

fine gael 

General Election
Manifesto
2007

2007

Foreword/Réamhrá

ENDA KENNY

The Fine Gael manifesto is a clear, comprehensive agenda covering the key areas of Irish life: the health services, crime, taxation, jobs, education, transport, energy, agriculture and the environment. It is designed, specifically, to provide public services to match the economy and to end the scandalous waste of taxpayers' money.

Our agenda is ambitious and achievable. For example, health includes 2,300 more acute beds; a comprehensive child health plan; plans to restore our hospitals as places of healing, not sources of infection; screening and prevention programmes to make and keep the general population well and Urgent Care Centres to take the pressure off A&E. Justice includes a new, tougher approach to sentencing. Education includes access to a year's pre-school.

Critical to the Fine Gael manifesto is the restructuring of the tax code to support, what we believe, is the most important institution in Ireland: the family. By supporting those who stay at home to care for children or the elderly, or those who want to buy their first home or trade up, we are giving Irish families a real choice. These reforms signal a clear difference of values between Fine Gael and other political parties and indicate our priorities in the next government.

By spending money wisely to create better services in the make-or-buy areas of living, we intend to improve, significantly, the quality of life for all Irish people. The Irish people have built this economy through their hard work and ingenuity, often at a huge personal cost through the pressures of commuting and balancing working and living. It's time they began to feel the economy's benefits in their lives day to day. Quite simply, the Irish people deserve better. This manifesto is designed to give them better.



fine gael 
www.finegael.ie

Is clár cuimsitheach soiléir é forógra Fhine Gael ina gcuirtear san áireamh príomhnithe saol na hÉireann: seirbhísí sláinte, coir, cáin, postanna, oideachas, taisteal, fuinneamh, talmhaíocht agus an timpeallacht. Tá sé curtha le chéile go speisialta chun seirbhísí poiblí a chur ar fáil a fhreastalóidh ar an ngeilleagair agus a chuirfidh deireadh le cur amú gránna airgead na gcáiníocóirí.

Is clár uailmhianach indéanta é. Mar shampla sa chóras sláinte feictear 2,300 níos mó leapacha ar fáil, plean cuimsitheach do shláinte na bpáistí, pleananna chun ár n-ospidéal a athnuachan mar láithreacha leighis, ní ionaid na ngalar, cláir scagtha agus chosctha le muintir na tíre seo a choinneáil i mbarr a sláinte agus Ionaid Cúram

Práinneacha chun an brú a bhaint den A&E. Feictear dearcadh nua níos déine maidir le gearradh pianóis i gcúrsaí dlí. Tá fáil ar bhliain réamhscolaíochta san oideachas.

Is cuid bhunúsach de fhorógra Fhine Gael é an córas chánach a athstruchtúru chun tacaíocht a thabhairt do phríomhinstitiúid na hÉireann, dar linn, an teaghlach. Is rogha dáiríre atáimid ag tabhairt do theaghlach: iad siúd a fhanann sa bhaile chun aire a thabhairt do pháistí nó do shean daoine nó dóibh siúd atá bhfuil ag iarraidh a gcéad theach a cheannach nó margadh a dhéanamh faoi theach. Is léiriú suntasach é ar an difir idir luachanna Fhine Gael agus na páirtithe polaitiúla eile agus ár gcuid tosaíochtaí sa chéad rialtas eile.

Le hairgead a chaitheamh go ciallmhar chun seirbhísí a chur ar fáil sna gnéithe is tábhachtaí dár saol tá fúinn caighdeán slí maireachtála a fheabhsú go mór do chách. Tá geilleagar na tíre seo tógtha de bharr dúthracht agus éirim pobal na hÉireann in ainneoin an chostais phearsanta gearrtha orthu féin idir brú taistil agus ag fhreastal ar dhá thrá: obair agus slí beatha a bhaint amach. Tá sé in am dóibh tairbhe a bhaint as an ngeilleagair ina saoil féin. Go bunúsach tá tuilleadh tuillte acu. 'Sé bun agus barr an fhorógra seo ná é sin a thabhairt dóibh.

Enda Kenny
Enda Ó Cionnaith

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

KEY THEMES AND HIGHLIGHTS

- | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Agriculture and Food | 46 | Health |
| 4 | Arts | 52 | Housing |
| 6 | Communications | 55 | Immigration |
| 8 | Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs | 56 | Justice |
| 10 | Dáil Reform | 63 | Marine |
| 11 | Defence | 65 | Natural Resources |
| 13 | Disability Issues | 66 | Older People |
| 16 | Economy and Enterprise | 68 | Public Sector Efficiency and Better Value for Money |
| 19 | Education and Science | 71 | Rip Off Ireland |
| 25 | Emigrants | 75 | Small Businesses |
| 26 | Energy and Climate Change | 77 | Sport |
| 30 | Environment, Heritage and Local Government | 79 | Tourism |
| 36 | Families | 81 | Transport |
| | <i>Health</i> | 86 | Youth and Children |
| | <i>Taxation</i> | | <i>Health</i> |
| | <i>Childcare</i> | | <i>Child Protection</i> |
| | <i>Special Needs/Education</i> | | <i>Childcare</i> |
| | <i>Disability Issues</i> | | <i>Young Carers</i> |
| | <i>Carers</i> | | <i>Education</i> |
| | <i>Single Parent Families</i> | | <i>Elections</i> |
| | <i>Pensions</i> | | <i>Sport</i> |
| | <i>Civil Partnership</i> | | |
| | <i>Recreation and Amenity</i> | 90 | Appendix |
| | <i>Domestic Violence</i> | | Financing the Manifesto |
| | <i>Work and Study</i> | | |
| 41 | Foreign Affairs | | |
| 45 | Freedom of Information | | |

KEY THEMES AND HIGHLIGHTS

Fine Gael will set new priorities to deliver public services and a quality of life to match our strong economy. In government, Fine Gael will:

1. Create health services that work, ensuring that cost and capacity don't prevent people from getting treatment that is high quality, timely and close to home. That means:

- Planned expansion of vital capacity (2,300 Acute Beds, 1,500 Convalescence).
- Free Health Insurance for every child under 16.
- Free GP visits for every child under 5.
- Confront the rise of suicide.
- Extend medical cards to 100,000 more families.
- Clean hospitals.
- Reform to ensure money follows patient.

2. Make our communities safer by focusing on victims' rights and making life a lot tougher for criminals. That means:

- 2,000 more Gardai on our streets.
- Consistent sentences from judges.
- Bail harder to get and electronic tagging if needed.
- No prison remission without earning it.
- Best practice policing - when and where they're needed.
- New rights for victims

3. Spend taxpayers' money well, getting maximum value and sacking any Minister who spends carelessly. That means:

- Put Minister's reputation on the line.
- Link money to performance and strategic change.
- Public project scrutiny at critical gateways.
- Every agency openly accountable.

4. Support families as they deal with challenges of modern Ireland and transform education by incentivising innovation in schools to meet pupils' needs and focusing on outcomes. That means:

- Targeted tax relief for single income family/carers.
- Reformed stamp duty to help first time buyers and growing families.
- Improved support for those caring for the elderly.
- Extend medical cards to 100,000 more families.
- Confront the rise of suicide.
- Increase the Old Age Pension to €300.
- Support for one year pre-school.
- Ensure educational support for children with disabilities and special needs.
- School Excellence Fund to achieve pupil goals, more teachers, improving literacy and numeracy.
- Upgrade science and technology at every level.

5. Build an environmentally-sustainable society, with renewable energy, transport, green housing and reduce our impact on global warming. That means:

- Mandatory blends of biofuels in all petrol and diesel.
- Reduced taxes on biofuel and lower emission cars.
- Public facilities must match new housing.
- Increased investment in public transport.
- Help householders achieve best energy standards in all new and refurbished homes.
- Prioritise energy investment to achieve more renewables.
- Leading by example by reducing every Government agency's carbon footprint by 2% each year.

KEY THEMES AND HIGHLIGHTS

6. Lower the cost of living on working families, making childcare, housing, and healthcare more affordable. That means:

- Curb public price increase to inflation or lower.
- Reform regulators who pass on prices too easily.
- Improve competition in key sectors.
- Cut stamp duty.
- Support pre school education and childcare.
- Free medical insurance for all under 16.
- Free GP visits for children under 5.
- Sell State land where appropriate for the provision of more social and affordable housing.

7. Cut taxes for all taxpayers, with a focus on relief for families and first-time homebuyers, and ensure Ireland's strong economy and jobs are not put at risk by complacency or lack of competitiveness. That means:

- Cut 20% tax rate to 18%.
- More support for single income families and home carers.
- Inflation proof bands and credits to protect from stealth tax.
- Cut stamp duty to help first time buyers and growing families.
- Fast track infrastructural priorities.
- Cut regulatory burden by 25%.
- Upskill the workforce through greater provision of third level education and on-the-job training.
- Invest in science and research in a way that supports new and existing industries.
- Extend broadband throughout the country and build a Next Generation network by 2012.

8. Manage Ireland's immigration system in a way that is good for immigrants and good for the Irish by establishing clear rights and responsibilities for immigrants. That means:

- Appoint a Minister for Immigration Affairs.
- Immigrants should be free from discrimination and have their contribution to the country recognised.
- Ensure that Irish laws are understood by and adhered to by immigrants.
- People who come to this country to commit serious crime are not welcome and will be dealt with severely.
- We must protect Irish jobs and the rights of those who come to work here.

9. Protect rural Ireland to ensure vibrant communities, a modern and sustainable farming industry and an equitable distribution of wealth throughout the country. That means:

- Help farmers to grow and develop their enterprises, through targeted State supports; investment in food research and development and enhanced training and education.
- Promote alternative locally-based employment for rural dwellers, particularly part-time farmers.
- Lead the sustainable development of the maritime sector, maximising the quality of life in coastal regions.
- Promote viable rural transport links, sustainable housing in areas of rural depopulation and a better distribution of national development through the National Spatial Strategy.

10. Promote peace on the island, work with our European partners and strengthen our international reputation. That means:

- Build on the historic agreement reached in Northern Ireland and do everything possible to realise the full potential of a lasting settlement.
- Support Ireland's role in the European Union while promoting reform of decision making structures and greater dialogue between the EU and its citizens.
- Combat terrorism and extremism by working with our international partners and promoting human rights.
- Meet our international environmental commitments and work against climate change.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Our farming community has served as the backbone of rural communities and the food manufacturing sector for decades. A thriving farm sector remains a key priority for Fine Gael. Irish agriculture has changed hugely in the past decade and in this altered environment, Irish farmers face enormous challenges if they are to survive. Fine Gael believes that with the right combination of political leadership, State support, smart thinking and a progressive farming community Irish agriculture can transform our food industry into a world leader.

A Viable Future for Irish Farmers

- Fine Gael will help farmers grow and develop their enterprises, through targeted State supports, investment in food research and development and enhanced training and education.

Freedom to Farm

- We will conduct an audit of existing regulations with the target of reducing all bureaucracy by one quarter during our first 18 months in Government.

Fair Inspections

- Fine Gael believes farmers are entitled to advance notice for cross compliance inspections, the opportunity to rectify infringements before they face penalties and a code of practice for the conduct of inspections which applies to inspectors and farmers.

Farm Consolidation and Expansion

- We will remove the barriers to consolidating holdings or transferring them through generations by tackling anomalies in our tax code, most notably by restoring Capital Gains Tax rollover relief which is holding farmers and farming families back.
- Fine Gael will structure tax relief on leased lands to ensure that they encourage longer leasing periods of 15 years and more.

Installation Aid and Early Retirement

- We will increase the level of Installation Aid and reform the Early Farm Retirement Pension to ensure maximum participation in both schemes and facilitate the transfer of land holdings.
- We will also ensure that the ERS remains above the State Old Age Pension rate.

Farm Partnerships

- Fine Gael will introduce specific Farm Partnership legislation to resolve current anomalies with partnerships and to give a secure legal basis for all such partnerships.

Inheritance

- We will examine the feasibility of introducing a programme similar to the Australian Model which facilitates planned inheritance.

REPS

- Fine Gael will continue to support REPS and will work to encourage increased farmers participation, particularly amongst more intensive farmers.

Food Production and Processing

- We will position Ireland as the leading global food producer in terms of quality, innovation and food research and development.
- We will invest in strategic R&D programmes, food business development initiatives and new marketing and promotion measures to achieve this.

Smarter Marketing of Irish Food

- Fine Gael will introduce a single food label for all Irish produce, 'Green Ireland', which will be a simple, single, easily recognisable food label to be used on Irish food in both domestic and international markets and which emphasises Ireland's ability to produce green, quality, healthy food.

The Consumer

- We will ensure that the consumer is protected and served by ensuring the supply of good value, safe, traceable and clearly labelled Irish food produce.

Imports

- We will seek at EU level to have new regulations introduced to ensure that all meat and foodstuffs imported from outside the EU are clearly labelled as such and meet the same standards of production and quality as is required by EU farmers.

Research and Development

- We will set a target to bring investment in R&D in the food industry to a similar level to that in other leading global food producing countries.

Dairy

- We will increase the level of support and technical assistance provided to dairy farmers to give farmers the know-how to enhance the profitability of their dairy holdings.
- We will introduce an independent monitoring system of milk testing which will include protein as well as butterfat.
- Fine Gael will promote investment in the development of more modern product mixes such as functional dairy foods, nutraceutical foods, casein products and milk by-products.

Sheep

- Fine Gael will implement the recommendations of the Malone Report and will introduce a support scheme for farmers to improve the quality of our sheep sector to assist farmers in producing a premium quality product.

Beef

- Fine Gael will develop programmes and initiatives to improve the breeding and quality standards of Irish beef production targeted toward better production standards and reaching a higher output quality.
- We will remain committed to the live export market and will strive to open up new export markets and reopen markets closed during the current FF-PD administration.

All Ireland Animal Health Regime

- We will prioritise the establishment of an all-Ireland animal health system in conjunction with the authorities in Northern Ireland.

Forestry

- Fine Gael is committed to the Forestry Environmental Protection Scheme - it is a vital tool in increasing our afforestation rates, particularly amongst existing REPs farmers.
- We will keep the scheme and its rates of payment under review to ensure that it achieves its aim of significantly increasing our levels of afforestation.

WTO Talks

- Fine Gael will not support any more agricultural concessions at the WTO talks. We believe that the EU have gone far enough and must not go beyond the 2005 offer.

Education and Training

- Fine Gael will introduce a food business and enterprise module dealing with all aspects of food production as part of the Agricultural Science curriculum at second level education. Existing farmers will have the opportunity to access ongoing, flexible training and education to ensure that their product matches consumer demands.

Agriculture Ombudsman and Customer Service

- We will expand the functions and duties of the existing Agriculture Appeals Office to create an independent Office of the Agriculture Ombudsman.
- We will improve customer service within the Department of Agriculture and Food to ensure that farmers can receive a faster and more efficient response to their queries and have access to more flexible opening hours.

Biofuels

- Fine Gael will remove excise duty on biofuel to create a market for its use amongst motorists.
- We will provide seed capital for Producer Groups consisting of up to 50% of the costs of setting up the group, subject to a maximum of €300,000 per group.
- We will reform the existing Energy Crops Scheme to address barriers to increased energy crop production and re-position forestry grants to promote the growth of forestry for wood energy sector.

Organic Farming

- Fine Gael will introduce imaginative, effective solutions to encourage more farmers to go organic.
- We will ensure that establishment funding for organic producers is fully drawn down, remove set-up barriers such as those in REPs, increase area payments for organic farms, reform labelling of organic products, improve education and training and enhance marketing and promotion of organic foods, especially through new sales channels such as over the Internet or through farmers markets.

Farmers Markets

- We will amend planning laws to mandate that all local authorities designate public spaces for farmers markets.

Farm Labour

- Fine Gael will put in place support structures such as continued farm training, education and language programmes which will be offered by Teagasc to all farm workers to attract and retain workers in the sector.

Farm-to-Farm Trading

- Fine Gael will introduce incentives to promote increased farm-to-farm trading and to reduce input costs.

Fruit & Vegetable Promotion

- Fine Gael will support the on-going nationwide roll out of the "Food Dudes" Fruit and Vegetable Promotion programme to all primary schools in Ireland.

Minister For Animal Welfare

- We will assign a Minister of State in the Department of Agriculture with responsibility for all matters relating to animal welfare, and transfer responsibility currently resting with other Departments, in particular the control of dogs, to his/her office. A full audit of existing animal welfare and control legislation will be carried out and, if deemed necessary, new legislation shall be brought to the Oireachtas.

ARTS

Ireland has a strong artistic heritage that is seen in the high quality of our literature, drama, music, and visual arts. The arts are very much a part of the Irish society, defining us as a people and a nation.

Education

- We will support local education partnerships between schools and artists to facilitate artists working directly with schools.
- We will increase the number of schools offering music and art to Leaving Certificate level.
- We will support the clustering of schools in offering enhanced subject choice and extracurricular activity.

Inclusion

- We will support and encourage opportunities for the participation, appreciation and enjoyment of art for people with physical or intellectual disabilities and those with mental health problems.
- We will create a forum of arts organisations and local groups to enhance artistic inclusion among the various ethnic groups in Ireland.
- We will create incentives for artists and organisations that work to further arts inclusion, enhance multicultural participation, and promote arts workshops and festivals in major cities.
- We will promote touring as it presents opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds and locations to have greater access to the arts. We will provide incentives for performing arts groups or arts organisations to undertake regional or national tours.

Touring Collection

- We will establish a touring collection of important Irish art and artefacts which will be on show in public buildings throughout the country to ensure widespread public access.

Libraries

- We will expand the services provided by local libraries and propose an increase in library access to disadvantaged areas.

Audit

- We will audit the level of provision of local arts centres and facilities, to identify communities that are without access to these services.

Arts Council

- We will increase funding to the Arts Council, in particular monies used to promote and support individual artists and arts organisations.

Traditional Arts

- We will provide increased support to artists and groups involved in the creation and promotion of Irish traditional arts.

National Theatre and National Concert Hall

- We will support the redevelopment of both the National Theatre and the National Concert Hall.

Arts Forums

- We will promote the creation of arts forums that can expand the voice of Ireland's arts community and facilitate a more effective dialogue between the Arts Council, national and local government, and artists.

Filmmaking

- We will support Irish filmmaking, and evaluate the current tax and relief schemes for those employed in the acting community.

Access

- We will expand student and family access to national arts institutions, especially with a view to ensuring access to those on lower incomes.

COMMUNICATIONS

Fine Gael believes the basis of future economic growth depends heavily on a modern, efficient and responsive communications infrastructure. We will ensure that Ireland embraces the latest technology and becomes a world leader in the field.

BROADCASTING

Indigenous Broadcasting

- We will establish in law the principal of setting aside at least 0.05 per cent of Government funding for broadcasting. This would equate to a €13m increase in funding in Year 1 and a guaranteed increase year-on-year commensurate with the increase in overall spending. Fine Gael believes that one of the most important social challenges facing the next Government is to ensure that Irish television audiences are offered home-produced programming.

Broadcasting Bill

- We will implement the Broadcasting Bill and ensure the speedy establishment of the Broadcasting Authority.

Digital

- We will ensure that Digital Television is provided quickly to enable the switching off of analogue transmissions by 2015.
- We will create a dedicated TV service, to be broadcast via digital terrestrial television, dedicated to the coverage of Oireachtas Éireann.

Local Radio

- We will take steps to ensure that shareholders in local radio stations - often from outside the State - do not dictate the pace of change in local radio content.
- We will instigate five-yearly reviews of local radio licences to ensure original commitments, including the provision of local content, are met.
- We will entrust the Broadcasting Authority to establish clear criteria about provision of local content.

Fairness and Balance

- We will charge the Broadcasting Authority with ensuring all political coverage is fair and balanced.

TG4

- We will fully support the independence of TG4 from RTE and will make its future success a top priority.

TELECOMS

Competition and Reducing Prices

- We will stimulate competition in the mobile phone market by granting extra licences to those operators who wish to enter the market.
- We will overcome obstacles to entry by compelling existing operators to allow competitors access their networks in line with ComReg's regulations, backed by a European Commission ruling in January 2005.
- We will compel mobile phone operators to display a Typical User Price (TUP), similar to APR for bank loans, on all plans to help consumers make an informed choice.

Phone Masts

- We will encourage greater co-location of masts between operators to ensure fewer mast sites spring up throughout the country.

Broadband

- Fine Gael in Government will adopt a two-stage strategy to revolutionise broadband access in Ireland recognising that Ireland has one of the lowest take-ups of broadband in the EU and the total failure of Government policy in this area, with many householders and businesses unable to connect to a broadband service.
- We will immediately prioritise the extension of access to basic broadband services across the whole country. Other countries with similar population density and settlement patterns, such as Norway and Northern Ireland, have achieved 100% coverage of basic broadband services long ago. We will ensure it happens here.
- We will move quickly to put in place so-called Next Generation networks that will improve on the existing broadband service as a second stage in our strategy to create a fresh vision of our future telecoms needs. The fastest broadband available to households in Ireland is still slower than that available in many countries.
- We will achieve this vision in a way that will be efficient and speedy and will not be characterised by an overblown budget or an inordinate delay. A number of options are available. One possibility is to create a brand new infrastructure under State control. Another possibility is the pooling, integration and further development of existing telecom assets of private and public bodies under the management of a new Public Private Partnership, with organisations taking ownership shares in the new entity commensurate with the value of the assets contributed - subject to control by the State of the infrastructure.
- We will work, over a short and well-defined period, with ComReg and the industry participants to agree a plan to achieve this vision in the shortest time and most cost effective manner.

