

Fine Gael will:

- Encourage greater co-operation between the new Health Regions and local authorities in planning health infrastructure projects.

- Ensure that the planning and consenting process is completed as quickly as possible, working in conjunction with local authorities.
- Promote greater use of existing local authority facilities for new community health services.
- Ensure councillors can input on the range and operation of local health services through Regional Health Forums. In this new approach, strong representative voices will become even more important, and Fine Gael will ensure that we have the team to advocate for better local health services.
- Work to further expand the network of 174 Primary Care Centres which are already operating across the country. Continue to invest in the Enhanced Community Care (ECC) Programme which is delivering more care at home and in the community, preventing admissions to hospitals.
- Work to improve access to GP services in rural Ireland, our towns and cities and invest more in general practice
- Work alongside pharmacists to expand their roles for the benefit of everyone. Community pharmacists already play a significant role in providing care in our communities, but we understand that pharmacists can and want to do more for their communities.
- Support increased funding for mental health services.

Cleaner Communities

Fine Gael will:

- Ensure all households, including apartments, have access to a compost bin.
- Ensure each local authority develops a Circular Strategy for their area targeting transformation in food, construction and durable consumer goods.
- Utilise all tools in our power to crack down on dumping black spots, including the use of CCTV. Illegal dumping is a scourge on society.

- We will examine introducing SMART enforcement of our waste laws, such as the use of drones, to identify illegal activity.
- Develop and implement a plan to provide alternatives to the practice of plastic rubbish bags being put out on the street in urban areas. This is leading to litter and obstructed walkways.
- Ensure each local authority will upgrade one of its bring centres to become a Rediscovery Centre, where people can avail of services to carry out repairs, share or exchange equipment and spare parts and get information and advice.
- Use our enforcement powers and improve facilities to reduce littering and improve our overall ranking on the Litter Pollution Index (LPI).
- Minimise waste in all aspects of local authority work, recognising the need to lead the way.
- Increase litter inspections.
- Examine increasing fines for littering and illegal dumping.

Vibrant Towns and Villages

Fine Gael has spearheaded unprecedented investment in our rural communities in recent years. Historic and vacant buildings are being brought back into use through the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.

Fine Gael will:

- Ensure a strong pipeline of local projects under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.
- Work with local authorities to ensure they are proactive in identifying and repurposing vacant and derelict sites.
- Push for further rounds of funding for the innovative Streetscape Enhancement Scheme.
- Push for further rounds of the Community Centre Investment Fund in the years ahead.
- Promote accessibility and inclusion through universal design in upgrades to community centres.
- Recognise projects that use universal design to promote and support participation for all members of our communities including people with disabilities.

- Push for continued increases in Tidy Towns funding in the years ahead, as resources allow.
- Support the establishment of a national Women's Shed network.
- Push for progressive increases in grants for Men's Sheds.

Sports Capital Grants

The Sports Capital and Equipment Programme (SCEP) develops sports and recreation facilities and the purchase of non-personal sports equipment in every community around Ireland. It has helped over 13,000 projects with over €1 billion in funding.

Fine Gael will:

- Ensure Sports Capital schemes are adequately funded into the future.
- Work with local authorities and clubs to ensure applications are in order and eligible.
- Recognise projects that use universal design to promote and support participation for all members of our communities including people with disabilities.

Better access to sports facilities

Fine Gael recognises the importance of our local sports clubs to our rural communities. We want to ensure people of all ages and abilities can enjoy watching sport in their community. Following engagement with Fine Gael Councillors, Minister Heather Humphreys, this year, introduced new grant aid to support the upgrade of spectator stands at local sports grounds helping to improve access for older people and people with disabilities.

As highlighted in a recent motion passed at our party's Ard Fheis, more playgrounds, parks and playing fields are needed in both rural and urban locations. This issue can be particularly acute in parts of cities where open green spaces are at a premium.

Fine Gael will:

- Seek further rounds of funding to upgrade access to sports grounds for older people and people with disabilities.

- Promote holistic support programmes for children with additional needs and include proven sports and physical activity programmes.
- Work with local authorities to either acquire or re-purpose land for playgrounds, parks and playing fields.