AN POST

Securing An Post's Future

- We will remain committed to the future of An Post.
- We will ensure the provision of an efficient, reliable, next day delivery postal service throughout the country in both urban and rural areas, based on the retention of the maximum possible number of electronically upgraded post offices.
- We will identify and address the issues of haphazard or non-delivery of post in numerous areas for a variety of reasons, some of which are technical.
- We will make a special effort to encourage taking on board a variety of services including the annual updating of the voters register and general on-line services such as motor taxation and bill pay, in addition to Fortis Bank, thereby enhancing the services to the community and providing for people who might not be familiar with on-line services.
- We will provide for a P.S.O., the financial equivalent of that provided in a number of European Countries.
- We will modernise, improve and upgrade the service as a result of the foregoing.
- We will encourage all Government departments to use banking and other services now available through An Post.

Postcodes

- We will scrap all plans to introduce postcodes to this country. We view these plans as nothing short of a Junk Mailers Charter.

COMMUNITY, RURAL AND GAELTACHT AFFAIRS

Fine Gael believes that strong and vibrant communities are critical to the well being of our nation. Our communities, both urban and rural, must be supported by the State to achieve this goal. Fine Gael is committed to achieving a more equitable society, to alleviating disadvantage, to tackling social exclusion and to ensuring a greater balanced regional development across Ireland.

RAPID

- We will develop a strategic Action Plan for the RAPID programme which will clearly set out the aims, targets and methods of implementation of the RAPID programme, with a strong emphasis on targeting increased funding to tackle educational disadvantage as an effective method of addressing social exclusion.

DRUGS AND THE COMMUNITY

- Fine Gael will develop and implement a National Addiction Strategy which addresses both drug and alcohol abuse and the interactions between the two.
- We will strengthen the work of the Drugs Task Forces to ensure that they have the resources and manpower to tackle drug misuse in local communities, particularly the problem of cocaine misuse.
- We will give increased priority to the rehabilitation pillar of the National Drugs Strategy to help drug misusers to become drug free by providing alternatives to methadone treatment, and providing greater assistance with training, education and accommodation.
- Fine Gael will ring fence monies seized by the Criminal Assets Bureau for drug prevention and treatment programmes benefiting communities most impacted by drug misuse.
- We will reduce waiting times for drug treatment services by increasing the number of treatment places available.

COUNTRYSIDE RECREATION

- Fine Gael will increase the number and range of countryside walks available to the public while ensuring that the interests of property owners are protected.
- We will seek to maximise the spin-off benefits from rural recreational pursuits in areas such as in the rural tourism, food and enterprise sectors.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

- Fine Gael will promote alternative locally-based enterprises for rural dwellers, particularly part-time farmers.
- We will build an Enterprise Hub in each county by merging all existing State agencies in each county, such as County Development Boards, Leader programmes and Pobal-assisted schemes to develop one single overarching Enterprise Hub in each county.
- Fine Gael will target rural development funding to economic activities which have strong growth potential such as energy projects, micro enterprises such as specialist food production and sustainable tourism projects.
- Fine Gael will, under the CLAR programme, continue to prioritise investment in the provision of critical infrastructure and services in rural Ireland such as local roads, water and waste schemes, and village enhancement schemes.

LOCAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

- Fine Gael will channel State resources strategically to community development work which combats inequality, poverty and social exclusion.

- We will improve collaboration and co-operation between State agencies, development groups and local communities to ensure that State investment yields the maximum benefits to local communities.
- We will give communities greater opportunities to participate and make decisions on the rejuvenation and development of their communities to create vibrant, sustainable and empowered communities.

AN GHAELTACHT

Is í an Ghaeltacht tobar agus foinse na Gaeilge. Is chuige sin atá gá le polasaí dearfach lena caomhnú agus lena forbairt go h-eachnamaíoch, go sóisialta agus go cultúrtha.

Déanfaimid

- Infrastruchtúr na Gaeltachta a fheabhsú o thaobh cumarsáide, bóithre, séarachas, uisce agus seirbhísí riachtanacha eile.
- Le blianta anuas cailleadh fostaíocht sna tionscail thradisiúnta sa Ghaeltacht. Déanfaimid treániarracht postanna bunaithe ar an téicneolaíocht nua-aimseartha agus an teanga a chruthú sna ceantair Ghaeltachta.
- Tabharfar na hacmhainní agus an tacaíocht is gá d'Údarás na Gaeltachta leis na spriocanna seo a bhaint amach.
- Caithfear cás speisialta a dhéanamh do na Gaeltachtaí beaga maidir le seirbhísí agus fostaíocht.
- Cuirfear seirbhís leathan-bhanda ar fáil i ngach ceantar Gaeltachta.
- Is gné thábhachtach de shaol na Gaeltachta agus na Gaeilge na Coláistí Samhraidh. Bunófar cúrsaí breise do dháltaí agus d'ábhair múinteoirí a leanfaidh i rith na bliana agus a úsáidfídh áiseanna na gColáistí.
- Tá sárobair a dhéanamh ag RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta agus ag TG4. Tabharfar an tacaíocht atá riachtanach dóibh chun leanúint ar aghaidh agus forbairt mar is gá a dhéanamh ar a seirbhísí.

THE ISLANDS

- Fine Gael will strive to improve the transport links for our island communities between our islands and the mainland.
- We will provide enhanced broadband connections to our island communities.
- We will ensure that islanders have equal access to health care and other social services.
- Fine Gael will seek to maintain and grow island communities through targeted investments which will develop strategic services and which promote job creation for our islands.

DÁIL REFORM

The need for fundamental reform of Dáil practices and procedures is acknowledged across all parties. Progress has been slow and no reforms have been introduced during the lifetime of the current Dáil. Fine Gael will change how the Dáil works, making it responsive to the issues of concern to the nation.

Sitting Days

- We will ensure that the Dáil routinely sits for four days a week from Tuesday to Friday.
- We will make Fridays real sitting days and include an Order of Business and Question Time. Business could include items for which it is often difficult to find a time at the moment (reports etc) and could also include some Private Members Time.

Leaders Questions

- We will take Leaders questions on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. To compensate for the requirement for the Taoiseach to be present on Thursdays for Leaders questions, we would consider agreeing to a reduction in the time allocated for ordinary Taoiseach's questions

Recess

- We will make recesses significantly shorter. The Dáil will rise not earlier than mid-July and should return not later than mid-September. The Dáil should sit until the third week of December and return not later than the third week of January. One specific week in each Dáil session should be designated for the taking of European-related issues.

Questions

- We will allocate more time to oral questions while, as a quid-pro-quo, reducing the number of oral questions being submitted. At present only a fraction of questions tabled for oral answer are actually answered orally in the Chamber with more than 90% never being reached.
- We will reverse the significant reduction in ministerial accountability that has occurred over recent years through the establishment of so many new State agencies or bodies - such as the Health Service Executive. Standing Orders will be amended to require Ministers to place on the Dáil record answers provided by agencies or boards within a specified time limit.
- We will permit written questions during the summer recess. Replies will be published once a week in a supplement to the Official Report and on the Oireachtas website.
- We will amend Standing Orders to place an obligation on Ministers to ensure that questions are answered properly and fully. The Ceann Comhairle will be given additional powers to police this.

Private Members Time

- We will expand Private Members Time. The additional time will be allocated on a lottery basis to individual members - including Government backbenchers.

Adjournment Debate

- We will revamp the adjournment debate format. It will be renamed 'the topical issue' debate and there will be a minimum of five, taken around the middle of the day with provision for questions at the end. A Minister or Minister of State from the relevant department will be required to be present and there will be an end to the practice of one Junior Minister responding on behalf of a number of Departments and reading scripts they know nothing about on a range of subjects.

Standing Order 31

- We will review the Standing Order 31 procedure. Requests are rarely granted given that, in theory anyway, it means the abandonment of all other Dáil business for that day. However, requests for Standing Order 31 adjournments of Dáil business, which are read out on the Order of Business, are being misused to ventilate issues which clearly have no prospect of meeting the criteria set out in Standing Orders. We will suggest a minimum number of signatories would be required for a Standing Order 31 request.

DEFENCE

In Government, Fine Gael will develop the role and capacity of our Defence Forces to fulfil security tasks at home, and to play a full part in the international peace support role which Ireland will actively develop in co-operation with the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN).

EU Security and Defence

- We believe that Ireland should be a full participant in an EU security and defence arrangement.
- We will develop and support participation in the EU battle group concept.

Triple Lock

- We will reform the “triple lock” mechanism to allow for full national sovereignty over the Permanent Defence Force (PDF).

PDF numbers

- We will permit the PDF to achieve a strength of 10,500 plus 250 in training. This will allow the PDF to reach a maximum total strength of 10,750 which would include personnel in training.

Emergency Planning

- We will streamline the approach to emergency planning and legislation will be introduced to underpin Ireland’s preparedness and capacity to cope with emergencies, whether from terrorism, or environmental or natural disasters.

Rapid Response Corps

- Fine Gael will support the Rapid Response Corps, consisting of personnel from the public and private sector and designed to enhance Ireland’s response to humanitarian disasters. This initiative will be brought under the remit of the Department of Defence.

Reserve Defence Force

- We will expand the remit of the Reserve Defence Force (RDF) to allow for overseas service, and review labour law to allow for this change.

Young Offenders Project

- We will develop a new initiative for young offenders, in partnership with the Prison Service, which will couple education and vocational training opportunities within a structured and demanding programme. This initiative will be made available to young offenders nearing their time for release or as an alternative to shorter prison sentences.

Military Archives

- We will increase staffing allocations and enhance resources to facilitate the use of and access to the Military Archives by members of the public and the Defence Forces

Naval Service

- We will expand and improve the facilities available to the Naval Service at Haulbowline, County Cork.
- We will replace the three oldest ships in the Naval service flotilla over the term of a Government. At the time of the decommissioning of these ships, we will examine the feasibility of equipping at least one of the new replacement vessels to participate in humanitarian operations overseas. This would entail the provision of medical equipment and facilities to allow the vessel anchor close to areas of humanitarian disaster or political upheaval and offer medical assistance.

Electronic Surveillance

- We will encourage the use of electronic surveillance equipment to ease the burden of Regimental Duties.

Air Corps

- We will develop the Air Corps capability to provide a twenty-four hour Air Ambulance service, and enhance the ability of the Air Corps to perform Search and Rescue duties.

Retirement Age

- We will amend the retirement age of officers - Commandants from 56 years to 60 years, and Lt-Colonels from 58 years to 60 years.

Further Education for Other Ranks

- We will provide an opportunity for other ranks (O/Ranks) with five years service or more to avail of further education up to and including third level by the provision of facilities and study time at each barrack location.

Investment

- We will ensure that funding obtained from the disposal of defence lands will be invested in the Defence Forces.

Use of Biofuels

- We will ensure that Defence Force vehicles will convert, where practical, to forms of biofuel.

Review of White Paper

- We will review the Defence White Paper within 12 months of entering Government.

Primary Radar

- We will ensure that there is a primary radar service available countrywide to enhance national security.

DISABILITY ISSUES

The long awaited Disability Bill is now the Disability Act 2005. The challenge is to accelerate progress for people with a disability in the post-Disability Act era. Fine Gael is committed to ensuring that the National Disability Strategy and the departmental Sectoral Plans will be implemented in full.

OPPORTUNITY AND REFORM

Funding

- We will ensure that there is transparency in the funding for disability services, that funding provides value for money for people with disabilities, that there are standards of services applied in particular to residential services and that the thrust of disability policy enables participation rather than creating additional barriers.

Services

- Fine Gael will progress towards a system where people with disabilities are enabled to access their own support services. We must offer people with disabilities choice and control over the type of services needed and to enhance independence and autonomy.

Reform

- We will promote the concept of the "money following the client" rather than block granting services providers as at present as this could lead to a more person-centred and responsive model of service provision.

Standards

- We will ensure that national standards for services, which are still at draft stage with the Department of Health, are finalised, implemented and monitored.
- We will ensure that services provided are appropriate to the client and protected by rigorous standards.
- Fine Gael will bring in a Patient Safety Authority to protect the standards applied in residential and day settings for people with disabilities.
- We will promote services which are targeted to provide care appropriate to people's needs.

Disability Strategy

- We will appoint a Minister for Disability Issues to coordinate and implement the National Disability Strategy at Government level and accelerate progress on Departmental Sectoral Plans.
- We will create an Office for Disability Issues to provide advice and support the Minister in implementing the National Disability Strategy, overseeing the distribution of multi-annual funding for disability support services and the dissemination of information on individuals rights and entitlements.
- We will develop a Partnership Forum to improve dialogue between voluntary and community groups and the Government.

Cost of Disability

- Fine Gael will introduce a cost of disability payment for people who have been in receipt of means-tested Disability Allowance for a specified period of time. Discussions will be held with groups and organisations representing people with disabilities before this scheme is introduced.

Independent Living

- Fine Gael will support independent living by creating employment and training opportunities and by providing adequate home help and home care services.
- Fine Gael will aim to accelerate the progress on the Transport Sectoral Plan and to provide a fully accessible and comprehensive public transport system to meet the needs of those who rely upon it.

Irish Sign Language

- In Government, Fine Gael will give increased recognition and support to Irish Sign Language (ISL) services.
- We will develop a module on ISL Education for use in secondary schools in transition year.
- We will increase the number of ISL interpreters to ensure sufficient interpretation services are accessible to the deaf community nationally.
- We will ensure the prompt screening of all new born babies to identify hearing impairment at the earliest possible stage.
- Fine Gael will introduce a formal accreditation programme and registration system for ISL interpreters.

EDUCATION

Speech Therapy

- We will create a speech therapy service within the education system to cater exclusively for children and young people needing this service.

NEPS

- We will expand the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) bringing all schools under the cover of this service, and ensuring that the waiting time for a NEPS assessment for any child is no longer than one school term.

Special Needs and Autism

- We will ensure that recommended and necessary educational supports are allocated to children who need them, making it a priority to ensure that children with physical or intellectual disabilities receive the best education and best chance to reach their full potential.
- We will support diversity in the education of children with autism, recognising that both intensive education and mainstreaming can be seen to work for individual children. Where a period of intensive education is professionally recommended for children with autism we will support this education.

Vetting of Staff

- We will ensure that all new teachers and school support staff are vetted prior to taking up employment, and will also introduce the retrospective vetting of all those currently working in our schools. We will ensure that 'soft', non-conviction information forms part of the vetting process.
- We will establish a register of persons considered unsafe to work with children, young people or the vulnerable of any age.

ARTS

- We will support and encourage opportunities for the participation, appreciation and enjoyment of art for people with physical or intellectual disabilities and those with mental health problems.

HOUSING

Legislative Reform

- We will audit all existing housing legislation to find those aspects of legislation which perpetuate inequalities.
- We will specifically target any legislative measures that adversely affect vulnerable groups including people with disabilities, people with psychiatric illnesses and those who have left the family home following marriage or relationship breakdown.

BARCELONA DECLARATION

- Fine Gael will support the full adoption and implementation of the Barcelona Declaration in every local authority area.

SPORTS

Under-represented Groups

- We will assess sporting infrastructure to address deficits which prevent older people, women and girls, and those with disabilities from engaging in sporting activities.

Teacher Training

- We will provide training in adapted physical education to teachers as part of their ongoing professional development.

Development Officers

- We will ensure that Disability Sports Development Officers are provided in each Local Sports Partnership.

Accessible Infrastructure

- We will ensure that new sports facilities are accessible for people with disabilities and extend grants to make existing facilities accessible.

ECONOMY AND ENTERPRISE

Sound economic management is a fundamental requirement of good government. In our joint publication, Protecting the Progress, Fine Gael and Labour set out the measures that we will take to protect prosperity, progress and growth and to ensure more and better jobs.

TAX REFORM FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

A More Progressive and Family Friendly Income Tax Code

- We will cut the standard rate of tax by 2% from 20% to 18%.
- We will index personal credits and bands to earnings.
- We will increase the home carers credit to the level of the PAYE credit.
- We will increase by a further €5,000 the point where one-income married couples hit the top rate of tax.

A Fairer Stamp Duty Regime

- We will abolish stamp duty for first time buyers up to €450,000.
- We will restructure the stamp duty system for others buyers as follows:
 - No stamp duty up to €100,000.
 - On the next €350,000 a 5% rate will apply.
 - On the balance a 9% rate will apply.

A Supportive Environment for Employment and Exports

- We will not change the current rates of Corporation Tax.
- We will not change the current rates of Capital Gains Tax.
- We will make sure that charges by state bodies are capped at the rate of inflation.

A Greener Tax System

- We will abolish excise duty on biofuels.
- We will bring in a new stamp duty credit linked to a new energy sustainability rating.
- We will rebalance VRT in a revenue-neutral fashion to favour lower-emission vehicles.

A More Equitable and Efficient Tax System

- We will have a Commission on Taxation to examine tax schemes on an on-going basis.
- We will have a tax-payers advocate, situated in the National Consumer Agency, to ensure that PAYE workers in particular get all the tax credits to which they are entitled.
- We will bring in a cap on the benefit from tax breaks.
- We will bring in tax relief at source in additional areas such as bin charges and medical expenses.
- We will ensure equal tax treatment for couples in Civil Unions.

BUDGETING FOR GROWTH AND STABILITY

Fiscal Prudence and Economic Stability

- We will subject all spending and tax commitments to the over-riding commitment to adhere to the EU Growth and Stability Pact. This means respecting the requirement that, over the course of an "economic cycle", the General Government Balance will, on average, not exceed 1% of GDP.
- We will keep sufficient flexibility in the public finances to allow for a sharper than expected slowdown in tax growth without breaching EMU commitments.

Higher Capital Spending

- We will increase capital spending to the levels set out in the National Development Plan 2008-12, subject to a new framework for delivering infrastructure on time and on budget.
- We will invest 1% of GNP in the National Pension Reserve Fund (NPRF) annually over the lifetime of the Government.

Targeted Tax Reforms

- We will deliver our tax proposals (which have been costed at a total of €3.4 billion in 2007 terms) over the lifetime of a 5-year Government (equating to an average annual tax relief package of €680 million each year in 2007 prices).

Better and More Cost Effective Public Services

- We will fulfil Government policy commitments across a range of public services, as set out in Towards 2016, the Partnership Agreement.
- We will fund additional day-to-day spending on health and policing services, as set out in Fine Gael/Labour joint policies on health and policing. When delivered in full, these will cost an additional €1.6 billion in 2007 prices.
- We will allocate additional resources for further public service improvements in the context of annual budgetary planning.

Better Value For Money

- We will improve strategic management and prioritisation of spending.
- We will enhance Oireachtas scrutiny of expenditure.
- We will enhance civil service capacity in expenditure management.
- We will clarify lines of accountability for Ministers and civil servants.

MORE AND BETTER JOBS

Tax Competitiveness for Exporters

- We will maintain the 12.5% single rate of Corporation Tax and the current rate of Capital Gains Tax.
- We will expand our tax treaty network with Asia and Latin America.
- We will introduce further tax measures to make investment in high-tech, export oriented Irish firms more attractive to investors.
- We will increase direct state support for the development of the Irish venture capital (VC) industry through Enterprise Ireland.

Upskilling the Workforce

- We will develop a National Skills and Training System to progress 100,000 people by one level under the National Qualifications Framework, through:
 - Support from the National Training Fund for part-time third level education.
 - Two-week statutory paid training leave paid out of the National Training Fund.
 - Increased support for employer-led training networks.
 - Additional financial contributions from the Social Insurance Fund to support education and training for those that have been made redundant.

A “Next Generation” Telecoms Network

- We will immediately extend broadband access across the country.
- We will create, by 2012, a new, high speed, open access, Next Generation network.

Competitiveness through Research and Innovation

- We will increase public funding for industry-led research and in-firm R&D.
- We will expand industry-led networks that define higher education research agendas.
- We will allow universities to issue bonds to finance research infrastructure.
- We will provide additional resources for the Marine Institute.
- We will give greater attention to research areas of relevance to the services industry - business, finance, psychology, linguistics, economics and environmental research.
- We will develop a new Institute of Advanced Studies in Applied Finance.

Ireland as a Life Science Leader

- We will develop a National Life Sciences and Health Research Strategy.
- We will increase funding for health-related research infrastructure and training.
- We will strengthen the relationship between industry, clinicians and researchers.
- We will facilitate the HSE to recruit additional clinician scientists, with protected time for research.
- We will reform Ireland's slow and fragmented system of clinical trials.

Less Regulatory Red Tape

- We will cut the administrative burden (red tape) on companies by 25%.
- We will introduce a reinvigorated programme of better regulation based around cost-benefit analysis, more transparency and better consultation with affected groups.