Libraries

Our libraries are at the heart of our towns and villages with over 300 facilities nationwide.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to treble the number of My Open Library facilities nationwide. My Open Library allows library members the freedom and flexibility to use the library at times that suit them.
- Work with Government and the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) to expand the Little Library initiative, where every 4-5 year old child is invited to visit their local library and collect a free bag of books and become library members. It is estimated that 30,000 children have joined their local library as a result of this scheme.
- Invest in the development of sensory spaces in our libraries, as well as sensory gardens under the CLÁR Programme.
- Promote initiatives that provide access to audible books, quiet times for people with autism, and access to assistive devices rental schemes.

Seniors Alert Scheme

The Seniors Alert Scheme is designed to support vulnerable older people in our communities. It provides funding for a personal monitored alarm so that our senior citizens can live securely in their homes with peace of mind.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to develop a major awareness campaign to promote the benefits of the scheme.

An Ghaeltacht

Fine Gael recognises the importance of the Irish language to our culture and national identity. We want it to be a living language, used in daily life throughout our communities. As highlighted in a motion at our recent Ard Fheis, housing and planning policy must protect Gaeltacht communities.

Fine Gael will:

- Promote the use of the Irish language in workplaces and social settings, especially outside Gaeltacht areas.
- Prioritise the work of Údarás na Gaeltachta in strengthening the identity and branding of our Gaeltacht areas.
- Work to ensure planning guidelines and development plans preserve Gaeltacht communities in terms of housing provision.

Aithníonn Fine Gael tábhacht na Gaeilge dár gcultúr agus dár bhféiniúlacht náisiúnta. Is mian linn go mbeidh sí ina teanga bheo, a úsáidtear i saol laethúil ar fud ár bpobal. De réir mar a diríodh aird air i rún ag ár nArd-fheis le déanaí, ní mór pobail na Gaeltachta a chosaint trí bheartas tithíochta agus pleanála.

Déanfaidh Fine Gael an méid seo a leanas:

- Úsáid na Gaeilge a chur chun cinn in áiteanna oibre agus i suíomhanna sóisialta, go háirithe iad siúd atá lasmuigh de cheantair na Gaeltachta.
- Tús áite a thabhairt d'obair Údarás na Gaeltachta chun féiniúlacht agus brandáil ár gceantair Ghaeltachta a neartú.
- Obair a dhéanamh chun a chinntiú go gcaomhnaítear pobail Ghaeltachta le treoirínite pleanála agus pleananna forbartha.

Developing local tourism

Tourism is a vital component of the local economy throughout the country. Access via land, sea and air is crucial in ensuring balanced growth in tourism.

Fine Gael will:

- Work with other local authorities, north and south of the border, on developing new tourism initiatives and upgrading existing initiatives.
- Improve access to tourism destinations around the country by working with local authorities and national bodies.

Water safety

We welcome the increased interest in open water swimming in recent years and will work on ways to promote it. Open water swimming promotes community

engagement and good mental health, but it also comes with risks.

Fine Gael will:

- Ensure local authorities are using their powers to issue on-the-spot fines and minimise the possibility of dog fouling making its way into open waters.
- Ensure popular destinations are adequately resourced with lifeguards at the most important times.
- Work with Water Safety Ireland to promote public awareness of water safety, and minimise accidents in water.
- Work with local authorities and local sports partnerships to develop improved swimming infrastructure.

Supporting the arts

At a national level, Fine Gael has doubled spending on the arts, culture and sport over the past seven years. Local authorities have a crucial role in supporting the arts, in organising events and festivals and creating new spaces for artists to be creative.

Fine Gael will:

- Build on recent positive initiatives to create new working spaces for artists.
- Work with the OPW to examine if unused buildings could temporarily be used by artists for working and performance spaces.
- Work to simplify the processes involved in organising festivals, from licencing, to traffic management and insurance.

Supporting local media

Local media needs our support. It is a cornerstone of a well-functioning democracy.

At a national level, Fine Gael Oireachtas Members Richard Bruton, Micheál Carrigy Jerry Buttimer and Ciarán Cannon undertook a detailed survey and analysis on the local media landscape nationwide and received feedback from key stakeholders, culminating in a submission to the Future of Media Commission.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to support local media and ensure that funding is in place so that local authority business can be reported and the public is informed of important decisions being taken in their locality.

Sustainable communities

Climate change is the biggest challenge facing this generation. We are rising to the challenge. Fine Gael in local government will lead by helping and supporting people to make the changes needed to reduce emissions in a fair and equitable way.

Fine Gael will:

- Put in place an ambitious plan for the next 5 years, which will help our communities feel the benefits of climate action, while protecting our cities, towns and villages from its worst effects. It will include measures on adaptation, energy use and how we can best help and support individuals make the changes required.
- Task each local authority with developing a 'Green Audit', looking at all its suppliers in receipt of contracts above a certain value as part of a drive to achieve higher levels of sustainability in its supply chain.
- Develop demonstration Mobility Hubs in each local authority area, with EV charging points, car-sharing opportunities and electric bikes.
- Develop a decarbonising zone in each local authority which will see a 75% carbon reduction in that area by 2030 using a combination of the following: improved pedestrianisation and cycling facilities, mobility hubs, renewable energy, initiatives to cut down on packaging, reduce waste and improve repair options.



Biodiversity

We need a step change in the way we think about nature and how to protect it for future generations.

Fine Gael will:

- Request that the National Biodiversity Plan set geographic targets and enter partnership with local authorities to coordinate their delivery.
- Work with each local authority to assess biodiversity status of natural assets in the county and set out actions for regeneration of same as part of county development plans.
- Place bees on the roofs of local authority owned buildings, where practical.
- Work with each local authority to eliminate the defects highlighted by the EPA in its environmental enforcement activities.
- Work with the local authority to develop a project focused on a chosen demonstration river catchment in the local area. The project will look at ways to improve water quality and biodiversity, as well as reducing flooding risk and the response to flooding incidents.

Playgrounds and other recreation facilities

Fine Gael recognises the health benefits of providing play and recreation spaces, including active travel, for young people and adults. We will ensure that new, innovative play and recreation spaces are provided in every county – both urban and rural – and that existing spaces are maintained and refurbished.

We will also ensure that playgrounds are inclusive spaces, where children of all abilities can have fun together.

Nationally, Fine Gael has prioritised providing more outdoor recreation amenities, ranging from outdoor gym equipment to walking trails, cycleways and greenways. Hundreds of projects have been funded in local authorities across the country, and the benefits are obvious. Residents have recreational opportunities close to home and visitors are attracted to the area, providing knock-on business advantages.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to ensure there is a strong Outdoor Recreation Plan developed in every county – rural and urban.

- Ensure local authorities have access to adequate funding to invest in the upkeep of playgrounds falling into disrepair.
- Work with local community groups and the local authority to deliver more play facilities.
- Work to increase the funding available nationally that local authorities can apply for.
- Work with local authorities, community and sports groups to avail of funding under the CLÁR programme.
- Promote inclusive universal design of playgrounds to ensure that children of all abilities can have fun together. Our playgrounds should be a place where every child belongs.
- Advocate for Communications Boards to be installed in every playground and public space building. These boards have proven to be very effective, making it possible for people of all ages who struggle with verbal communication to express their thoughts.
- Seek to provide more parent and child parking spaces adjacent to playgrounds, ensuring that appropriate and adequate signage is installed marking their presence. Improving access to playgrounds is important.
- Ensure childcare facilities and youth spaces are prioritised in the allocation of development levies, which are an important means of funding local infrastructure.
- Strongly advocate that local authorities make vacant spaces available for innovate youth activities and hang out spaces such as coffee clubs.

Smoking and use of e-cigarettes

Fine Gael is committed to reducing smoking rates across the population and is concerned by the increased usage of e-cigarettes and tobacco inhaling products.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to ban the use of tobacco and nicotine inhaling products from all local authority properties, excluding homes.

Positive Ageing

In the past five years the number of people aged 65 and over grew by almost 25%. One of our great success stories as a country is that we can look forward to at least 20 healthy years after we retire. However, we have not done enough to harness this enormous potential. The HSE, the local authorities and other public agencies need to work together and develop more creative and innovative ways to promote positive ageing.