The Green Economy

- We will set up a new Centre of Excellence for Alternative Energy Research.
- We will mandate ESB and Bord na Móna to become renewable energy leaders.
- We will exempt biofuels from excise duty.
- We will provide start-up grants for biofuel processing plans.
- We will improve the Bioenergy Crops Scheme for farmers.

Faster and More Economical Delivery of Infrastructure

- We will fast track electricity inter-connection, the inter-urban roads programme and public transport.
- We will set up a new Critical Infrastructure Commission to accelerate planning of key infrastructure projects.
- We will set up a new High Court for Infrastructure to accelerate judicial review of planning decisions by An Bord Pleanála.

Tighter Control of Utility Costs

- We will give stronger powers for regulators, particularly in energy and telecoms.
- We will set up a new Competition Appeals Court to accelerate regulatory appeals.
- We will put in place a Consumer Charter for Utilities that will, among other things, compensate households and businesses that lose utility service for more than three hours in a 24 hour period by forcing providers to deduct the cost of one day's service from the bill. This will apply to electricity, gas, telephone, internet and cable TV providers.

ESCHEATMENT

- Fine Gael will examine the viability of a system which would require banks and companies to submit periodic returns detailing unclaimed or abandoned dividends or property which would in turn be turned over to the State.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

To meet the challenges of the 21st century, Ireland needs a world-class education system. In Government, Fine Gael will ensure that Ireland's schools, colleges, institutes and universities allow all children, young people and adults to reach their educational potential.

A focus on reform and innovation, and on putting the needs of children and young people at the centre of education policy will characterise our approach.

A REFORMING AGENDA FOR EDUCATION

Annual School Reports

- We will ensure that all schools publish an Annual School Report, updated at the start of every school year, so that a comprehensive and accessible package of information is available to every parent.

Excellence Funds

- We will establish a Primary Schools Excellence Fund and a Secondary Schools Excellence Fund, each of €100 million annually. Schools will be able to draw from these funds to recruit additional teachers to reduce class sizes, but will also be empowered to use these funds to meet the diverse needs of their students through new initiatives.

Standardised Testing

- We will introduce standardised testing of numeracy and literacy at primary level, ensuring that results from all schools are returned to the Department of Education and Science.

Laptops For Every Child

- We will give a laptop to every child entering secondary school, redesigning course material around the new technology and completing a radical teacher-training programme.

School Buildings

- We will ensure that new schools and additional classrooms are delivered when and where they are needed, cutting the timelag between the identification of need and the final delivery of new facilities. We will:
 1. Provide €4.5 billion for the development and expansion of first and second level schools infrastructure over the next seven years, especially targeting substandard buildings and areas of population growth.
 2. Expand devolved initiatives to empower schools to plan for their own development, and deliver improvements at a speedier pace.
 3. Overhaul the sluggish School Building Programme, and introduce transparency into the process of school planning.
 4. Ensure that the provision of school buildings is factored into all large-scale residential developments.
 5. Reform the planning acts to allow local authorities to require private housing developers to directly provide for schools, community/youth centres and other elements of community infrastructure according to when and where they are needed.
 6. Ensure that local authorities draw up specific development plans for the provision of educational facilities over a ten-year period.

Sporting Facilities

- We will improve sporting facilities at our schools, and concentrate on the development of facilities that can be shared between schools and by schools and local communities.

New Schools

- We will simplify the establishment of new schools to empower parents in the development of diversity in education.

Teacher Training and Professional Development

- We will review and modernise teacher-training courses to focus on new challenges that primary and secondary teachers now face, and will also improve the professional development for teachers at both primary and secondary level.
- We will introduce fixed-term contracts for all school principals to encourage leadership, innovation and new thinking in the education system.
- We will introduce new initiatives to encourage people with different backgrounds and varied experience to join the teaching profession. Suitably qualified people in mid-career with an interest in teaching will be incentivised to join the profession.
- We will ensure that all primary and post-primary teachers are audited by trained professionals in their teaching skills and methodologies every five years to ensure that teachers benefit from the most up-to-date research and development in the field of teaching.
- We will allow teachers who may be experiencing 'burn out' to change employment within the public sector.

Primary Pupil Database

- We will prioritise the development of a Primary Pupil Database to track the progress of all children through the primary school system and on to second-level education, and will also ensure that this database holds information regarding the Department-funded educational programmes that each child may have benefited from, giving educators a clearer view as to the effectiveness of specific initiatives.

Teacher Numbers

- We will reform the method of allocating teachers to fast growing schools so that current enrolment numbers determine teacher allocation.

REACHING OUR EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL

Pre-School

- We will expand the number of community pre-school places offering free pre-school in areas of educational disadvantage, and will also subsidise this education by at least two-thirds for all other children with up to 100% subsidy available based on a means test.

Breakfast and Homework Clubs

- We will support the expansion of Breakfast Clubs and Homework Clubs, focusing particularly on schools in areas of educational disadvantage.

NEPS

- We will expand the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) bringing all schools under the cover of this service, and ensuring that the waiting time for a NEPS assessment for any child is no longer than one school term.

Speech Therapy

- We will create a speech therapy service within the education system to cater exclusively for children and young people needing this service.

Special Needs and Autism

- We will streamline access to services for children with special educational needs, making it easier for parents to access the additional help that their children need.
- We will ensure that recommended and necessary educational supports are allocated to children who need them, making it a priority to ensure that children with physical or intellectual disabilities receive the best education and best chance to reach their full potential.
- We will support diversity in the education of children with autism, recognising that both intensive education and mainstreaming can be seen to work for individual children. Where a period of intensive education is professionally recommended for children with autism we will support this education.

NEWB

- We will enhance the services provided by the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) to ensure that Educational Welfare Officers can work with a greater number of children and their families to improve school attendance rates, and will also re-orient the work of the NEWB towards adopting a significantly more preventative role, and in enhancing contact with schools in order to support school attendance as well as following up on cases of non-attendance.

Premium Payments

- We will instigate a system of premium payments to teachers in the most challenging schools, incentivising leaders in education to work with children at risk of disadvantage.

School Year and Use of Facilities

- We will lengthen the use of school facilities on a daily basis by local communities, and examine the extension of the school year at second level to take account of increased pressures on the curriculum, the greater number of required subjects and enhanced subject choice.

Youthreach

- We will expand Youthreach, increasing the number of places available on this programme and rolling-out this service nationally.

Career Guidance

- We will progressively increase the allocation of career guidance hours per week to all second-level schools.

Colleges of Further Education and McIver Report

- We will support the colleges of further education, and will introduce a phased implementation of the McIver Report, prioritising:
 1. The provision of crèche facilities at colleges to facilitate educational opportunity for parents, especially lone and young parents.
 2. Enhancing student library and IT facilities.
 3. Improvements in staffing structures.
 4. Investment in capital infrastructure.
 5. The enhancement of student support, assessment and industry liaison.

Adult and Community Education

- We will support adult and community education through a package of new measures including the use of the National Training Fund to fund a scheme to pay for part-time courses, and the introduction of annual paid training leave.

Youth Work

- We will support the development and expansion of youth work projects.

Transition Year and Leaving Certificate

- We will aim to ensure that a full transition year programme is available to all students at second-level. The curriculum for transition year programmes should allow flexibility according to the differing priorities of individual schools, including the development of modules on driver education, environmental awareness, entrepreneurial education, and Irish Sign Language (ISL) education.
- We will introduce greater flexibility, in terms of learning and assessment, in the Leaving Certificate examination whilst maintaining high standards.

Entrepreneurial Education

- We will aim to ensure that local enterprise support hubs should also play an enhanced role in entrepreneurial education at second-level, and in supporting groups such as Junior Achievement Ireland in this role.

Language Support and Immigration

- We will support schools dealing with new challenges posed by immigration, including enhancing the allocation of Language Support Teachers and ensuring that schools with a higher enrolment of students with English language needs will be allocated a higher number of teaching hours.
- We will develop English language classes for immigrant communities to ensure that places on adult education classes are retained for those requiring literacy education, not language education.

MAKING OUR SCHOOLS GOOD PLACES TO LEARN, GOOD PLACES TO TEACH

Behaviour

We will tackle deteriorating student behaviour, particularly at second-level schools, by:

1. Reviewing the legislation to ensure that all schools have the authority they need to tackle cases of unacceptable behaviour.
2. Encouraging parents to be fully engaged in this issue, and in ensuring their children act towards their teachers and peers in a way that is acceptable.
3. Establishing a new system of 'behaviour contracts', where schools organise a meeting for all parents and students and set out clearly the school code of behaviour, including what warnings will be given, and actions taken, in cases of poor behaviour.
4. Issuing new and up-to-date guidelines on discipline to every school in the country.
5. Piloting a new scheme which would involve young people in the drafting of their school discipline policy and in the decision-making process in cases where the policy is not adhered to, in recognition of the fact that peer pressure can be a strong motivator for change.

Home School Liaison

- We will expand the Home School Community Liaison service so that problems in the home environment, which may contribute to indiscipline, can be properly assessed and assisted, alongside greater cooperation between the Department of Education and Science, the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

Anti Bullying

- We will introduce a national anti-bullying strategy in all schools, designed to address bullying, homophobia and racism, which will involve students, teachers and parents.

Stay Safe and RSE

- We will ensure that the 'Stay Safe' programme is offered in every primary school, and that all second-level students have access to Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).

Vetting of Staff

- We will ensure that all new teachers and school support staff are vetted prior to taking up employment, and will also introduce the retrospective vetting of all those currently working in our schools. We will ensure that 'soft', non-conviction information forms part of the vetting process.
- We will establish a register of persons considered unsafe to work with children, young people or the vulnerable of any age.

Commercial Activity in Schools

- We will issue guidelines regarding commercial activity on school premises to all schools, and will ensure that any PPPs entered into for the building of new schools will not remove from school authorities the power to remove vending machines from their school, or to insist that healthy products be stocked in them.

Capitation and Insurance

- We will enhance capitation funding to primary and voluntary secondary schools, and increase the grants to vocational, community and comprehensive schools.

- We will immediately examine the feasibility of the State Claims Agency taking a role in insuring all schools, which would save individual schools significant monies and allow them to redirect capitation funding towards their pupils' needs.

School Transport Service

- We will improve the school transport service, and review the catchment boundaries for school transport to take account of the considerable demographic change in many parts of the country since these boundaries were fixed.
- We will reform the current vehicle testing and inspection regime for school transport vehicles to ensure that these vehicles meet the highest safety standards.

Voluntary Drug and Alcohol Testing

- We will ensure that, where teachers and parents decide to introduce random drug and alcohol testing at secondary schools, the Department of Education and Science will cover the costs of such testing.

THE IRISH LANGUAGE

Choice at Leaving Certificate

- We will substantially reform the teaching and learning of the Irish language in line with our published proposals in this area, including giving all Leaving Certificate students the choice to study Irish for their final two years in school.

New Leaving Certificate Subject

- We will radically reform the Irish language curriculum, and introduce a new subject at Leaving Certificate level, Communicating in Irish, which will focus on giving students a real fluency and facility in the Irish language.

Language Support Corps

- We will develop a specialist Language Support Corps to help individual primary schools which are having particular difficulties with the teaching of Irish.

THE TEACHING OF MATHS AND SCIENCE

Reform

- We will reform the teaching of maths and science at second level in line with the proposals set out in the joint Fine Gael and Labour Party document Formula for Success.

Core Requirement at Junior Certificate

- We will ensure that Science is a core requirement for all Junior Certificate students, delivering participation rates of 100% within three years, and ensure that all schools offer their students a full choice of science subjects at Leaving Certificate level.

Science Audit

- We will audit all schools to identify the gaps in scientific equipment and facilities and invest to bring these up to standard.

Clusters

- We will encourage schools to form clusters within which the Department of Education and Science can make additional commitments to develop science. Laboratory technician hours will be allocated to schools on this clustering basis.

THIRD AND FOURTH LEVEL EDUCATION

Grants and subsidised loans

- We will increase grants at third level, and enhance funding to student hardship funds.
- We will ensure that any further increases in student registration charges do not exceed inflation.
- We will not reintroduce fees at undergraduate level.
- We will introduce a package of subsidised loans of up to €10,000, repayable within 4 years of graduation, to post-graduate students. We will also establish a new post-graduate fund to assist students doing Ph.D. research without sponsorship.
- We will streamline the application procedure for all grants and for the new package of subsidised loans. We will:
 1. Establish a Student Support Unit to coordinate grants for Diploma, Certificate and Degree courses, at both Institutes of Technology and the universities, within Ireland and Northern Ireland and for those studying abroad, and to manage the new package of subsidised loans.
 2. This unit will ensure that applications are processed quickly and according to a customer service charter for students and, where successful, grant funding is issued without delay.
 3. Students will have the option of having monthly or weekly grant payments made to them, instead of lump sums released each term.
- We will examine the possible introduction of a new system of student loans at undergraduate level.
- We will use the National Training Fund (NTF) to introduce a scheme for individuals who have not already benefited from higher education to pay for courses in higher educational institutions taken on a part-time basis.

National Framework of Qualifications

- We will develop a national framework of qualifications designed to make access, transfer and progression in education a reality.

Training and Upskilling

- We will introduce annual paid-training leave, support employer-led training, and reinvent the role of FAS to encompass the expansion of work-training schemes and apprenticeships.

Seanad Electoral Act

- We will reform the Seanad Electoral (University Members) Act 1937 and extend the Seanad franchise to all third-level graduates including all Institutes of Technology.

Industry

- We will foster and expand links between industry and commercial research and our third-level institutions, in particular our Institutes of Technology. We will build links between the ITs, the IDA and Enterprise Ireland in order to support the potential for these institutes to contribute significantly to regional development.

Flexible Learning

- We will support third-level institutions in providing a far greater number of courses at evening time and at weekends, and will promote flexibility in learning which we believe we encourage a far greater number of people to return to education.

EMIGRANTS

Fine Gael believes that we have a duty of care and responsibility toward Irish-born citizens wherever they reside.

Agency

- We are committed to establishing an Agency for the Irish Abroad, along the lines recommended in the Task Force on Policy Regarding Emigrants.

Dormant Accounts Fund

- Fine Gael will ensure that Emigrant Representative Groups working with Irish-born emigrants abroad can seek funding from the Dormant Accounts Disbursement Board.

Undocumented Irish in US

- Fine Gael will continue to campaign for the regularisation of the status of undocumented Irish workers in the U.S.
- We will seek to negotiate a working visa exchange programme between Ireland and the U.S. This visa programme would be open to U.S. and Irish citizens including undocumented Irish emigrants living and working in the U.S to expand the opportunities for U.S. and Irish citizens to live and work in both countries.

Pensioners

- Fine Gael will work to ensure that all Irish-born emigrant pensioners who return to reside in Ireland will be entitled to social welfare entitlements equal to those enjoyed by Irish pensioners.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Fine Gael believes the twin challenges of climate change and the need to adjust our energy usage patterns are the most urgent facing Ireland and the world. We believe in an efficient, vibrant and competitive energy market, where supply is secure and the need to reduce consumption is always recognised.

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

- We will establish a Department of Environment and Energy which will co-ordinate climate-change policy. We have paid too high a price for the inter-departmental inertia that gave us ten years of rising emissions and missed opportunities.

CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

- We will establish a Centre of Excellence for Alternative Energy charged with ensuring Ireland develops a world-class alternative energy sector.
- We will incorporate the existing Sustainable Energy Ireland into the Centre of Excellence, to be located within an existing Institute of Technology with "outreach" points in other academic institutions nationwide. It will have specific responsibility to encourage, incentivise and develop the alternative energy sector with the objective of replacing a major percentage of energy imports and securing supply.

ENERGY AT HOME

Grants

- We will pay grants to householders wishing to improve insulation of their homes and contribute towards a reduction in energy use.
- We will improve on grant aid available to householders who wish to convert existing home-heating technology to renewable energy technology in their homes.

Energy Performance

- We will ensure the Energy Performance in Buildings Directive is implemented in full and in a timely fashion. What is more, we will work towards ensuring that 30% of all new buildings will be "green" and be powered by renewable forms of energy.

GENERATING ELECTRICITY

Renewable Targets

- We will move towards generating 33% of Ireland's electricity needs from renewable sources by 2025.
- We will target an increase in renewables in energy production to 17% by 2012 as an interim measure.

ESB and Eirgrid

- We will legislate for a complete separation of the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) from the National Grid (Eirgrid), while keeping both in State ownership, in order to ensure a level playing field for all energy suppliers.

Wind Energy

- We will build the necessary interconnecting infrastructure with other electricity markets to allow for a significant increase in generation from wind.

Landfill Gas and Waste Water

- We will seek to recover all landfill gas in all landfill sites and waste water treatment plants, as far as is practicable, for generation of electricity to be fed into the National Grid and for private use.

R&D in Hydro electricity

- We will increase research and development funding in the offshore hydro-electric sector to ensure established targets are met and commit to a review of progress with a view to exceeding those targets should conditions permit.

Bord na Móna

- We will include Bord na Móna in the overall development of energy policy given its experience and expertise as an energy provider and its ability to play a meaningful role.

BIOFUELS AND THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE

Excise Duty

- We will remove all excise duty on biofuels produced from all renewable energy crops.

Producer Groups

- We will make available establishment grants for Producer Groups that would consist of up to 50% of the costs of setting up the group, subject to a maximum of €300,000 per group.

Energy Crops

- We will examine the current rates of payment under the existing Energy Crops Scheme and whether the sugar beet crop should be included under the Scheme to facilitate development of the bio-ethanol industry.

Biofuel Processing

- We will initiate a public competition for the establishment and operation of a number of biofuel processing plants, strategically located in a selected number of locations. Capital Start-Up Grants for these processing plants would be initially given to enable these plants to become established and begin viable processing operations.
- We will establish greater links with international biofuel processors and/or fuel suppliers and the relevant Government Departments, especially the Department of Transport and the Department of Agriculture and Food, to facilitate the promotion of the biofuels industry.

Public Awareness and Promotion

- We will initiate a Public Awareness and Promotion Campaign to encourage the growth of biofuels.

Forestry

- We will encourage throughout the public and private forestry sector the growing of trees with a high carbon sequestration capacity making a further contribution to meeting Kyoto requirements.
- We will set clear targets for the wood energy sector in Ireland. There are currently no targets in place to allow for the replacement of imported fossil fuels with domestic wood energy. Targets and a clear policy direction would promote better forest management and stimulate the growth of the forestry sector.
- We will re-position forestry grants to promote and develop sustainable forestry. There must be a greater focus on the potential of a vibrant forestry sector, through alternative timber use to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. In particular, there must be a greater emphasis on short rotation coppice forestry such as willow.

TRANSPORT

Public Transport

- We will allocate capital transport funding to facilitate a meaningful increase in the development of public transport infrastructure projects. There is an urgent need to prioritise a fast-track high capacity commuter rail services into the capital and other cities. The endless traffic queues are hugely wasteful of energy and the concentration of emissions is damaging to health, as well as to the environment.

VRT

- We will reform Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) through the establishment of a system of energy efficiency labelling for motor vehicles, with lower rates of VRT for those cars with more efficient engines.

Biofuels

- We will create a market for biofuels by legislating to provide that all motor fuels must include a blend of fuel from renewable sources. The EU has set a binding target of increasing the penetration of biofuels in transport to 10% by 2020. Fine Gael in Government will accept this target, and as an interim measure we will target an increase to 5% by 2012.

Cars

- We will encourage all car manufacturers selling on the Irish market to provide at least one model in their car range which can run entirely on pure plant oil.

Buses

- We will ensure an immediate increase in the number of buses providing commuter services into our major cities, particularly feeder buses to rail connections.

Public Transport Regulator

- We will establish a Public Transport Regulator as a priority, with the aim of assisting in the provision of increased public transport services with an emphasis on rapid high capacity systems.

Rail

- We will take action on the provision of increased rail services, as a viable transport solution to dramatically reduce our current reliance on the car and the provision of parking at railway stations and major interchanges to encourage the use of commuter rail services.

Fuel Use

- We will place a requirement on all public transport vehicles and public service vehicles to convert, where practical and feasible, to pure plant oil.

Work Place Mobility Management Plans

- We will compel all Government and public service organisations to develop Work Place Mobility Management Plans (WPMMP).
- We will ensure that all planning applications for facilities that will employ more than 20 people will have to be accompanied by a WPMMP.

Electric Cars

- We will mandate all public car parks to provide sockets for recharging of electric cars.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Infrastructure

- We will amend the National Spatial Strategy to include major renewable energy infrastructure projects.
- We will ensure that renewable energy infrastructure constitutes an element of Regional Development Plans.

Community Dividend

- We will provide a "community dividend" to act as "compensation" for those living close to important infrastructure that aids the entire country reach its alternative energy commitments.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

We will implement an effective plan to make Local Government integral to the green agenda.

Inventory of CO2

- We will legislate to compel every local authority, in conjunction with local energy committees where such exist, to conduct a full inventory of all CO2 emissions in their administrative area. This shall include all emissions from the Council itself and emissions from manufacturing industry outside of the Emissions Trading Scheme; business, shops, offices, schools, hospitals, places of recreation, public buildings, etc in their region.

Plans

- We will ensure that following the drawing up of such inventories of emissions, each local authority will be charged with putting in place a comprehensive plan of action to reduce these emissions by setting out achievable targets. Adjoining local authorities can combine to address common issues arising if they see fit.
- We will allow for such plans to be discussed proactively with each sector, CO2 reductions identified and costed, targets set and reviewed every two years. Such plans shall be detailed and agreed.
- We will require Departments within each council to draw up a detailed plan of how emissions will be reduced in their own area. Housing, Planning, Waste Management, Transportation, Road Maintenance, Sports, Arts and all other Departments will draw up detailed and specified plans for CO2 emission reduction.
- We will ensure that local authorities, as part of each plan of action, spell out what changes to their planning processes will occur in order to make buildings greener and more energy efficient.

Performance Indicators

- We will also include Climate Change in the Local Authority Performance Indicators.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Targets

- We will set a target of a 2% reduction in CO2 emission from each Government Department and State Agency.

Green Procurement

- We will lead by example on environmental issues through a policy of green procurement.

Public Buildings

- We will begin the conversion of all public buildings to green energy.

Public Service Vehicles

- We will begin the conversion of all public service vehicles to biofuels in order to reduce the State's carbon footprint.

Annual Reporting

- We will introduce a new system of annual open and transparent reporting which will ensure that every Government Agency is held to account every year on its progress.

Local Authorities

- We will require each Local Authority to spell out how it intends to roll out the Green Schools programme, organised by An Taisce and which has proved remarkably successful in counties like Clare where 80 schools are currently enrolled.

A NUCLEAR FREE IRELAND

- We will not allow for any nuclear power facility to be constructed or operate in this country. We shall continue to campaign for the closure of the Sellafield facility by the British government.

ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Fine Gael will take the environment seriously and lead a cleaner, greener Government. We will rejuvenate local democracy, protect our treasured heritage and get to grips with the growing waste crisis.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Directly Elected Mayors

- We will legislate for directly elected full time Mayors in every city and county council in the country with increased powers. Mayors will be elected for a five-year term by popular vote under the PR-STV system. The manager would continue to hold reserved powers.
- We will allow Mayors, upon their election, to select a local cabinet (equivalent to each chair of SPC) from councillors proportionate to their strength on the Council.
- We will create a system where each member of the local cabinet will act as a 'local minister' with a portfolio for which they will recommend decisions to the full council. The Mayor will be the political leader of the community, proposing policy for approval by the Council and spearheading cross-portfolio initiatives as well as initiatives in co-operation with other local authorities.

Services

- We will ensure that services provided by local authorities involve personal face-to-face contact between the public and officials. Privacy, courtesy and the identification of the official concerned will continue to be the norm in such contacts. There must be an end to "the hatch" in the public office, which often allows private issues to be easily overheard.

Citizens Charter

- We will draw up a local government Citizens Charter which will set out clearly
 - The rights of the citizen in all dealings with local government;
 - The duties and functions of the local authority;
 - The obligations of the local authority to each citizen in its functional area;
 - Standards and services to be guaranteed in the system.

Performance

- We will charge the Department to annually collate and publish data, in league table format, of how each council is performing in a wide range of services. Public scrutiny, and pressure from the local communities that they are elected and paid to serve will ensure that local authorities provide value for money and the full range of services people deserve.

RECREATION AND AMENITY

Family Friendly Policy

- We will make Local Government child and family friendly. All policies must be proofed on this basis. In conjunction with all of the national sporting bodies and the support of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, each Council shall draw up a recreation and amenity policy document.

Playgrounds

- We will prioritise playgrounds suitable for young children. At the core of this policy will be the requirement to protect existing green recreational spaces for environmental, social, cultural and sporting reasons and to ensure as new development occurs that adequate recreation and amenity space is provided.

High Quality Build

- We will ensure high quality build throughout the country. With the advent of high density housing such plans have an increasing importance and relevance. High quality build is essential with adequate green belts identified and planned for locally and put in each development plan.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCING

Business Audit

- We will undertake a full business audit of all local government activity to establish the most effective cost efficient way of providing value for money services to the public.

No New Taxes

- We will not introduce any new taxes in order to fund local authorities.

Economic cost

- We will examine the practice of charging the State the full economic cost of services provided by local authorities.

Rent reductions

- We will encourage local authorities to reduce rents for those tenants who maintain their homes well and have lower maintenance costs as a result.

Professional Skills

- We will support and encourage the employment of suitably qualified persons presently in the private sector as specialists into local government to provide business and professional skills on fixed term contracts.

Public Accounts

- We will subject all local authorities to the full scrutiny of the Public Accounts Committee of the Oireachtas.

ELECTIONS

Electoral Commission

- We will establish an independent national Electoral Commission.

Voting Age

- We will reduce the voting age to 17.

Electoral Register

- We will ensure the electoral register is accurate and up to date through the automatic registration of all individuals when they turn 17 years of age and the use of the PPS system to ensure accuracy.

Election to Dáil Éireann

- We will reduce the minimum age for election to Dáil Éireann from 21 to 17.

Electronic Voting

- We will scrap electronic voting.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Zoning

- We will legislate to allow for applicants in the planning system to opt for a one-stop-shop without appeal to An Bord Pleanála for new commercial or change of use to commercial planning applications in commercial zoned areas, and for new Light Industrial or change of use to Light Industrial Development in Industrial Zoned areas. This will be provided that all or other regulatory bodies who are applicable to each such application have given their approval including any conditions they would attach to such development.

Rezoning and Development Plans

- We will require all councillors to publicly declare all representations made by interested parties to them on planning matters outside of official correspondence or of actual official meetings held in the Council chamber when rezoning issues arise and where development plans are being produced or varied. A register shall be kept of such declarations which shall be open to full public scrutiny

Code of Conduct

- We will introduce a new code of conduct for elected members and officials to deal with complaints. This will be administered by the Ethics in Public Office Commission and will have the powers to suspend or fine or both if, after due process they are found to have acted unethically.

School Provision

- We will reform the planning acts to allow local authorities to require private housing developers to directly provide for schools, community/youth centres and other elements of community infrastructure according to when and where they are needed.

Senior Citizens

- We will charge local authorities, in conjunction with the HSE and voluntary bodies, with identifying sites in their development plans suitable for homes for the elderly including supported housing with adequate community and health facilities.

Bord Pleanála

- We will reform An Bord Pleanála to increase the quorum of members to make decisions from 3 to 5, require greater explanation of all final decisions and provide more resources i.e. more full-time planners.

PREVENTING URBAN SPRAWL

Integrated Planning

- We will develop and promote models of integrated planning for small and medium scale development.

Derelict Property

- We will, as part of each Plan of Action, require local authorities to quantify the number of brown field sites available for development and set clear targets for their development. In an era of soaring property prices and urban sprawl, it is intolerable that vacant and derelict property continues to blight our urban centres.

Town Centre Residency

- Fine Gael will actively encourage the redevelopment of residential facilities in town centres, especially above existing retail and commercial facilities, in order to boost population density and reduce pressure on services.

TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION

- We will accelerate the implementation of Local Authority Traveller Accommodation plans.

NATIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY

- We will update the National Spatial Strategy in light of higher than expected population growth.
- We will then implement the NSS in full and end the dithering and delay that has characterised its implementation.

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT ZONES

- We will roll out the Strategic Development Zone scheme to all hubs identified in the NSS in order to fast track vital infrastructural development. We shall also create special SDZs for industry.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Competitive Tendering

- We will undertake an overhaul of the current regulatory framework for waste collection services, introducing competitive tendering for waste collection services at a local and regional level, as in done in other EU countries. The current model of competition is not working well for households and small businesses. This is, in part, because the dual role played by many local authorities - both regulator and competitor in the provision of waste services - inhibits competition.

Landfill

- We will examine the privatisation of landfill sites in order to reduce the financial burden on local authorities.

Recycling

- We will look to our European neighbours and the great success Galway City Council has had in reaching a situation where nearly half its household waste is recycled and set a target of 50% recycling of household waste.
- We will ensure that householders are provided with brown, green and grey wheelie bins in order to facilitate waste segregation and recycling.
- We will extend the network of bring banks and bring centres designed to empower householders to separate and recycle waste.

Plastic Bag Levy

- We will increase the plastic bag levy to 50 cents in order to provide local authorities with the necessary resources to turn our goal into a reality.

Incineration

- We will recognise that incinerators work against efforts to encourage the reduction, reusing and recycling of waste and concentrate on reaching European levels of recycling as our main priority.

Litter

- We will increase the number of litter wardens and significantly increase fines for littering and fly tipping.

Market for Recyclables

- We will help create and build a market for recycled products in order to encourage greater investment in recycling facilities.

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT COMPANIES

- We will bring to an end the practice of establishing private management companies on new housing developments that are not gated.
- We will legislate for the proper regulation of management companies in apartment blocks, or gated communities.
- We will enact legislation that will ensure;
 - Developers will be obliged to fix the management fee for the first three years of a new complex at a level that ensures managing agents can meet the established minimum standards for that period.
 - The management fee will not be fully payable until managing agents are in place and the various services can be provided.
 - Provision of an adequate sinking fund will have to be made from Day One.

NOISE POLLUTION

Noise Control Officers

- We will establish Noise Control Officers in every local authority to replace the plethora of agencies and officers responsible for noise pollution.
- We will establish a system of testing, issuing of warning notices and levying fines to be enforced by Noise Control Officers.

Legislation

- We will legislate to reduce car and house alarm activation periods.

WATER

Safe, Clean and Secure

- We will ensure the necessary investment is made to provide everyone with running water that is clean and safe to drink.

Grants for Group Water Schemes

- We will improve grants for group sewerage schemes to the same level available for group water schemes. This will facilitate the prioritization of infrastructural development and the provision of services in order to aid housing development in towns and villages outside the main population centres.

Sewage and Waste Water

- We will provide greater investment in sewage services and wastewater treatment throughout the country. It should be a clear policy objective that all waste water treatment should be brought to the point where waste water can be returned to the ecosystem without causing any risk to the environment or to human health.
- We will establish a grant scheme to upgrade septic tanks in rural areas through the installation of modern treatment systems. Priority will be given to vulnerable areas where existing tanks are causing a serious threat to public health and the environment.

MINISTER FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

- We will assign a Minister of State in the Department of Agriculture with responsibility for all matters relating to animal welfare, and transfer responsibility currently resting with other Departments, in particular the control of dogs, to his/her office. A full audit of existing animal welfare and control legislation will be carried out and, if deemed necessary, new legislation shall be brought to the Oireachtas.

HERITAGE

Identification

- We will identify all buildings which are of historical or architectural importance.

An Bord Pleanála's role

- We will strengthen An Bord Pleanála's remit and expertise regarding historic buildings.

Awareness

- We will roll out a nationwide campaign of awareness of Ireland's heritage.
- We will specifically target those living in urban areas and those in lower socio-economic groups in awareness campaigns so that all citizens can share in our heritage wealth.

Government Decisions

- We will consider preservation, protection and promotion of our natural and built heritage in Government decision making.

School curriculum

- We will expand heritage inputs into the school curriculum and liaise with the Department of Education and Science to provide extra-curricular programmes that increase heritage awareness.

Community Projects

- We will expand community heritage projects and local heritage events.

Landscape

- We will bring together existing agencies dealing with landscape policy and create a central agency to complete a programme of national landscape characterisation.

Legislation

- We will urgently review legislation as it relates to the designation of national parks and other protected landscapes.

BIODIVERSITY

Promotion

- We will promote biodiversity through support for the Notice Nature campaign.

Plans

- We will draw up plans to prevent the extinction of the 150 species of plants and birds currently under threat of extinction in Ireland.
- We will encourage and offer assistance to all organizations to create Biodiversity Action Plans.

FAMILIES

Fine Gael believes in a society which values and supports childhood and the family in all its forms and will have public policies which enhance and support that value.

HEALTH

- We will provide free health insurance for every child under 16.
- We will provide free GP visits for every child under 5.
- We will provide health check/screening appointment for all children in the year they start school.
- We will extend medical cards to 100,000 more families - 40% of population. This target will be achieved by substantially increasing both the income threshold for medical card qualification and the income allowance which takes account of the number of children in a family.
- We will confront the rise of suicide by doubling the budget for the National Suicide Prevention Office immediately and providing comprehensive mental health services.
- We will give a Vaccine Smart Card to each child. This will be a unique system of recording childhood immunisation from birth. It will assist GPs and other medical professionals in deciding on health treatment of children and help parents.
- We will institute a National Routine Screening Programme, put in place an Interactive National Patient Database and encourage better Health Promotion.

TAXATION

A More Progressive and Family Friendly Income Tax Code

- We will cut the standard rate of tax by 2% from 20% to 18%.
- We will index personal credits and bands to earnings.
- We will increase the home carers credit to the level of the PAYE credit.
- We will further increase by €5,000 the point where one-income married couples hit the top rate of tax.

A Fairer Stamp Duty Regime

- We will abolish stamp duty for first time buyers up to €450,000.
- We will restructure the stamp duty system for others buyers as follows:
 - No stamp duty up to €100,000.
 - On the next €350,000 a 5% rate will apply.
 - On the balance a 9% rate will apply.

CHILDCARE - Better for Children and Easier for Parents.

Parental leave

- We will introduce 1 weeks paid paternity leave for the first time
- We will give 1 weeks paid parental leave for either parent to take, giving them more choice. This proposal in addition to our parental leave commitment would give parents an additional 2 weeks paid leave.

Financial Support

- We will continue to make a direct payment of €1,000 each year for each child until the age of 6.
- We will make available a childcare credit of €1,500 for every child up to age 5 which can be used by parents to access quality assured childcare for their children.

Pre-School Education

- We will also ensure that every child has access to one year of pre-school education, giving a guaranteed two-thirds subsidy to cover the cost of this education for all children rising to 100% free pre-school based on means.

Quality and Supply

- We will give an income disregard of €10,000 for childminders who commit to an appropriate level of quality of care.
- We will examine enhancing PRSI entitlements for childminders and increasing development grants and training opportunities.
- We will establish a discretionary fund of €50 million in current funding to support the community crèche and playgroup sector.
- We will amend legislation to ensure that all new childcare facilities - built by developers under the Planning Acts - are transferred to Local Authority or Childcare Committee ownership.
- We will propose that on-site childcare facilities be built on all new primary school campuses.
- We will allow rates relief for childcare providers.
- We will support the development of community-based early childhood centres to support parents and childcare workers.
- We will review labour law to recognise the changes needed to accommodate a situation where either or both parents work and share in the obligations of parenting, developing family-friendly work practices.

SPECIAL NEEDS AND EDUCATION

- We will streamline access to services for children with special educational needs, making it easier for parents to access the additional help that their children need.
- We will create a speech therapy service within the education system to cater exclusively for children and young people needing this service.
- We will expand the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) bringing all schools under the cover of this service, and ensuring that the waiting time for a NEPS assessment for any child is no longer than one school term.
- We will ensure that recommended and necessary educational supports are allocated to children who need them, making it a priority to ensure that children with physical or intellectual disabilities receive the best education and best chance to reach their full potential.
- We will support diversity in the education of children with autism, recognising that both intensive education and mainstreaming can be seen to work for individual children. Where a period of intensive education is professionally recommended for children with autism we will support this education.

DISABILITY

- We will ensure that there is transparency in the funding for disability services, that funding provides value for money for people with disabilities, that there are standards of services applied in particular to residential services and that the thrust of disability policy is that it enables participation rather than creating additional barriers.
- Fine Gael will progress towards a system where people with disabilities are enabled to access their own support services. We must offer people with disabilities choice and control over the type of services needed and to enhance independence and autonomy.
- We will promote the concept of the "money following the client" rather than block granting services providers as at present as this could lead to a more person-centred and responsive model of service provision.

Cost of Disability

- Fine Gael will introduce a “cost of disability payment” for people who have been in receipt of means-tested Disability Allowance for a specified period of time. Discussions will be held with groups and organisations representing people with disabilities before this scheme is introduced.

Independent Living

- Fine Gael will support independent living by creating employment and training opportunities and by providing adequate home help and home care services.

A NEW DEAL FOR CARERS

- Fine Gael will improve financial supports, reducing the risk of carers facing poverty. We will improve information and access to support services, assess each carers needs and increase the number of carers. We are committed to developing and implementing a comprehensive national carers strategy.

Financial supports

- We will remove the spouse’s means from the means test for the Carers Allowance payment.
- We will increase the home carers credit to the level of the PAYE credit.

Easier Access to Support and Services

- We will establish a one-stop-shop for carers to make it easier for carers to access support and services. The new service will be a central point of contact for carers and care recipients where both parties will have their needs assessed and have the various care options explored.

Integrated Case Management Service

- Fine Gael will ensure that services will be administered by an Integrated Case Management Service through the Department of Social and Family Affairs simplifying the process of determining entitlements to services.

Work Life Balance

- Fine Gael will work with employers to make it easier for carers to achieve a work life balance while caring, such as with part-time work, and to help carers re-integrate back into the work place once their caring role has ended. Proposals include a PRSI exemption for employers who hire former carers and a certificate of skills for carers who may wish to continue caring for another care recipient.

Young Carers

- Fine Gael will put a new focus on the approximately 3,000 carers under the age of 18 carrying out caring responsibilities. This is a group of carers who get absolutely no recognition from the State. Fine Gael will increase supports from the State such as home helps and will work with the education system to ensure that these young people are not isolated.

SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

- Fine Gael will work to address the many issues faced by single parent families in relation to their children.
- We will reform the tax system to ease the financial burden on all families, particularly low income and one-parent families.
- Fine Gael will take the pressure off parents in meeting the costs of childcare and pre-school education by introducing a range of supports that make it easier for parents and better for children.
- Fine Gael will introduce a targeted child support for all low-income families which may incorporate the merging and adjusting of the Child Dependent Allowance, Family Income Supplement and Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance.
- We will examine ways of improving the conditions of the One Parent Family Payment including the abolition of the cohabitation rule and supporting lone parents in entering employment, education or training.
- Fine Gael will establish a national guardianship register for fathers.

PENSIONS

- We will increase the state pension to at least €300 per week by 2012.
- We will continue to invest 1% of national income in the National Pensions Reserve Fund to ensure adequate state provision for the future.
- We will publish a Green Paper on Pensions early in the term of the new Government to identify the options for increasing pensions coverage across the working population, and particularly among women, in order to generate an informed consensus on this crucial long-term issue.

CIVIL PARTNERSHIP

Civil Partnership Register

- We will create a Civil Partnership Register to allow for two people of the same or opposite sex to formally register their partnership with the State. Officers appointed by the Registrar-General will conduct Civil Partnership ceremonies in registry offices throughout the country.

Public Commitment

- We will require that individuals publicly declare in the presence of witnesses that they fully understand the agreement they are entering into, the rights and responsibilities that come with this agreement and that they are entering a lifelong commitment to their prospective partner.

Rights and Responsibilities

- Fine Gael will institute the following rights and responsibilities for persons entering into Civil Partnership.
- The surviving partner will be entitled to the estate when their partner dies intestate. If the deceased partner has children, entitlement is reduced to two thirds. Should a partner die, leaving a will, the surviving partner will be entitled to at least one half of that estate regardless of what that will states. No inheritance tax will be payable.
- Civil Partnership will bestow next of kin status upon a registered partner.
- The surviving partner will be entitled to benefit from the pension provisions that have been made.
- Both partners will have the right to share a last name should they wish.
- The right to residency in Ireland will automatically be conferred on a foreign registered partner of an Irish citizen.
- The equivalent of the married tax-free allowance and married mortgage allowance will be conferred on registered couples.
- Registered couples will be considered adult dependents and will be assessed according to their joint income.
- Registered partners will be entitled to compassionate leave from employers in the event of serious illness or the death of their partner, along the lines granted to married couples.
- The Family Home Protection Act will be widened to include registered couples in order to avoid any chance of a 'secret sale' of the home of a registered couple that may be in the name of only one member of that couple.
- Fine Gael proposes to extend to two brothers, or two sisters, or a brother and sister living together a similar type of domestic partnership opportunity so as to ensure that they are not discriminated against.
- We will ensure equal tax treatment for couples in civil unions

RECREATION AND AMENITY

Family Friendly policy

- We will make local government child and family friendly. All policies must be proofed on this basis. In conjunction with all of the national sporting bodies and with the support of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, each Council shall draw up a recreation and amenity policy document.

Playgrounds

- We will prioritise playgrounds suitable for young children. At the core of this policy will be the requirement to protect existing green recreational spaces for environmental, social, cultural and sporting reasons and to ensure as new development occurs that adequate new recreation and amenity space is provided.

High Quality Build

- We will ensure high quality build throughout the country. With the advent of high density housing such plans have an increasing importance and relevance. High quality build is essential with adequate green belts identified and planned for locally and put in each development plan.

Access to the Arts

- We will expand student and family access to national arts institutions, especially with a view to ensuring access to those on lower incomes.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Revise Domestic Violence Acts

- We will revise and amend the Domestic Violence Acts 1996 to 2002 to allow equal status for married and non-married co-habitants in respect of domestic violence remedies.

Coordination of services

- We will bring together responsibility for all domestic violence issues under one department so that policy in this area is coordinated and effective.

Increase HSE budget for domestic violence services

- We will increase the funding for HSE domestic violence programmes by €2.5 million so that facilities are available to all women and to ensure that funding levels are up-to-date.