Fine Gael will:

- Increase housing options available to older people to live happy, active lives in their communities.
- Continue to enable Age Friendly Ireland's work in assisting cities and counties to be more inclusive and respond to the needs of older people. In particular, we will support the Healthy Age Friendly Homes Programme which helps people to continue living independently in their home for longer, or in a home more suited to their needs.
- Continue to support the Healthy Age Friendly Homes initiative, between the Department of Health, Sláintecare and Age Friendly Ireland. This establishes the important role of a Local Coordinator, based in local authorities, who acts as a single point of contact for older adults and directs them to health, housing and other services. This will enable people to remain living in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.
- Request each local authority to mandate its County Age Friendly Forum to conduct an audit of existing policy in the county on preparation for retirement, assess barriers to participation, and the range of choices available, with a view to developing an annual programme for the Council to promote their area as the best place to grow older.
- Request each Local Authority to develop a policy to support rightsizing for families whose needs have changed. It should include an examination of rigidity in the planning system to facilitate division or adaptation of properties. It should also include potential partnership with the LDA to acquire centrally located sites that could offer own door accommodation in a secure and supported environment with good access to the community and its services.
- Ensure that Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability are adequately funded and income thresholds and grant limits are adjusted in line with the cost of living.

- Continue to increase home support hours year on year and continue to make changes to ensure home support workers and healthcare assistants are valued and new entrants are attracted to these professions.
- Introduce a statutory home care scheme.
- Provide adequate funding for in-home dementia day care.
- Continue to support day care and meals on wheels services across the country, which provide vital connections for many older people in our communities.
- Continue our investment in community beds and in the Nursing Homes Support Scheme (Fair Deal) for those who need additional care.

Disability

Our councillors are committed to engaging with and listening to people with disabilities and disability organisations so that we can work together to ensure our towns and cities work for everyone. We must work to ensure everyone can use the same facilities, take part in the same activities and enjoy the same experiences.

Fine Gael will:

- Support the employment of Disability Inclusion Officers in all Local Authorities, encourage more disability awareness training for staff and ensure that information from Local Authorities is available in accessible formats.
- Use our councillors' influence to ensure that universal design is central to all planning and developments, in both the public realm and in housing developments.
- Promote new accessible social housing and adapt existing social housing stock for people with disabilities.
- Ensure that sporting facilities, changing spaces, playgrounds, footpaths, parks, public spaces, and public seating is accessible to all.
- Work constructively with businesses and traders to maintain accessible pathways.
- Ensure footpaths are not blocked by overgrown hedges, signage and micropillars and promote dished kerbs and tactile crossings.
- Promote a review of all disabled parking to ensure sufficient access and pilot a Space Finder App providing real-time information on the location & availability of accessible parking spaces.

Reforming your County Council

Local authorities carry out vital work on behalf of all Irish citizens and yet many of us are not familiar with what they do, how they work and what services they provide.

We need to ensure county councils evolve quickly to reflect the changing needs and preferences of the public.

Streamlining county council websites

Local authorities' websites vary in their functionality. Nationally, Government has integrated the various government department websites into gov.ie.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to streamline all local authority websites and improve citizens' access to vital public services.
- Work on new ways to engage people, especially younger people, through a more systematic approach to digital media.
- Promote better take-up of online services by local authorities. The planning system should be digital insofar as possible. People should have access to everyday services on their phone.
- Retain traditional alternatives, such as phone and counter services, to ensure access for all people.

New skills

From housing, to planning, to small business, to artificial intelligence, county council staff are going to require a broad range of skills for our future needs.

Fine Gael will:

- Work to commission a nationwide audit of what skills and resourcing requirements are needed in our local authorities. We cannot allow skills or labour shortages to hold up vital infrastructure needs in areas like housing.
- Work to ensure that county council staff are representative of our population as a whole – e.g. migrants.

More female participation in local politics

The membership of our local authorities should better reflect Irish society. There are many practical barriers to getting more people to enter public life.

Fine Gael will:

- Campaign for more family friendly and flexible working arrangements.
- Build a culture that promotes safe participation in politics and equips councillors to stand against harassment and abuse.
- Introduce a common policy across all the public service with regard to leave for public representatives – currently there is no consistency across the public service.
- Promote awareness-raising campaigns to increase visibility of women in politics, and build understanding of the role of local councillors and the importance of women's participation in local politics.

Reflecting a more diverse society

Fine Gael will continue to encourage a diverse range of candidates to stand for election. We will also support the work of Public Participation Networks (PPN) to ensure the views of local community groups are considered as part of the decision-making process of local government.

Fine Gael will:

- Continue to promote the role of members from a migrant or ethnic minority community within our party and help them to run for election.
- Promote the work of Public Participation Networks (PPNs) and work with local authorities to ensure that where members of local PPNs opt to run for election, they do not need to step down their position until they are elected.
- Promote the participation of people with disabilities within our party and ensure accessible and inclusive practices to enable them to run for election.

FINE GAEL 



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