Access

- We will ensure access to criminal justice systems for all sectors of society, including "new Irish" and members of the travelling community

Schools Awareness

- We will provide a comprehensive schools awareness programme

WORK AND STUDY

- Fine Gael will make it easier to combine work and study. We will introduce an option for employees to take two-weeks statutory annual paid training leave, financed out of the National Training Fund.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Fine Gael has the strongest possible record of support for the peace process in Northern Ireland. The Anglo Irish Agreement, negotiated by a Fine Gael and Labour Government, laid the foundations for the current peace process.

Both in Government and in opposition, we have worked towards the goal of peace, the restoration of power sharing and the building of ever-stronger links between North and South.

Now, the progress that has been made must be consolidated and supported. Fine Gael will work to realise the full potential - for the entire island - that is presented by a lasting settlement.

On the European and international stage, Ireland must vociferously defend the principles of democracy and peace and protect our citizens at home and abroad.

NORTHERN IRELAND

- We are strongly committed to the principles of the Good Friday Agreement, and support effective and accountable power sharing in Northern Ireland.
- We will support the building of closer links between North and South, including in research and development, trade, investment, and enterprise.
- We will support enhanced cooperation and coordination in the provision of key infrastructure on the island of Ireland, including energy, transport and telecommunications.
- We will help grow the island economy by examining the creation of all-island markets in telecommunications and transport with a move towards all-island regulators for these sectors.
- We believe that Northern Ireland should benefit from greater fiscal autonomy, particularly with regard to corporation taxes.
- We will propose the preparation, in partnership with the British Government, of a joint economic plan for the entire North West of the island as counties in both jurisdictions share common problems

IRELAND AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

- We will promote openness and transparency in the workings of the European Union, and the manner in which Union legislation impacts on the citizen. We believe that all Council of Ministers meetings should be held in public when debating new laws. We will insist that all Government Ministers report to the European Affairs committee on matters discussed at EU ministerial meetings.

Single Meeting Place

- We will press for a single meeting place for the European Parliament based in Brussels. We believe in real reform of the workings of the European Union, especially in cutting out wasteful practices and reducing unnecessary spending.

Red Tape

- We will work to reform the European Union to reduce 'red tape' and bureaucracy, especially regarding the impact on small and medium enterprises. We believe that every new piece of European legislation should be assessed regarding its impact on business before enactment.

European Constitution

- We will actively engage in a wide-ranging national debate on the European Constitution with a view to holding a referendum within 12 months of forming a new Government, unless an alternative approach is agreed at European level. This is in line with our support for the important reforms and measures set out in the European Constitution.

Enlargement

- We will support carefully planned European Union enlargement, believing that consideration of the Union absorption capacity is important. Whilst supporting the application from Turkey for EU membership, we reaffirm that all applicant countries must meet the criteria for accession in full. We believe that all applicant countries must recognise each of the current members of the European Union.

National Forum on Europe

- We will strengthen engagement with the public on European issues, and will ensure that regional and local meetings become a far greater focus for the work of the National Forum on Europe.

Oireachtas Scrutiny

- We will ensure that the Oireachtas, particularly its committees, have the necessary powers and resources to adequately scrutinise draft European Union legislation and policies, including the vetting of all Irish appointments to European institutions by the European Affairs Committee.

EUROPOL & EUROJUST

- We will actively support the work of EUROPOL and EUROJUST, believing that the investigation and prosecution of serious cross-border crimes remains one of the most serious challenges facing the European Union. We will work for stronger European Union measures to combat serious cross-border crimes like drug and human trafficking, the movement of paedophiles, internet-related crime, money laundering, terrorism, and acts of racism.

Illegal Immigration

- We will support EU moves to counter illegal immigration through a coordinated approach at European level, including increased border control and surveillance, cooperation with countries of origin, and a co-ordinated visa policy, along with information sharing and police cooperation.

Security and Defence

- We believe that Ireland should be a full participant in European Security and Defence Policy according to five key principles which are:
 1. The commitment to adhere to the fundamental principles of the UN.
 2. The commitment to the pursuit to universal nuclear, biological and chemical disarmament, and a promise never to use these types of weapon.
 3. The commitment to mutual defence with our EU neighbours, but with specific provisions that would allow Ireland decide whether to get involved in any conflict on a 'case by case' basis.
 4. The commitment to providing peacekeeping and peacemaking operations.
 5. The commitment to respect the right of other EU Member States to enter other military alliances.

IRELAND ON THE WORLD STAGE

Multilateralism

- We will promote a multilateral approach to addressing global problems. We do not accept unilateralism as an acceptable approach when dealing with major issues that face the global community.

Iraq

- We recognise that the only future for Iraq lies in the eventual withdrawal of armed forces from that country. Whilst reiterating our belief that the invasion of Iraq should not have occurred without the endorsement of the United Nations, we must work to counter the extreme violence that has erupted in that country which has been responsible for a massive loss of civilian lives and threatens many more.

We will:

1. Promote the holding of an international conference on the future of Iraq, involving all world leaders.
2. Ensure that the European Union gives every possible support to the people of Iraq, for example through enhanced support for the training of police and through greater humanitarian aid.

3. Bring every possible diplomatic effort to bear on the countries surrounding Iraq to ensure that they effectively counter any elements within their societies which are contributing to the violence in Iraq.
4. Call, at United Nations level, for an immediate investigation into the missing Iraqi billions which were to be set aside for rebuilding work, and thereby seek to have squandered monies returned to the Iraqi people. It is our view that the international community working together must address the current situation in Iraq, so that a stable, peaceful and democratic Iraq might be achieved.

Terrorism

- We will work - with both our European Union colleagues and all other States with which we share good relations - to combat terrorism and the threat posed by extremism, without engaging in, or supporting directly or indirectly, methods or operations which compromise our respect for human rights.

Transatlantic Cooperation

- We will establish a Foundation for Transatlantic Cooperation with a view to promoting dialogue and the exchange of ideas on key issues of joint concern to Europe and the United States of America.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

- We will work to bring the issue of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty back to centre stage and push for an immediate review of the Treaty, believing that the failure by the United Nations to reach such an agreement has weakened the agreement.
- We will offer that Ireland, as a non-nuclear State, act as broker in the negotiations with Iran regarding nuclear developments in that State, and campaign vigorously against nuclear testing by North Korea.

Aircraft

- We will seek to ensure that all aircraft using European facilities, both commercial and private, provide full and complete passenger lists to the relevant authorities.

Decision Making Reform

- We will support reform of the United Nations, to enhance decision-making processes and representation at the UN.

Undocumented Irish in USA

- We will give support to legislation in the United States which would allow undocumented Irish to regularise their status in that country through the payment of a penalty.

Middle East

- We will assert the European Union as a key player in the Middle East peace process, whilst also recognising the need for States like Ireland to adopt strong individual positions on the matter. We will urge both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to respect UN resolutions, and call for an immediate end to actions which penalise civilian populations.

IRELAND AND THE DEVELOPING WORLD

Development Aid

- We will increase the budget for development aid to 0.7% of GNP by 2012. To ensure the delivery of this target, we will enshrine this level of aid spending in legislation, thereby making it considerably more difficult for any future Government to scale down Ireland's commitment to aid spending.

Millennium Development Goals

- We will encourage Public/Private Partnerships towards the development of vital, life-saving drugs because we believe that the EU must take the lead in research towards the development of easily administered and inexpensive AIDS treatments, which would be of particular assistance in the fight against AIDS in the developing world. We are committed to the Millennium Development Goals, and to tackling the scourge of HIV/AIDS particularly in Africa.

Decentralisation

- We will take every step to preserve the 'intellectual memory' of the Irish Aid organisation in regard to the plans for the decentralisation of the organisation especially in light of the ongoing large increases in aid spending.

Evaluation and Audit

- We will expand the Evaluation and Audit Unit of Irish Aid to ensure that our aid spending consistently hits the target, and reaches those who need assistance most.

Aid Funding for Critical Infrastructure

- We will support aid funding designed to improve critical infrastructure and build economic development in programme countries, whilst maintaining existing commitments. We will examine the potential that exists from the expansion in spending to target aid in a more innovative way, and to support new ideas in delivering better living standards in the countries of the developing world.

Twinning

- We will empower Government Departments, State agencies, schools, charities and other organisations to 'twin' with their counterpart organisations or agencies in the countries of the developing world to enhance the exchange of information, skills and ideas between these countries and Ireland, having first evaluated which country or countries would be most receptive to the proposal.

Staffing

- We will review staffing levels in Irish Aid in light of the demands to be placed on the agency with increases in aid spending.

Democratic Development

- We will use the leverage that Ireland gains through our aid programme to encourage and support democratic development and respect for human rights in the countries of the developing world. We will support partner Governments and civil societies in their fight against corruption.

Environmental Considerations

- We will focus on environmental issues as part of our aid commitments in the developing world recognising that environmental change threatens the peoples of the developing world disproportionately.

Coordination of Development Issues

- We will work to streamline the consideration of development issues across all Government Departments, so that all actions of Government are considered in the context of their impact on the countries of the developing world.

Fairtrade

- We will encourage all Government Departments and State agencies to purchase only 'Fairtrade' products.

Debt Cancellation

- We will use Ireland's voice at international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank on behalf of the countries of the developing world, in particular towards ensuring that qualification for debt cancellation does not come with preconditions which harm the economic development of poorer countries.

Oireachtas Scrutiny

- We will strengthen debate and scrutiny in the Oireachtas regarding Ireland's stance on international trade and development to ensure greater public engagement in, and knowledge of, these important issues.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Freedom of Information is a key tool in maintaining the balance between citizens and the State and ensuring that government is accountable. It also encourages the quality of decision-making and acts as a check on the exercise of power by government. Introduced by the Rainbow Government in 1997 the Freedom of Information Act has played an important role in increasing transparency, accountability and openness for citizens and the media about the way that the State is governed.

In 2003, the Fianna Fail/PD Government introduced legislation that has fundamentally undermined the operation of Freedom of Information legislation in Ireland. Rights to access information were restricted and a prohibitive scale of fees was introduced both of which have radically reduced citizen's rights of access to information about how they are governed. Since 2003, requests for non-personal information to Government bodies have halved and FOI requests submitted by journalists have fallen by 60%.

REVIEW OF LEGISLATION

- Fine Gael will undertake an inclusive and wide ranging review of the operation of Freedom on Information legislation with a view to rescinding the draconian changes introduced by the Fianna Fail/PD Government in 1997.
- We will ensure that a high level group including representatives of the Office of the Information Commissioner, the media, citizens rights, consumer and community groups, the legal profession, and Government Departments will carry out the review.
- We will ensure that the remit of the review will be to examine the impact of the changes introduced to Freedom of Information in 2003 and make recommendations concerning;
 - Legislative changes required to ensure that the Freedom of Information regime operates effectively to ensure transparency, accountability and openness from government.
 - Administrative changes required to help deliver an effective FOI regime, including the necessary reductions in the current level of fees that should be charged to facilitate citizens' access information.
 - Any additions to the bodies covered by FOI and other further enhancements for citizens and media rights of access to information.
 - The establishment of an independent and representative standing commission to oversee and protect the integrity of the operation of FOI in Ireland.

HEALTH

Over the past decade, there has been substantial increased spending on Ireland's health services. The results for patients have been disappointing. Fine Gael and Labour are committed to building the health service that the Irish people deserve. We are committed to excellence in the quality of care, fair access on the basis of medical need, and efficient use of resources.

We have published four joint documents: Reaching Recovery - An Agreed Agenda on Mental Health; Tackling the Crisis - An Agreed Agenda on A&E; Patients First - An Agreed Agenda on a Patient Safety Authority and Better Health - An Agreed Agenda on Reform and Investment in the Health Service. The full details of our policies are to be found in these documents. What follows is a summary of their main proposals.

TACKLING THE CRISIS - ACCIDENT AND EMERGENCY

Cleaning

- We will keep A&Es clean so that they do not become the source of infection or illness and allocation of clear responsibility for cleaning regimes.

Wet Rooms

- We will keep drunks out of A&E and in medically supervised 'wet rooms'.

Information

- We will give people the information they need through an Emergency Helpline and GP location service staffed by properly trained personnel to assess the situation and advise callers on the availability of appropriate assistance.
- We will provide information online and conduct a public information campaign on appropriate use of services.

Security

- We will increase security in A&Es, give greater legal protection for staff and improved linkages with local Gardai.

See and Treat

- We will redesign A&E through a "See and Treat" system for patients with minor complaints.

Medical Assessment Units

- We will provide Medical Assessment Units (MAUs) to provide an appropriate and comfortable environment for patients to be fully assessed and treated or admitted.

Urgent Care Centres

- We will supplement A&E services through the provision of Urgent Care Centres for treating relatively minor surgical and medical problems such as asthma and diabetes. UCCs will have essential diagnostic facilities and a small number of observation beds.

Out-of-Hours

- We will ensure increased provision of out-of-hours GP and pharmacy services as well as greater out of hours cover for diagnostics.

Discharge Plan

- We will tackle delays in discharging patients through a Patient Discharge Plan.

Step Down Beds

- We will immediately begin a major investment in 1,500 step down beds to provide appropriate care for those who no longer require acute hospital care.

Capacity

- We will provide 2,300 additional acute hospital beds which will have a key role in reducing overcrowding and will help to solve the A&E crisis.

REACHING RECOVERY - MENTAL HEALTH

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Specialist Out Patient Teams

- We will solve the crisis in child and adolescent psychiatric services by increasing specialist outpatient teams by 50% and bring the established teams up to the recommended staffing complement.

Early intervention

- We will ensure early intervention. To cover the crucial period during adolescence and early adulthood adequately, we propose a 'Youth Mental Health' initiative which is aimed at teachers and other adults who have frequent contact with young people.

Suicide

- Fine Gael will introduce a suicide prevention strategy, the fundamental aim of which is to prevent suicide and deliberate self-harm and to reduce the level of suicide ideation in the general population.

Budget for Suicide Prevention

- We will increase the budget of the National Suicide Prevention Office to €10 million in year 1, rising to €20 million in year 5.

Schools

- We will provide a comprehensive package for all primary and secondary schools, including mental health programmes and comprehensive counselling services.

Partnership

- We will set up formal structured partnerships between the voluntary, community and statutory sector to strengthen community-based suicide prevention strategies and bereavement support.

Adult Mental Health Services

Positive Mental Health

- We will build and foster positive mental health across the community and provide accessible, community based, fully staffed, multi-disciplined services for people with mental illness.

Community Teams

- We will put in place multidisciplinary community mental health teams. Early and consistent intervention is the most effective way of helping those experiencing mental illness to recover or to manage their personal situation.

Psychiatric Institutions

- We will close those psychiatric institutions which are inappropriate for their purpose and which undermine the dignity of their patients. However, this will only happen when we have put in place adequate outpatient services. Funds from the sale of these institutions will be ring-fenced for mental health services.

Manpower Strategy

- We will initiate a long-term manpower strategy to address staff shortages.

BETTER HEALTH - AN AGREED AGENDA ON REFORM

Principles

- We will introduce reform within hospitals to get better use of acute capacity, invest in additional acute

bed capacity, develop non-hospital services to ensure more appropriate treatment for patients and better use of in-hospital capacity and reform incentives in the health service.

- We will provide both a better and fairer health service by ensuring that the principle that 'the money follows the patient' applies across the health service. Moving towards a system of Universal Health Insurance is a shared objective of both parties, but introducing such a system requires a phased and planned approach, taking into account the critical state of our current health system.
- Fine Gael and Labour will, over the lifetime of a Government, introduce free health insurance cover for all children and adolescents up to age of 16 years – the age after which people move into the adult health service.

Capacity

- We will expand the capacity of both hospital and primary care systems
- We will provide an additional 2,300 hospital beds.

Harney Plan

- We will scrap the Harney Plan to build private hospitals on public land beside public hospitals.

Consultants

- We will provide an additional 1,500 new consultants.

More Doctors in Training

- We will implement the Fottrell Report on medical training to expand the number of doctors in training.

Community Support

- We will expand community support services for elderly i.e. increase in the number of home help hours, have more GPs, Public Health Nurses, Physiotherapists etc.

Step Down Beds

- We will provide at least 1,500 additional (step down) convalescence, rehabilitation and long stay community beds. At least 600 of these will be located in Dublin.

NEW DEAL FOR CHILDREN

Principles

- Fine Gael will lay the foundation for a healthy Irish population through an effective and comprehensive health service for all our children and adolescents. The key principle of our policy for child health is that all children must have timely and appropriate access to necessary care, whatever the financial status of their families.

Early Detection

- We will ensure early detection and treatment of chronic conditions, dealing speedily with childhood illnesses, in addition to effective health screening. We believe this is not just cost-effective, it is a valuable investment in a healthy future for all our children.

Under 5s

- We will provide free GP-visit medical cards to all under 5s.

Free Health Insurance

- We will give free health insurance to all children under 16 years.

Medical Cards

- We will extend medical cards to 40% of the population - over 100,000 more families. This target will be achieved by substantially increasing both the income threshold for medical card qualification and the income allowance which takes account of the number of children in a family.

Health Check

- We will provide a health check/screening appointment for all children in the year they start school.

Vaccine Smart Card

- We will introduce a Vaccine 'Smart Card' - a system of unique childhood immunisation cards for each child from birth.

PATIENTS FIRST - A PATIENT SAFETY AUTHORITY

Regulating to Protect Patients.

- Fine Gael will set up a patient's watchdog with real teeth and clear responsibilities. The people employed, or contracted, to provide care are accountable for the quality and standard of care which they provide. The establishment of a Patient Safety Authority will put in place systems which will ensure that a patient, who has cause for concern about their treatment or care, will have an advocacy system which can resolve the difficulties experienced.

- The Patient Safety Authority will

Register Facilities

- Oversee the registration and accreditation of hospitals, inpatient and residential facilities e.g. facilities providing care and/or treatment for persons who are ill, in need of care or who have a disability.

Standards

- Set and monitor standards of patient safety in all registered health and social care facilities.
- Set National Minimum Standards for health facilities.
- Audit and monitor the standard of care provided in hospitals, nursing homes and residential centres.

Inspections

- Carry out inspections and publish inspection reports annually.
- Carry out hygiene inspections and require effective cleaning and hygiene procedures with clear accountable management.

Advise on patient safety

- Review and advise on obstacles to the efficient running of registered centres and opportunities for greater efficiencies.
- Monitor and advise on the personal social services provided by, or on behalf of, the HSE in respect of services for children, elderly people or people with disabilities.
- Advise the public, the HSE, agencies operating health and residential facilities and the Minister for Health on patient safety.

Incident Reporting and Risk Management

- Receive reports of adverse incidents or potentially adverse incidents.
- Receive reports of all unexplained deaths in residential centres and investigate where this is considered necessary.
- Establish a clinical/medical incident register.

Investigate Complaints

- Investigate complaints - at request of the Minister, HSE etc.
- Investigate complaints from members of the public when it has not been possible to resolve them under section 9 of the Health Act 2004.

Advocacy

- Provide an advocacy service for vulnerable complainants.

Regulatory Bodies

- Oversee the operation of regulatory bodies for health professionals.

Mental Health Services

- Act as the Commissioner for Mental Health Services.

Whistleblowers

- Facilitate "Whistleblowers".

Quality Reviews

- Carry out Quality Reviews.

TACKLING THE SUPERBUGS

- Fine Gael will set up systems to protect patients from hospital acquired infections.

Clean Hands

- We will ensure that a staff member is assigned to duty on the door of every hospital, nursing home and GP surgery to insist that everybody, staff or visitor, who enters or leaves wash their hands with hygienic hand gel.

Hospital Visiting

- We will see that visiting hours are controlled until this crisis is dealt with and unnecessary visits must be avoided.

National Director of Infection Control

- We will appoint a National Director of Infection Control responsible for spearheading essential changes needed to detect, control and reduce the prevalence of hospital acquired infections.

Responsibility for Hygiene

- We will ensure that a Senior Staff Nurse be made fully responsible and accountable for all aspects of hygiene in the hospital ward or unit.

Flying Squads

- We will set up infection control flying squads to conduct regular, unannounced inspections with published results.

Performance Issues

- We will investigate the extension of performance related pay conditions to contract cleaners where their payment contract is linked to achieving standards set by the Patient Safety Authority.

FUTURE HEALTH - PREVENTIVE MEDICINE AND SCREENING

- Fine Gael will make preventive medicine a top focus. We believe that early detection is key to tackling and monitoring diseases which reduces pressures on hospitals and reduces the health budget by treating illnesses before they become costly and by keeping people out of hospital.

National Health Screening

- We will set up a system of free regular health checks for all adults from their local GP. Screening can detect illnesses or diseases at an early stage so that they can be controlled and monitored, resulting in better outcomes for patients and a reduced burden on the health service. We will screen for illnesses and diseases such as diabetes, heart problems, lung disease and certain cancers.

Screening at Five Year Intervals

- We will include tests for blood pressure, body mass index, cholesterol levels, peak flow (a test of lung function), urinalysis, full blood count (for anaemia and certain blood cancers) and a glucose test which can help diagnose diabetes at an early stage.
- We will begin screening at 20 years for women and include cervical smears, breast screening, dexa scan (for osteoporosis), TFT's (to test for abnormal thyroid function) etc.
- We will begin screening men at 30 years and specifically for prostate cancer.

An Interactive National Patient Database

- We will set up a national patient database that would allow for early intervention and screening programmes. It will be a consumer-focused interactive database where the public voluntarily register to avail of the National Routine Screening Programme. The online database will initially be an age-sex-address register, which will be used to alert patients or a nominated person (e.g. a patient's GP) via e-mail (or by post if requested) that they are due a health check under the National Routine Screening Programme.
- We will ensure that over time, the database will be developed into a health statistics database to be used as a research resource and management information tool. The database will hold health statistics only, and patient confidentiality will be assured.

Better Health Promotion

- We will seek to have primary and secondary schools more actively involved in promoting an active and healthy lifestyle. This can be in the classroom or on the playing field, and as such, we have recommended making P.E. a compulsory subject at Junior and Senior level in secondary school.

Getting GPs More Involved

- Fine Gael will seek the involvement of GPs, who have a better knowledge of their patients than anyone else. GPs who get involved in the national screening initiative will have to have their IT systems operating to a specified standard so that they can plug in effectively to the national patient database that is established. In addition, Fine Gael wants to encourage the location of more GPs in disadvantaged areas where their very absence undermines the impact of any primary health care programme.

PRIMARY CARE

Linked Primary Care Teams

- We will deliver 50 Linked Primary Care Teams within 2 years.
- We will ensure that the HSE drives communication and links between primary care professionals to form primary care teams and that basic supports to be provided to help create links e.g. IT supports.
- We will create long-term physical structures giving priority for disadvantaged areas/poor GP representation.
- We will investigate incentives to GPs to set up in disadvantaged areas and provide funding initiatives with guaranteed patient benefits.

Tackling the GP Manpower Crisis

- We will address the serious shortage of GPs by giving extra support through the linking of primary care teams.
- We will fast track training and increase the number of training places for GPs.
- We will introduce postgraduate medical schools.
- We will introduce more flexible working arrangements and designate responsibilities to other primary care professionals.

First Responder Schemes

- We will arrange for defibrillators in communities around the country with training of volunteers to be carried out by ambulance staff.

HOUSING

The average house price in Ireland is now over €300,000. 100,000 individuals are waiting for a local authority home. And homelessness remains a problem in one of the richest countries in the world. Fine Gael presents the following proposals as a radical and practical solution to many of the housing difficulties Ireland faces.

LEGISLATIVE REFORM

- We will audit all existing housing legislation to root out provisions that perpetuate inequality.
- We will specifically target any legislative measures that adversely affect vulnerable groups including those with disabilities, people with psychiatric illnesses and those who have left the family home following marriage or relationship breakdown.

NEW HOUSING APPROACH

Housing Ireland

- We will merge existing housing agencies into one agency called Housing Ireland.
- We will empower Housing Ireland to step in when Local Authorities are seen to be failing to deliver adequate affordable housing.

Funding

- We will empower Housing Ireland to provide funding for services like roads, sewerage and communications in newly constructed housing developments.

Seed Capital

- We will charge Housing Ireland with the provision of seed capital for voluntary housing agencies, following a value for money audit.

BETTER USE OF STATE LAND

- We will conduct a full audit of all State land.
- We will sell State land if it is judged to be suitable for housing development, is not in use by the Department or Agency that owns it, and is not considered as crucial to the development of that Department or Agency, for the provision of housing, including affordable housing.

SCALING BACK OF RENTAL ACCOMMODATION SCHEME

- We will recognise the continued need for Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) as a mechanism for the provision of high-quality accommodation in a short time frame.
- We will, however, shift policy away from RAS toward the provision of State-owned social housing, through construction and acquisition, shifting resources away from payments to landlord and towards investment in housing assets.

HONOURING PART V

- We will issue a Directive to Local Authorities insisting on provision of 20% of units for social and affordable housing, and not cash as is often the case now, on all new housing developments.
- We will permit two exceptions to this rule;
 1. In areas where private development is the exception to the norm, units can be foregone and developers can instead provide facilities such as community, recreational or education facilities. However, this will only be with the agreement of Housing Ireland and the Minister.

2. Where the local authority believes there is neither a need nor demand for social housing in or around a new development, and where there is a shortage of social and affordable units elsewhere in the local authority area, permission may be sought from Housing Ireland and the Minister to accept a cash payment. The case for lack of demand will have to be proven to the Minister's satisfaction and details provided of where and when the cash will be spent and affordable and social housing units delivered.

MAKING HOUSING MORE AFFORDABLE

First Time Buyers

- We will create a new House Deposit Saving Scheme, similar to the SSIA scheme, for first time buyers seeking to fund a deposit for their first home.
- We will effectively abolish stamp duty for first time buyers by raising the exemption limit for first time buyers of second hand homes to €450,000.

Stamp Duty Rates

- We will simplify stamp duty rates for all buyers by reducing the number of rates from 7 to 3. The new rates will be 0%, 5% and 9%.
- We will make stamp duty fairer so that you pay the higher rate only on the portion of the price over each threshold and not on the entire purchase price. Under Fine Gael's proposals, the first €100,000 is zero rated, the next €350,000 is paid at 5% and the balance is charged at 9%. This means that major savings are made on stamp duty costs at each house price level.

BETTER PROTECTION

- We will eliminate Staged Payments.
- We will instruct planning authorities to refuse planning permission to any developer who has not fully complied with obligations under previous planning permissions.
- We will regulate management companies and provide greater transparency in the sector.

ENDING HOMELESSNESS

Move-On Accommodation

- We will provide greater "move on" accommodation to help those move out of homelessness and ensure those in danger of falling into homelessness do not do so.

Addiction

- We will introduce a range of measures to tackle drug addiction and assist those seeking to tackle their addiction - addiction that often leads to homelessness.
- We will initiate a single comprehensive National Addiction Strategy.
- We will improve outreach services to difficult to reach drug abusers, including homeless people.
- We will provide greater follow-up care for those released from prison, including addiction treatment, work and educational facilities.

RURAL HOUSING

Rights

- We will continue to support the right of people in rural Ireland to build homes on their land. We will preserve the integrity of Special Areas of Conservation.

Design

- We will make the design of these houses central to planning decisions - and ensure that when houses are built they match the surrounding countryside; thereby ensuring rural communities can thrive, while also maintaining Ireland's natural scenic beauty.

Domicile

- We will waive the domicile requirements on rural housing for those workers who are judged essential for the continued progress of local communities and the local economy.

Development Plans

- We will consider making some aspects of guidelines on Development Plans and Residential Densities compulsory if necessary.

Audit of rural housing

- We will charge the Central Statistics Office with establishing a full audit of rural housing, and with providing a detailed breakdown of house size, type and location.

Sustainable Housing

- We will promote sustainable housing in areas of rural depopulation in order to reduce the strain on wastewater, transport and communications infrastructure while protecting against rural depopulation and ensuring greater house affordability than is currently available nearer urban centres.

Planning for Rural Housing

- We will ensure adequate and appropriate staffing levels in every planning authority, especially in areas of high population growth.
- We will adopt an official policy to have one planner deal with an application from start to finish. This will end the situation where an initial positive response to a planning application is replaced mid-way through the process by a less positive approach by a different planner.
- We will instigate a mentoring programme in every local authority to bring younger planners up to speed on the particulars on the relevant local authority area will be introduced to end the shortage of planners at local authority level.
- We will establish a Planning Monitoring Forum to provide an effective system of complaint resolution that will lessen the need for aggrieved applicants to go to the Courts.

IMMIGRATION

The recent, dramatic growth in the rate of immigration into Ireland is resulting in what is arguably the greatest economic and social transformation of our country since Independence. This transformation presents Ireland with both a huge challenge and huge opportunity. Given Ireland's history of emigration and migration, the country has a special responsibility to address the challenge of immigration.

We need a system that is good for the Irish and good for the immigrants.

Minister of State

- We will bring coherence to our political response to immigration by appointing a Minister of State for Immigrant Affairs who will be attached to the Department of the Taoiseach. This new ministerial role will include responsibility across all relevant government departments.

Streamline process

- We will ensure a swift and streamlined process for all applicants for asylum, residency, visas and citizenship so that they are not left waiting for action and so that as few people as possible are left in a situation of undetermined fate.

Reform agencies

- We will reform the relevant refugee bodies so that the decision-making process is transparent and accountable by publishing judgements and their reasoning and by giving clear criteria for each applicant.

Language support

- We will revamp the allocation of language support resources so that schools with higher demands receive appropriate support. We must also undertake a national audit to find out the true extent of this problem and to establish whether other measures, such as providing additional language support outside normal school hours, are needed and what extra teaching resources are required.

Screening

- We will introduce a much more rigorous screening of those applying to come here from outside the European Union to establish if they have criminal records.
- We should refuse entry to those who have been involved in serious criminal activity. In addition, we believe that those who are convicted of serious offences and sentenced to five or more years imprisonment by the Irish Courts should be deported automatically after they have served their sentences.

Road safety

- We will tackle the tragically high number of immigrants who are being killed or injured on our roads by:
 - Addressing the loophole that allows foreign registered cars to be re-registered here for two years without checks being made for roadworthiness and
 - Pursuing changes to the implementation of penalty points across the EU so that they can be effectively applied to all licence-holders irrespective of nationality.

Employment rights

- We will rigorously enforce severe penalties for employers who abuse their position and pay immigrants below legal rates.

Green Card

- For non-EU citizens, we will introduce a Green Card system with the objective of making Ireland the destination of choice for highly skilled migrants, including those with advanced science and engineering skills and specific skills required in the economy

JUSTICE

Fine Gael wants more Gardaí on the ground where they are needed in order to address Ireland's descent into a vicious and violent society. We will not tolerate anti-social behaviour, we will make criminals pay for their crimes and we will rebalance the justice system in favour of the victim.

POLICING

2,000 extra Gardaí

- We will deliver at least 2,000 extra Gardaí to deal with the crime epidemic currently sweeping Ireland, bringing the total strength of the force up to at least 15,000. Thereafter, the number of Gardaí will be decided by reference to assessed need and population growth.

New Garda organisational structure

- We will legislate for an independent Garda authority, representative of civil society, to stand between the Commissioner and his officers on the one hand, and the Minister and the Department of Justice on the other.

Driving international best practice

- We will drive the agenda for reform, ensuring that measures are implemented as a priority and we will inject professionalism and modernism into a force that has served the country well but now needs to be updated.

Opening up senior Garda recruitment

- We will open recruitment for senior Garda positions to external candidates to ensure the best recruitment and promotion practices are operated and the best people are hired.

Measuring performance data

- We will use performance data from different Garda regions, districts and divisions comparatively, to drive innovation and initiative in tackling crime, thereby achieving results.

Changes in rostering

- We will put Gardaí where and when they are needed - most crimes are committed at night, yet most Gardaí are on duty during the day.

Completed civilianisation programme

- We will take fully-trained Gardaí out from offices and behind desks, and put them on duty where they belong, replacing them with clerical staff.

ENHANCED COMMUNITY POLICING

Special grade of Community Garda

- We will ensure that Gardaí see community policing as a career option in which they can reasonably expect advancement. We will change Garda organisational structures to reflect a focus on community-based policing and an acknowledgement of the value of the Gardaí involved in it.

Longer-term assignments

- We will ensure that Community Gardaí commit to long-term assignments to provide continuity in community policing and to allow them to really get to know the community.

Incentives to live in the community

- We will provide incentives to Community Gardaí to live in the communities that they police, be it remote rural areas or disadvantaged urban estates.

Community accountability

- We will involve the community in policing. We will include public representatives, the Garda-in-charge and other officers, representatives of residents' associations and community groups as well as members of the public and local authority officials.

Policing forums

- We will require the Garda-in-charge to meet policing forum members at regular intervals, to both receive and impart views on the challenges of policing in their area.

IMPROVED GARDA TRAINING

- We will ensure that all Gardaí, and particularly Community Gardaí, will receive dedicated preparation and on going training to provide them with the appropriate skills for dealing with local issues on the ground.

More comprehensive

- We will improve initial training, and enhance on-going training within the Force in on-site locations, while maintaining the Garda College in Templemore as the cornerstone of the training structure. We will require that all Garda recruits spend some of their training in an urban context, and in an educational setting which involves regular contact with students from other walks of life in the way that Army and Navy cadets do.

Wider and more specialised

- We will enhance training in urban crowd control, traffic management, human rights, sexual offences, firearms, driving, legal issues, and other specialised areas.

High-visibility policing

- We will put more Gardaí on the beat so that they are accessible to everyone, but also so that their presence is seen.

Better equipment and technology

- We will equip the Gardaí with technology and modern personal protection equipment, including stab-vests and pepper-sprays that will allow them to perform their duties more effectively and more securely.

More diverse recruitment

- We will make An Garda Síochána a representative force that reflects the diversity of modern Ireland through a dedicated recruitment campaign in communities that are currently poorly represented or lack visibility within the Gardaí.

CHILD PROTECTION

- We will provide real legislative and systematic protection for children from exploitation and abuse.

Referendum on Children's Rights

- We will ensure that the issue of children's rights is dealt with, by holding a referendum amending the Constitution to take account of changes in society and children's rights.

Recommendations on Child Protection

- We will implement the 62 recommendations of the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on Child Protection, except for No. 19, which concerns the lowering of the age of consent to 16.

Age of Consent

- We will retain the age of consent at 17.

Zone of Protection

- We will impose a zone of absolute protection for children under 16.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Revise Domestic Violence Acts

- We will revise and amend the Domestic Violence Acts 1996 to 2002 to allow equal status for married and non-married co-habitants in respect of domestic violence remedies.

Coordination of services

- We will bring together responsibility for all domestic violence issues under one department so that policy in this area is coordinated and effective.

Increase HSE budget for domestic violence services

- We will increase the funding for HSE domestic violence programmes by €2.5 million so that facilities are available to all women, and to ensure that funding levels are up-to-date.

Access

- We will ensure access to criminal justice systems for all sectors of society, including the new Irish and members of the travelling community.

Schools Awareness

- We will provide a comprehensive schools awareness programme.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Stronger legislation

- We will strengthen legislation to deal with anti-social behaviour in innovative ways, while using existing measures including anti-social behaviour orders.

On-the-spot-fines

- We will make sure that people who behave in an anti-social manner will accept responsibility for their actions, and where parents have neglected to control their children, they will be brought to account.

Curfew orders

- We will ensure that Gardaí have the necessary powers to curtail the activities of people who indulge in anti-social behaviour.

Repair orders / compensation agreements

- We will guarantee that people who vandalise property or prevent other people's peaceable enjoyment of their property will be brought to task by way of requiring them to undo the damage they have caused or otherwise compensate their victims.

Increased fines for illegal sale of alcohol

- We will crack-down on the sale of alcohol to under-age persons and ensure that off-licence retailers take responsibility for their customers.

Increase Garda powers to curb loitering/intimidation

- We will equip the Gardaí with the necessary powers to stop loitering and intimidating group behaviour.

Legislative footing for restorative justice

- We will institute a real programme of restorative justice so that non-headline crime is reduced and victims get an opportunity both to be recompensed, and to confront the person who has committed a crime against them.

Implement the Children Act, 2001

- We will fully implement the measures enacted by the Children Act 2001.

Dedicated Minister of State for coordinating the ASB campaign

- We will inaugurate a dedicated Minister of State with responsibility for tackling anti-social behaviour and coordinating the response of different Government Departments.

Anti-social Behaviour Fund of €50 million

- We will set up a fund for organisations running local initiatives aimed at tackling ASB, e.g. improving lighting in problem areas or cutting back overgrowth in parks and walkways. We will also support projects such as sporting initiatives to engage those young people currently involved in ASB.

Consolidated anti-social behaviour laws

- We will consolidate all the individual laws on anti-social behaviour into a single document so that the powers of the Gardaí and the State to respond to anti-social behaviour are clear and unambiguous.

CRIMINAL COMPENSATION TRIBUNAL

Reform existing compensation structures

- We will allow the victims of crime to recover compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal by putting the scheme on a statutory footing.

Central compensation fund

- We will ensure that where possible, perpetrators of crime compensate their victims directly by way of compensation order, and, where criminals do not have sufficient means to pay a compensation order, they will have an order for attachment of earnings made against their income. These payments will go straight towards funding the awards made by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal which is currently paid for from central exchequer funds.

Victims

- We will guarantee that the victims of crime can recover from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal irrespective of whether they live under the same roof as their abuser, this will allow the victims of domestic violence to be compensated by the Tribunal.

BAIL

Electronic tagging

- We will immediately implement practical measures to make electronic tagging of persons on bail a reality and we will ensure that alleged serious criminals who are granted bail will be monitored prior to trial.

Consolidated legislation

- We will bring all the legislation on bail together in a single act so that the law in this area is clear for legal practitioners and Gardaí alike.

Sentences for crimes committed on bail

- We will ensure that persons who commit crimes while on bail serve consecutive sentences on top of their existing prison time.

Conditions of bail

- We will produce a schedule of conditions that can be imposed by a judge when granting bail, while not limiting the judge's power to impose additional conditions.

SENTENCING

Register of sentences

- We will put a comprehensive register of sentences in place that will both make sentences in Ireland transparent and allow comparison for the purposes of consistency.

Prosecution submissions at sentencing

- We will allow the DPP or Prosecutor to make submissions during a sentencing hearing so that the judge is fully aware of the aggravating factors of the case.

Sentencing tariffs

- We will draw up sentencing tariffs or guidelines with the Oireachtas so that judges have a clear guide to show them where the sentence should be in terms of maximum and minimum sentences in respect of specified offences.

Judicial explanation

- We will require a judge, who hands down a sentence outside the range of the Oireachtas sentencing tariffs, to explain his or her reasoning in open court for the benefit of both the victim and/or his or her family, and the Register of Sentences or precedent.

Tougher sentences

- We will ensure that mandatory minimum sentences, where they exist, are enforced in respect of second-time and repeat offenders, by enacting such legislation as is necessary.

JUDICIARY

Increased training and education for judges

- We will ensure that there is enhanced training and education available to all judges, particularly those who are likely to deal with sensitive cases such as sexual offences, children's court, domestic violence etc. We will further require that judges undergo a certain level of training as a condition of appointment to the bench.

Judicial conduct and ethics council

- We will establish a judicial conduct and ethics council to deal with complaints regarding judicial conduct or ethics.

Increase the number of judges

- We will appoint more judges to cut down on waiting lists in the courts, particularly for criminal cases.

Judicial support staff

- We will appoint more clerks and judicial support staff to ensure that the increased number of judges can do the work that is required.

COURTS SYSTEM / CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Chief Prosecution Solicitor

- We will deal with the serious delays in the courts service by putting increased staffing resources into the Office of the Chief Prosecution Solicitor so that cases can be heard swiftly and efficiently.

More courts

- We will provide more venues for hearings across the country, but particularly in Dublin so that more cases can be heard more often.

Exclusionary rule

- We will allow evidence to be introduced even if it was obtained through a minor or inconsequential breach of a person's constitutional rights, and provided that the breach was accidental. We will not allow criminals to walk free on technical grounds.

PRISONS

Remission of sentences

- We will ensure that prisoners earn their remission and are not automatically released early, thereby incentivising positive behaviour such as taking part in courses or rehabilitation programmes while in prison.

Rehabilitation

- We will guarantee that every prisoner will have access to a rehabilitative programme so that he or she has the option to break the cycle of crime and to ensure that prisons do not act as schools for criminals.

Improve access to training/education

- We will ensure that prisoners are ready for release and that they have options other than a return to crime by providing greater access to skills training and education than ever before, thereby breaking the vicious circle of re-offending.

Drugs in prison

- We will crack down on drug use in prisons and provide real treatment programmes for inmates who suffer from addiction. We will also provide for separation of drug-free inmates from those receiving treatment.

Re-offending rates

- We will take action to reduce the current rate of re-offending from 75% so that criminals who go to prison don't leave and commit more crime. We will provide alternative staged release programmes so that (particularly long-term) inmates are gradually re-introduced into society, and so that they have options other than a return to a life of crime.

VICTIMS CHARTER

- We will produce a schedule of rights that victims can expect when dealing with the criminal justice system

Information

- We will ensure that victims are kept informed at all stages throughout the Criminal Justice process so that they can see how it is both aware of and vindicating their rights. We will ensure that the victim(s) and/or their families are kept updated on how the case against their alleged perpetrator is progressing and on prison release dates.

Representation

- We will require that rights of the victim are vindicated during the sentencing process and that a 'plea in prosecution' is put forward from the DPP with a view to achieving clarity in the mind of the judge and to assist him or her in his or her function. We will ensure that the prosecution automatically makes submissions regarding sentencing precedents at the sentencing stage (whether requested by the judge or not), highlighting, in particular, any aggravating factors.

Compensation

- We will ensure that victims of serious crime will be compensated for criminal wrongs committed against them through reform of the current system of compensation.

Restoration

- We will allow victims, wherever appropriate, to avail of restorative justice measures with three main benefits: putting the victim centre stage (to the extent they wish), seeking to bring home to the accused an appreciation of the damage that he or she has done, and reducing the rate of re-offending by those who take part in this process (which evidence suggests is significantly lower). We will require offenders (young people and first-time offenders in particular) to face up to their crime in a very concrete and challenging manner without the necessity for criminal convictions and custodial sentences that are expensive and sometimes counter-productive.

WITNESS PROTECTION PROGRAMME (WPP)

Reform of WPP

- We will provide for a structured Witness Protection Programme that operates successfully to tackle gangland crime in particular.
- We will introduce legislation to put the WPP on a statutory footing.

HOME DEFENCE

- We will enact the Criminal Law (Home Defence) Bill 2006 to give more protection to homeowners to defend their homes and families, and to create greater clarity for those who are unfortunate enough to encounter an intruder in their homes.

ENFORCEMENT OF COURT ORDERS

- We will enact the Enforcement of Court Orders Bill 2006 so that court orders can be collected more easily, both by instalment and by "attachment to earnings order", so that fewer people unnecessarily end up in prison at significant expense to the tax payer.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

- We will pass law to make it illegal to traffick a person, to create better protection for the victims of sexual exploitation and to seize the assets of criminals involved in sexual slavery.

RE-BALANCING THE CRIMINAL LAW

- We will examine and implement the recommendations of the Department of Justice Committee on Re-balancing the Criminal Law.

MARINE

Fine Gael will end the neglect of the Marine sector, recognise the ocean of opportunity that exists in our coastal communities and prioritise a six-point plan to revolutionise the marine sector.

PROPER INDUSTRY PLAN

Sustainability

- We will immediately start the process of developing and implementing a biologically, environmentally and economically sustainable fishing industry development plan in full consultation with the stakeholders covering the period 2007 to 2013. The plan will cover all the sea and shore aspects including infrastructure requirements and will take full account of the Common Fisheries Policy.

Protection

- We will protect our marine environment, tourism and maritime heritage.
- We will lead the sustainable development of the maritime sector, maximise the quality of life in coastal regions and promote a plan that strengthens our maritime identity.

FLEET AND RESOURCES

Quota management

- We will examine alternative quota management arrangements with a view to developing a management regime that accurately reflects the current state of our fleet and fish stocks.

Conservation

- We will ensure stakeholder-driven, Technical Conservation Measures, aimed at protecting fish stocks, are placed on the EU agenda.
- We will take measures, where practicable, inside our six-mile limits without requiring sanction at European level.

Sea Fisheries Bill

- We will introduce an amendment to the Sea Fisheries Bill which will allow for a list of minor offences to be covered by administrative sanctions. The majority of other EU states have successfully devolved the management of quotas to the producer organisations and while Fine Gael is in favour of the State's retaining control of quotas, some devolution may be beneficial.

PROCESSING AND MARKETING

Labelling

- We will introduce quality assurance and eco-labelling schemes for a range of species in an effort to add value to the fish being landed by our fishermen.

Research

- We will initiate a research programme identifying those fisheries and species with the greatest development potential. Production and marketing trials aimed at realising this potential will follow.

Expertise

- We will utilise the food product development expertise available in Irish universities and will improve links with industry. We will capitalise on Ireland's clean image and exploit niche markets.

STRUCTURAL REFORM

Department

- We will revolutionise the structures that are trying but failing to boost this industry. We are committed to creating a standalone Department of the Marine, with a senior Minister, who will sit at the Cabinet table.

Innovation

- We will give priority to promoting market-led innovation and commercial application of research findings. We will also concentrate on new technologies in the fisheries and processing/marketing sectors within the context of an aggressive promotion of Irish seafood in domestic and export markets.

Bord Iascaigh Mhara

- We will ensure that part of a broader remit of Bord Iascaigh Mhara will be
 - to manage the Fishery Harbour Centres in an effective and efficient manner,
 - to carry out a full review of charges in consultation with the users and to draw up a priority list of infrastructure needs in each of the Fishery Harbour Centres in partnership with industry and provide detailed costings and timeframes.
- We will ensure the necessary funding is provided in the budget for these priority infrastructure projects.

Advice

- We will introduce a Marine Minister's Advisory Committee comprising of stakeholders and officials who will advise the Minister on an ongoing basis. The committee will deal with immediate domestic and EU issues but will also advise on future policy direction for the Irish fishing industry.

INSHORE FISHERIES

- We will move quickly to ensure that the required management measures for inshore fisheries are introduced. This will be carried out in partnership with the stakeholders, through the national Species Advisory Groups, to ensure that the measures will be sensible, practical and effective.

FUNDING

- We will progressively increase funding to the Marine by €25m per annum each year for five years.
- We will also radically increase funding for the infrastructural development of coastal communities and the marine sector through an increase in NDP funding. This funding will address the failure of the government in only securing €37.5 million out of an overall budget of €3.545 billion under the European Fisheries Fund. It will also address the failure of the Government to spend the €39 million allocated for inland fisheries section under the current NDP.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Fine Gael will ensure Ireland reaps the economic benefit of our natural wealth in a responsible, equitable and sustainable fashion.

GREATER AVAILABILITY OF NATURAL GAS

- We will increase the availability and provision of natural gas throughout the regions but particularly in areas of the West and North West with the objective of making them attractive for investment.

EXPLOITING OUR NATURAL MINERAL WEALTH

- We will develop and utilise all natural gas resources and other minerals on and offshore by way of a fair, transparent and even-handed system of incentivisation coupled with a fair return to the State. This applies to the Corrib gas field and other projects under exploration.

LICENSES

- We will ensure that future licensing reflects sufficient incentivisation to ensure ongoing exploration and an equitable return to the taxpayer.

NATIONAL OIL RESERVES

- We will monitor the extent to which oil reserves under the control of the National Oil Reserves Agency require to be increased in line with demand.

OLDER PEOPLE

Fine Gael recognises the important ongoing contribution senior citizens make in our society. We are determined to promote active ageing and are committed to assisting older people in living independently in their communities for as long as possible. We will introduce the following measures:

Government

- We will give recognition of older people at Government level to spearhead rights and entitlements of older people.

Minister

- We will appoint a Minister for Older People and will tackle ageist discrimination and implement our national strategy.

Office

- We will ensure that a new Office for Older People will oversee development and implementation of the national strategy, oversee bodies that provide services to the elderly, consult with representative groups and provide older people with full and adequate information on their rights and entitlements.

Ombudsman

- We will establish an Ombudsman for Older People who will investigate complaints and advocate on behalf of older people. The Ombudsman will also be responsible for monitoring and reviewing legislation relating to older people and promoting public awareness by collecting and disseminating information relating to rights and entitlement of older people.

Partnership

- Fine Gael will create a National Partnership Forum for Older People which will empower individuals and representative groups to become proactively involved in national strategy development.

Pensions

- Fine Gael will increase the State Pension to at least €300 per week by 2012.
- We will continue to invest 1% of national income in the National Pensions Reserve Fund to ensure adequate state provision for the future.
- We will publish a Green Paper on Pensions early in the term of the new Government to identify the options for increasing pensions coverage across the working population, and particularly among women, in order to generate an informed consensus on this crucial long-term issue.

Carers

- We will introduce an individual means test for carers to increase eligibility for the carers allowance (up to €200 per week) for children and spouses of older people (by excluding their spouse's income from the eligibility test).

Marriage Bar

- We will take into consideration the negative impact of the marriage bar on many women's financial circumstances when they reach pension age. We are committed to examining ways to address this situation including extending the homemaker's scheme and making changes to the contributory state pension-averaging rule.

Housing and Planning

- We will request that local authorities in conjunction with the HSE and voluntary bodies identify sites in their development plans suitable for homes for the elderly including supported housing with adequate community and health facilities.

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR ACTIVE AGEING

Our strategy encourages and supports healthy, active and independent living for all people.

Health

- Fine Gael will implement our Preventive Health Screening Policy to ensure early detection and treatment.

Regulating to protect patients.

- Fine Gael will set up a patient's watchdog with real teeth and clear responsibilities. The people employed, or contracted, to provide care are accountable for the quality and standard of care which they provide. The establishment of a Patient Safety Authority will put in place systems which will ensure that a patient, who has cause for concern about their treatment or care, will have an advocacy system which can resolve the difficulties experienced.
- The Patient Safety Authority will
 - Oversee the registration and accreditation of hospitals, inpatient and residential facilities e.g. facilities providing care and/or treatment for persons who are ill, in need of care or who have a disability.
 - Set and monitor standards of patient safety in all registered health and social care facilities.
 - Set National Minimum Standards for health facilities.
 - Audit and monitor the standard of care provided in hospitals, nursing homes and residential centres.

Volunteers

- We will encourage senior citizens to become actively involved in community and voluntary organisations.

Flexible Retirement

- We support proposals for flexible retirement for all older people.

Home Support

- We will develop support services for individuals in their own home so that home help, home care and meals-on-wheels services are improved.
- We will introduce a handypersons service where volunteers will go to older people's houses to perform basic tasks such as changing light bulbs, delivering shopping etc.

Supported Housing

- Fine Gael will actively promote supported housing schemes by providing voluntary housing associations and local authorities with funding to allow additional support services on site.

Sport - Under represented Groups

- We will assess sporting infrastructure to address deficits which prevent older people, women and girls, and those with disabilities from engaging in sporting activities.

Public Transport

- We will investigate the possibility of introducing a public transport voucher system for those who do not have access to transport services provided under the free travel scheme.

PUBLIC SECTOR EFFICIENCY AND BETTER VALUE FOR MONEY

During its two terms in office, this Government has overseen annual average growth in day-to-day exchequer spending (net voted current spending) of 11.2%, up from just 6.8% under the Rainbow Government. Spending growth peaked at 22% in 2001, just before the last election and is projected to accelerate again to 13% in this election year. This rate of spending growth has been far ahead of the growth in the economy and is not sustainable. There is a requirement to slow growth in day-to-day spending down towards the rate of growth in the economy.

Fine Gael gives greater care and attention to securing 'value for money' and efficiency in the delivery of public services than has been the case over the last decade.

CLARITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- We will ensure that the Taoiseach and Tánaiste have a central role in setting a limited number of targets for the Government, which will be translated into the estimates process. An Estimates Strategy Group will assist this process.
- The Taoiseach and Tánaiste will review Ministerial performance against high-level targets. Government must have a clear sense of its strategic spending priorities, which must be translated into high-level targets for Ministers.
- We will ensure that clear areas of ministerial responsibility are identified and there will be clear delegation of responsibilities to public servants where these occur.

THE ESTIMATES PROCESS

- We will scrap the charade of Budget Day and replace it with a modern system for the development of spending and tax proposals that will provide the Dáil with an opportunity for meaningful scrutiny and debate about the choices being made.
- We will publish draft spending estimates on the resumption of the Dáil after the summer recess. This will include a New Resources Statement showing the manpower and funds going to new programmes and setting out the performance targets in terms of outputs and outcomes to be achieved. Any new programme will require a 5-year projection of costs and benefits.
- We will implement our detailed plans for a more timely and relevant scrutiny by the Houses of the Oireachtas of the annual estimates, including the establishment within the Houses of the Oireachtas of an Estimates Commissioner.

STRENGTHENING EVALUATION AND FINANCIAL CONTROL

- We will make expenditure review an integral part of expenditure planning - with a minimum 20% of expenditure programmes reviewed each year.
- We will appoint Finance Directors in all departments, charged with the remit of delivering efficiency and overseeing internal audit and efficiency benchmarks.
- We will appoint an Estimates Commissioner to assist the Oireachtas in evaluating spending and taxation choices.
- We will give the Comptroller and Auditor General a new role to oversee improvements in corporate governance within departments and agencies.
- We will subject Local Authorities to the same system of value for money scrutinizing under the direction of the Comptroller and Auditor General as applies in the rest of the Public Service.

- We will introduce better accounting systems to allow civil and public service managers to make decisions on the basis of clearer benefits and costs, including the introduction of full accrual accounting and a system of capital charges that accounts for the value of assets held by public sector bodies.

STRATEGIC RESERVE FUND

- We will set up a Strategic Reserve Fund of up to 2% of current spending to be assigned by Cabinet to promote reform to achieve best practice benchmarks in the delivery of key services. This will substantially improve the capacity of government to achieve cross-cutting objectives.

CIVIL SERVICE CAPACITY

- We will build the capability of our public service to manage the challenges thrown up by a programme of reform. We will open up recruitment within the public service and in particular within the civil service. All posts from principal officer and upwards would be open to public competitions. Emphasis will be placed on building up the skill mix in areas such as IT, finance personnel and procurement.
- We will ensure that performance management and pay systems are directly tied to the achievement of high-level targets.

REFORMING THE WIDER PUBLIC SERVICE

- We will put in place a rolling review of existing public sector agencies to establish the scope for greater efficiency through reforming the existing legal codes under which they operate, through sharing of services and through examining the continuing relevance of the agencies' targets and operations.
- We will establish a Benchmark and Change Framework to assist public service units to evaluate their service against best practice and set out a programme of change to deliver improvements.
- We will require every local unit, be it a school, hospital, or Garda Station to report to the public on how it deploys its resources and what targets it is setting and achieving, and to hold monthly meetings to monitor and sustain progress.
- We will ensure that each Government Department provides a Technical Support Unit to assist local agencies in this work identifying sources of international best practice, promulgating success and helping the preparation of change strategies.
- We will ask the Central Statistics Office to develop methods of measuring public service productivity and performance and of benchmarking service delivery against international benchmarks of best practice.
- We will delegate greater responsibility and promote a dispersed model of public service with more user choice and more diversity.
- We will require that contracting out be assessed by public sector managers as one way of delivering greater efficiency. More innovation and local initiative to achieve best practice will be promoted.
- We will use Limited Life Task Groups with a specified termination date to tackle dogged problems. These teams will draw from people with experience on the ground and aim to move away from office bound approaches limited by the rigid silo systems of the parent departments who ought to be cooperating in delivering tailored and integrated responses

GREATER USE OF ICT AND E-GOVERNMENT

- We will use technology to improve the delivery of important public services, such as taxation and social welfare. Further progress will require flexibility in the recruitment and development of the people with the necessary expertise and experience, particularly with respect to IT project management skills.

BENCHMARKING

- We will continue the system of benchmarking pay as a means for deciding justified increases in public pay. However, the process of comparison of pay and conditions will be made open and transparent. The

comparison will include a quantification of the value of deferred pay under public and private sector pension arrangements. Benchmarking will also be tied to a programme of public service reform designed to achieve best practice and deliver tangible improvements in service at the frontline

PROCUREMENT

- We will set up a new Public Buying Office within the Department of Finance to take a lead in developing new procurement techniques that could be used across the public sector to achieve a common base.

DECENTRALISATION

- We will create a framework where the best elements of the present decentralisation programme can be secured and further potential opportunities developed for the future. We will undertake an immediate audit of the existing proposals. We shall proceed with those which have a sound business case and a good regional fit.
- We will seek to identify alternative opportunities for decentralisation where current proposals are found wanting but which have the potential to succeed given a sensible and well planned timescale. These must be part of a wider Regional Development Strategy.
- We will reverse the decision to move some of the core policy planning units of government departments away from Dublin City. It would undermine the continuing effectiveness of policy development. It is our clear preference that "stand alone" business units be moved under the decentralisation programme.

ENDING RIP OFF IRELAND

At over 5% in the first three months of this year, Ireland's inflation rate has hit a new 5-year high, marking a new low for this Government's record on competitiveness and the cost of living. Ireland is already the most expensive country in the Eurozone, and the Central Bank predicts that consumer prices will rise by a further 4.5% in 2007, leading to a further increase in the gap between here and the rest of Europe.

Fine Gael in Opposition has led the campaign since we launched ripoff.ie in November 2003. Reducing cost increases for households and small businesses will remain a key priority for Fine Gael in Government.

STATE CHARGES

Capping Increases

- Fine Gael will cap the growth in charges by state bodies at the overall inflation rate. A cost-plus formula based on historic investments will not be accepted as justification for a price increase. Any requested increases beyond the rate of inflation will require a Public Interest Report be presented to the Dáil. This will apply even where a regulator approves the changes. This Report must provide an efficiency audit of the agency, a detailed explanation of the use of the funds generated and a market comparator of equivalent pricing overseas or in the private sector.

Regulation

- We will undertake a radical overhaul of the current regulatory framework for waste collection services, introducing competitive tendering for waste collection services at a local and regional level, as in done in other EU countries.

Taxes and Charges

- We will, on an ongoing basis, identify and abolish taxes and state charges that run counter to important public policy objectives.

Competition and Consumer Law

- We will legislate to grant the National Consumer Agency (NCA) the same independent status as the Ombudsman.
- We will allow the NCA to take civil "class action" suits, and to seek damages, on behalf of consumers against violators of consumer and competition law.
- We will make the Competition Authority a decision making body with the powers to impose administrative fines on violators of competition law, as in the UK and other EU countries, even if this requires constitutional change.
- We will amend the Competition Act to allow the Competition Authority to issue binding civil decisions, which must be accepted by the infringing party.
- We will instruct the Competition Authority to issue an annual report on the implications for competition of State regulations and practices.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Legal Services

- We will establish an independent Legal Services Commission, involving a wide group of stakeholders, with responsibility for regulating the legal profession and the market for legal services. The Commission will formulate guidelines on legal costs that can be expected to be recovered by solicitors and barristers in respect of particular types of proceedings. The Commission will play a public information role regarding legal costs that can be expected for certain types of legal action.

- We will extend public access to barristers for legal advice.
- We will require solicitors whose clients wish to switch to another solicitor to hand over the client's file to the new solicitor.
- We will increase the limit of the maximum award under the Small Claims Court Procedure, initially to €6,000, and ensure that the maximum amount be subject to regular review and increased by Ministerial Order.
- We will index the jurisdictional limits of all the various courts to inflation, so as to avoid the cost escalation associated with legal actions being driven into higher courts by inflation.

Professional Services

- We will impose an obligation on all professional services providers to provide pricing details to clients in advance in a manner that allows clients to make informed choices about the value for money and competitive alternatives available for the service concerned.

PROPERTY RELATED SERVICES

Conveyancing

- We will introduce a profession of Specialist Conveyancer to bring down the price and improve the quality of conveyancing services.

Multi residential units

- We will introduce a new regulatory framework for the management of multi-unit residential developments. New legislation will provide for:
 - A widening of the remit of the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) to regulate apartment complex management companies and agents;
 - Action by the PRTB to ensure the appointment of managing agents by apartment complex developers is in the best interests of residents and that this appointment is made following an open and transparent tendering process;
 - The empowerment of the PRTB to clarify, mediate and adjudicate in disputes between management companies and agents; and
 - The drawing up by the PRTB of a code of practice for managing agents.

“NETWORK INDUSTRIES” - TRANSPORT, ENERGY & COMMUNICATIONS

Consumer Charter

- We will put in place a new Consumer Charter for Utilities that forces utility providers to compensate consumers who lose utility service for more than three hours in a 24 hour period by deducting the cost of one day's service from the bill. This will apply to electricity, gas, telephone, internet and cable TV providers.
- We will empower consumers, through a petition process, to force the Regulator to instigate a review of prices.

Regulation

- We will strengthen the powers of regulators, while ensuring that they remain accountable to the Houses of the Oireachtas, to drive pro-consumer regulation.
- We will abolish the existing regulatory appeals bodies, which have delayed implementation of pro-consumer decisions, and will create a Competition Appeals Court presided over by a High Court judge to hear and decide appeals involving competition or other regulatory issues.

Broadband

- We will immediately extend broadband access across the country. By 2012, we will create a new, high speed, open access, next generation broadband network.

Electricity

- We will accelerate electricity grid inter-connection and regulatory convergence with the UK, and eventually with north-west continental Europe in order to boost our energy security and promote the use of renewables in electricity generation.
- We will transfer, but retain within state ownership, responsibility for the development of the national electricity grid away from ESB to Eirgrid, the State-owned system operator, in order to encourage more competition.

Transport

- We will separate the ownership and regulatory functions of the Department of Transport by creating a new, National Transport Regulator.
- We will charge the new regulator with opening up of 25% of the Dublin bus market to additional competitors every three years, until the market is fully open to public and private bus operators. This process will aim to increase the type and frequency of buses available in Dublin.
- We will charge the new regulator with expanding transport options in rural areas, through the provision of additional bus services, particularly those that service Gateway cities and Hub towns from rural areas.

PHARMACEUTICALS

Drug Costs

- We will instruct the National Consumer Agency to publish comparative data for medicine prices across EU states at both manufacturer and retail level.
- We will legislate for the display of prices for both branded and generic drugs in pharmacies at the point of purchase to allow consumers to make ready choices, and to allow pharmacists to provide generic substitutions for branded drugs.

Pharmacies

- We will remove the prohibition on non-Irish graduates being supervising pharmacists in pharmacies less than three years old, while simultaneously strengthening the powers of the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland to ensure that practising pharmacists have the linguistic and technical competence to practice.

FINANCIAL SERVICES

Codes of Banking

- We will examine codes of banking practice to ensure they achieve best practice in terms of promoting the opportunity for consumers to switch their business.

Digital Payments

- We will play a leadership role with retailers, banks, credit unions, An Post and consumer groups in implementing a modern and people-friendly digital payments framework that reduces cash and cheque payments. We will exempt any payments instruments that fit into this framework from Stamp Duty.

Cross Border Payments

- We will encourage EU-wide reforms to reduce the extortionate cost for consumers and businesses of cross-border payments.

Bank Charges

- We will retain the requirement of notification of bank charges until a proven track record of meeting consumer benchmarks has been achieved.
- We will direct the Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority to publish cross-country comparisons of the cost of personal and small business banking services.

Financial Penalties

- We will change the financial penalties for breach of regulatory obligations from a flat rate to one where they are related to the size of the turnover.

GROCERIES AND RETAILING

Planning

- We will monitor the application by local authorities of the Retail Planning Guidelines to ensure they promote retail competition.
- We will identify suitable locations for more large-store formats, like IKEA, and amend the Retail Planning Guidelines accordingly.

Grocery Sector

- We will empower the Competition Authority to carry out a new study of the grocery sector to ensure that supermarkets are not engaging in practices, such as land-banking and predatory pricing, that suppress local market competition.

Casual Trading

- We will increase the numbers of casual trading licences granted to open-air traders and apply a locally sensitive approach to casual trading regulations.

SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES

Small business has been the forgotten child of Irish industrial policy. This will not remain the case with Fine Gael in Government. We recognise that multinationals have made a huge contribution to Ireland's economic recovery. But we know that to sustain Ireland's growth, we need to move beyond the era of making things invented elsewhere. We need an Irish industrial renaissance, driven by Irish entrepreneurs.

We have an 8-point plan to help small business owners and managers to keep their companies growing and competitive.

LOWER TAXES

- We will cut income taxes for all taxpayers.
- We will keep the current low rates of Corporation Tax and Capital Gains Tax.
- We will develop tax measures to encourage investment in high-tech, export oriented Irish firms.

A CAP ON STATE CHARGES

- Charges imposed by State bodies - waste disposal, postage, motor tax etc. - have increased in excess of the general rate of inflation over the last decade, forcing consumers and business to pay for inefficiencies and out-dated work practices.
- Fine Gael will cap charges by state bodies at the rate of inflation. Any requested increases beyond the rate of inflation will require a Public Interest Report be presented to the Dáil.

TIGHTER CONTROL ON UTILITY COSTS

- We will give stronger powers to regulators, particularly in energy and telecoms to deliver competition and lower prices.
- We will put in place a Consumer Charter for Utilities that will, among other things, compensate households and businesses that lose utility service for more than three hours in a 24 hour period by forcing providers to deduct the cost of one day's service from the bill. This will apply to electricity, gas, telephone, internet and cable TV providers.

LESS REGULATORY RED TAPE

- We will cut the administrative burden (red tape) on companies by 25%, focusing on reducing the number and complexity of information requests connected with:
 - Employment law
 - Tax administration
 - Health and safety law
 - Statistical collection
 - Importing/exporting
 - Regulatory enforcement

UNIVERSAL, NEXT GENERATION BROADBAND

- We will immediately extend broadband access across the country.
- We will create a new, high speed, open access, Next Generation network by 2012.

QUICKER DELIVERY OF INFRASTRUCTURE

- We will fast track the inter-urban roads programme and public transport.
- We will create a new Critical Infrastructure Commission to accelerate planning of key infrastructure projects.
- We will create a new High Court for Infrastructure to accelerate judicial review of planning decisions by An Bord Pleanála.

MORE EFFICIENT PUBLIC SERVICES

- We will improve strategic management and prioritisation of spending.
- We will enhance Oireachtas scrutiny of expenditure.
- We will enhance civil service capacity in expenditure management.
- We will clarify lines of accountability for Ministers and civil servants.

MORE ACCESSIBLE STATE SUPPORTS FOR GROWTH AND INNOVATION

- We will build Enterprise Support Hubs in each county by merging all existing state enterprise agencies under a single roof.
- We will increase support from the National Training Fund, which is largely financed by employer PRSI payments, for employer-led training networks.
- We will increase public funding for industry-led research and in-firm R&D.
- We will give greater attention to research areas of relevance to the services firms - business, finance, psychology, linguistics, energy and environmental research.

SPORT

It is vital for the future health of our country that more of us are physically active. In Government, Fine Gael will support sporting activities that can be enjoyed by the many, not just the few, at all levels of ability and at every age in life.

Schools

- We will ensure that all primary and secondary students have two hours of physical education per week, and will establish a Commission on Physical Education to ensure that PE programmes are implemented in all schools.
- We will ring fence €100 million for a Schools Sports Fund, drawing from the Schools Modernisation and Development Fund of the National Development Plan (NDP), to allow for the development of sporting facilities at primary and secondary schools.
- We will designate certain secondary schools as Sports Colleges with a special focus on physical education and school sport. These schools will work with other schools in their areas to help teachers improve the quality and quantity of physical education and sport.
- We will introduce an out of school hour's sports programme, initially on a pilot basis, to provide an opportunity for children to participate in structured sport after school hours linking school and community sport.
- We will give priority to community groups or sporting organisations that apply for National Lottery funding for sporting facilities on or adjacent to the grounds of a school, provided the facilities can be used by the school during school hours.

National Audit of Facilities

- We will accelerate the completion of a National Audit of Sports Facilities, and following this develop a spatial strategy for the provision of sports infrastructure, both at local and regional levels.
- Following the completion of the National Audit of Sports Facilities we will give responsibility for the allocation of National Lottery grants to the Irish Sports Council. National Lottery funds will be allocated according to the spatial strategy.

Swimming Pools

- We will increase the national stock of swimming pools, putting in place a new Local Authority Swimming Pool programme. Over the course of one full term in office we will work to provide 50 new swimming pools nationally.

Lansdowne and Abbotstown

- We are committed to the development of the Lansdowne Road stadium and Campus Ireland at Abbotstown.

Under Represented Groups

- We will assess sporting infrastructure to address deficits which prevent older people, women and girls, and those with disabilities from engaging in sporting activities.

People with Disabilities

- Training in adapted physical education will be provided to teachers as part of their ongoing professional development.
- We will ensure that Disability Sports Development Officers are provided in each Local Sports Partnership.
- We will ensure that new sports facilities are accessible for people with disabilities and extend grants to make existing facilities accessible.

Multi Sports Centres

- We will encourage the provision of municipal multi-sport centres where local sports organisations come together with a local authority to provide playing pitches or other sporting facilities.

RAPID

- We will increase grant aid for sporting facilities in RAPID areas.

Third Level

- We will enhance sporting facilities at third-level colleges, and foster stronger links between these institutions and local community sports organisations.

Coaching

- We will support and encourage the continued professional development of coaches.
- We will support stronger links between the Institute of Sport, Coaching Ireland, and the sports departments of universities and institutes of technologies to ensure that research is shared and to avoid duplication of resources.

Women and Sport

- We will adopt the Brighton Declaration on Women in Sport, and provide for the appointment of a full-time Officer within the Irish Sports Council to co-ordinate Women in Sport initiatives.
- The creation of a Women's Sport Foundation will be advanced.
- We will support an Annual Women's Sports Award Scheme to include both sportswomen and the contribution made by women in sports administration, coaching and refereeing.

Promotion

- We will put a major emphasis on the promotion of sport and physical activity in the media and in education.

Ticket Touting

- We will outlaw ticket touting through the introduction of legislation that will impose stiff penalties on any person engaging in that activity.

Doping

- We will improve measures to stop the doping of animals in the greyhound and horseracing industries and will enforce these measures strictly.

Playgrounds

- We will enhance the provision of parks and playgrounds, especially in areas of residential growth and also focus on the provision of skateboarding, biking and roller blading facilities.

TOURISM

In Government, Fine Gael will develop the potential of Ireland's tourism industry, by prioritising policies that make Ireland a safe, clean and welcoming country to visit.

Ireland must also face the increasing international competition for our share of the tourism market, and Fine Gael will facilitate the growth and development of the tourism sector to meet this challenge.

Sports Tourism

- We will develop a National Sports Tourism Strategy. As a key platform of this strategy, discussions will be held with the IRFU with a view to bidding for the 2015 Rugby World Cup.

Role of LAs

- We will facilitate bottom up involvement in tourism by strengthening the role of local authorities in tourism, including the appointment of full time tourism officers.

Customer Care

- We will drive a renewed focus on customer care for visitors, and ensure Irish and migrant workers are educated and trained to have knowledge of their surrounding tourism attractions.

Special Tourism Areas

- Where possible, we will cluster attractions together to act as a significant tourist draw for certain areas, and also identify and designate "Special Tourism Areas" of outstanding scenic, cultural or historic appeal.

Litter and Sanitation

- We will get tough on litter louts reforming the litter warden system and putting in place more stringent litter controls, stiffer penalties and greater enforcement.
- We will audit the provision of sanitary facilities in areas of high-tourism appeal, and put in place measures to improve these facilities and to maintain them to a high standard.

World Heritage Sites

- We will seek UNESCO World Heritage Site designation for an area encompassing the Cliffs of Moher, the Burren and the Aran Islands.

Regional Developments

- We will support the restoration of the Ulster Canal as a major cross-border project, the establishment of a Viking and Norman heritage cluster of attractions in the South East and the development of a Christian Heritage Trail linking major monastic sites.

Signposting

- We will overhaul and rationalise signposting. In towns and cities, street names should be displayed at every junction. In rural areas, colour classification of signage should be strictly applied to reduce confusion, and missing signposts replaced. To improve the urban and rural environment, unnecessary signage and unused signposts will be removed.

Infrastructure

- We will invest in key infrastructural developments that support tourism, such as the Western Rail Corridor, the Atlantic Road Corridor, and the major inter-urban routes and support the expansion of regional airports as a means of facilitating regional tourism growth.

Gastronomy

- We will place a major emphasis on gastronomy as a means of reinforcing the distinctiveness of the Irish holiday experience, and promote food events to showcase Irish food and Irish culinary skills designating some locations as organic food centres.

Regional Marketing

- We will create Regional Co-operative Marketing Campaigns to enable individual players in the tourism industry to promote their products in the international market place in a cost effective manner.

Cultural Infrastructure

- We will deliver key cultural infrastructural developments that impact on tourism, including the National Conference Centre, the Abbey Theatre, the refurbished National Concert Hall and Lansdowne Road stadium.

Walkways

- We will develop a 'national grid' of walkways, in consultation with landowners, so that walkers are clear as to their right to access certain routes but also their responsibilities to landowners, livestock and crops.

Activity Holidays

- We will re-invigorate and develop activity holiday products including walking, cycling, golf, angling, equestrian activities, and inland cruising and water-based activities.

Developing Countries

- We will examine the potential that exists within the overseas aid programme to promote economic growth through tourism in developing countries.

Regional Conference Centre

- We will examine the feasibility of developing a Regional Conference Centre in the Shannon Region.

Towns and Villages

- Town centre small shops are part of the charm of our Irish towns. We will support town improvement schemes to preserve heritage shop fronts, and work to improve the quality of street paving, cleanliness and the general visual appearance of towns and villages.
- In order to preserve the distinctiveness of Ireland's towns and villages, we will ensure developers use appropriate designs and building materials, such as local stone.

TRANSPORT

Fine Gael strongly supports the measures outlined in Transport 21, particularly its emphasis on significantly expanding public transport. However, we believe that all such projects must be subject to rigorous cost-benefit analyses based on social, economic and environmental benefits. Such analysis will inform the priority and delivery timetable for the public transport projects outlined in the plan. Fine Gael's key transport priorities are firstly, to provide all cities and large towns with ample public transport to ensure that traffic congestion is not allowed to deteriorate to the extent that it has in our capital. Secondly, to prioritise a network of road improvements which support and facilitate the development of the National Spatial Strategy and balanced regional development. Finally, we recognise the critical role of our ports and airports as key drivers of economic development and will foster their growth and ensure that they are fully integrated with existing transport infrastructure.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Dublin Transport Authority

- Fine Gael will support a powerful, independent Dublin Transport Authority to regulate and manage all aspects of Dublin transport.

Transport Regulator

- Fine Gael will create one single regulator for all transport services. This single regulator will have responsibility for the regulation of all transport services within the State including rail, rail freight, bus services, aviation and taxi regulation, subsuming the responsibilities of the existing regulators for these latter two areas.

Bus Competition

- Fine Gael will fully open up the bus market to competition. At least every three years the bus market will be opened up in tranches of 25%. We will similarly introduce bus competition in our regional cities and towns. This process of opening up the bus market to private and public operators will be the responsibility of the Transport Regulator and in Dublin will be implemented through the offices of the Dublin Transport Authority.

Rail Services

- We will support expansion in the range and frequency of high capacity commuter rail services, particularly additional Luas lines, Metro North and Metro West and maximise integration between public transport services.
- We will re-invigorate rail freight through the provision of a rail freight support grant, which will be granted to freight operators who seek to increase rail freight.

Western Rail Corridor

- Fine Gael will support the reopening of the line from Ennis to Sligo and will re-open the WRC as far as Claremorris, during our first term in Government and instigate a Railway Order to Cooloooney.

Integrated City-Wide Ticketing

- Fine Gael will make the roll-out of integrated city-wide ticket a priority.

Tax Relief for Public Transport

- We will expand the tax relief available on commuter tickets to all commuters, irrespective of whether their employer participates or not.

INFRASTRUCTURE

A Critical Infrastructure Commission

- Fine Gael will ensure that this Commission will identify strategic infrastructure needs and signpost any barriers to their delivery. The Commission will consist of public and private sector interests and will advise the Taoiseach and Tánaiste.

Gateway and Traffic Light Monitoring System

- We will put in place a Gateway Monitoring System as a structured development programme for major infrastructure projects. It will include rigorous cost benefit analyses. Projects cannot proceed unless they satisfy the criteria for each Gateway. A Traffic Light Reporting System will track and publish the progress of all major capital projects under construction.

ROADS AND MOTORISTS

Major Inter Urban Routes (MIUs)

- We will prioritise the completion of the five MIUs by 2010.

Secondary Routes

- Fine Gael will upgrade secondary routes based on their fit with the National Spatial Strategy and their ability to enhance regional development. (E.g. N52/N62 from Dundalk to Limerick, via the Midlands as a strategic road corridor)
- We will prioritise the Atlantic Road Corridor from Derry/Letterkenny to Waterford as critical project to ensure greater balanced regional development.
- We will give the NRA a special advisory role, in conjunction with Local Authorities, in identifying and prioritising the development of secondary roads, with funding being channelled through the NRA to the relevant Local Authorities.

Road Traffic Officers

- We will establish a dedicated Road Traffic Officer Unit within the Garda Reserve Force which will provide back-up support to the Gardai in patrolling and assisting in traffic management duties. Specially trained for this role, they will act as a rapid reactionary force, patrol key routes to anticipate and prevent incidents which cause congestion and will respond to incidents which do occur to ensure traffic continues to flow freely.

Car Park Traffic Management

- Fine Gael will give private security personnel greater powers to manage and direct traffic entering and exiting large car parking facilities. The law currently prohibits such personnel from stepping off the footpath to improve traffic flows.

Tolling

- Fine Gael will lift the barriers on the M50 and move to barrier free tolling. On all major inter urban routes with multiple tolls, motorists will pay no more than one toll, which will be less than the sum of all tolls on an entire journey.

ROAD SAFETY

Road Safety Authority

- Fine Gael will provide the resources, manpower and political support to the Authority to ensure that it succeeds in significantly reducing road deaths.

Speed Cameras

- We will roll out speed cameras nationwide, conscious that they must lead to discernible road safety improvements.

Mandatory Driving Lessons

- Fine Gael will introduce mandatory driving lessons for all learner drivers.

Driver Training Grounds

- We will open five pilot regional driver training grounds, operated on a PPP-basis, where learner drivers can learn to drive under different driving conditions.

Road Surface Conditions

- We will oblige all Local Authorities to undertake rolling Road Safety Audits. These will inform the appropriate speeds to be used on all roads.

RURAL TRANSPORT

Expanded Bus Services in Rural Areas

- Fine Gael will expand public transport options in rural areas, through the provision of additional bus services, particularly those which service Gateway cities and Hub towns from rural areas.
- We will expand the bus services in rural areas through the Rural Transport Initiative, school buses and increased private bus licences.
- We will increase private sector bus licences to meet specific local demands.

AVIATION

Consumer Choice and Competition

- We will ensure consumers enjoy a competitive aviation environment by encouraging new operators into the market.

National Aviation Policy

- We will develop a long term strategy for the development of the aviation sector to guide the growth of the industry.

Regional Airports

- Fine Gael will support the expansion of our regional airports, particularly in assisting them to increase the range of services they can offer, through strategic investments in infrastructure, where it enhances aviation safety.
- We will also focus on improving the access and transport links into such airports to ensure they can become drivers of regional development.

Expansion of East Coast Aviation Services

- Fine Gael will plan for an expansion in air services in the East Coast region, by conducting an independent study on the feasibility of either a third independent terminal for Dublin Airport or a second airport for the East Coast region. The outcome of this study will determine future policy on this issue.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

Energy Efficiency Labelling for Vehicles

- We will give lower rates of VRT to cars which are most efficient, have low emissions and greater fuel efficiency.

Biofuels in Cars

- We will legislate for a mix of biofuel to be blended with all conventional carbon fuels and remove the excise duty on the biofuel component.

Park and Ride

- We will mandate Local Authorities to increase the number of park and ride facilities. Around the M50 we will create a necklace of park and ride sites, serviced by regular and frequent buses to major employment locations and to the airport.

Electric Cars

- We will examine measures to expand the use of electric cars such as on taxation, parking incentives and other facilities.

Cycling

- We will increase the facilities and opportunities for cycling in public areas and as a viable means of commuting.

Teleworking

- We will ensure that all public service bodies will develop and implement flexible teleworking arrangements to encourage family friendly work practices and to reduce traffic congestion.

Mobility Management Plans

- We will require all new business start-ups, intending to employ more than 30 employees, as part of their planning permission application to develop a mobility management plan which set out how their future employees will commute to work. These employers will be expected to develop the most sustainable methods of commuting to work such as through the provision of buses or through car-pooling.

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT DURING DUBLIN'S TRANSPORT 21 "BIG DIG".

During the development of Transport 21 large areas of Dublin will experience significant construction disruption. To cope with the ensuing traffic congestion Fine Gael proposes the following

Dublin Transport Authority

- We will set up Dublin Transport Authority: The absence of a single, strong, coordinating body to drive projects is largely responsible for the appalling state of Dublin traffic.

Buses

- We will provide more buses and immediately appoint a regulator to facilitate bus companies to provide badly needed new services.

Secondary School Buses

- We will set up a Pilot Scheme for secondary school buses. Secondary schools have large catchment areas and term time is most likely to see the family car and even the second family car pressed into service.

Operation Freeflow

- We will have year round Operation Freeflow and will recruit and train civilian Road Traffic Officers to support the work of Traffic Corps. A constant patrolling presence is essential to keep traffic moving during the Big Dig.

M50

- We will make the M50 work. All resources must be put into early M50 upgrade completion and the move to barrier-free electronic tolling including buying raised barrier time to reduce queuing in the interim.

Port Tunnel

- We will pack the Port Tunnel. This expensive tunnel is operating and will for the foreseeable future operate at less than one tenth of its capacity. Long distance commuter buses, northside and airport bus services will be mandated to use the tunnel.

Secret Tunnel

- We will open and use the secret tunnel. With the Spencer Dock Station now complete, Ireland's best-kept secret CIE's Phoenix Park Tunnel from Heuston to Connolly Station must be opened up to Kildare line trains. Removing commuters from Heuston and from the area of the Metro dig is essential.

M50 Park & Ride Necklace

- We will mandate Local Authorities to increase the number of park and ride facilities. Around the M50 we will create a necklace of park and ride sites, co-located with service areas and fed with frequent buses connecting to the city centre, major employment locations and to the airport.

Liffey Bridges

- We will ensure that the Macken Street Bridge and additional bridges are developed to aid public transport and reduce the bottleneck effect of limited crossings which will intensify during LUAS and Metro construction.

Technology

- Fine Gael will maximise the potential of technology for better traffic management, i.e. extend Scats and use the new speed camera system to collect and respond instantly to traffic information and for policing bus lanes, yellow box compliance etc.

PORTS

- Fine Gael will support the development of our port and marine sector as important drivers of Irish economic growth.
- Fine Gael will work with all stakeholders to ensure that a viable and feasible solution is developed to overcome the serious constraints on capacity which face Dublin Port.
- Fine Gael will facilitate the growth of our national ports, particularly through the development of road and rail access routes into and out of our ports which will enhance their expansion.

YOUTH AND CHILDREN

HEALTH

- We will give 100,000 more families a medical card - with particular weighting given to families with children
- We will give free GP visits for all children under 5
- We will provide free health insurance cover for all children up to 16 years of age
- We will arrange a health check/screening appointment for all children before they start school

Vaccine Smart Card

- We will introduce a Vaccine 'Smart Card' - a system of unique childhood immunisation cards for each child from birth.

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Specialist out patient teams

- We will solve the crisis in child and adolescent psychiatric services by increasing specialist outpatient teams by 50% and bring the established teams up to the recommended staffing complement.

Early Intervention

- We will ensure early intervention. To cover the crucial period during adolescence and early adulthood adequately, we propose a 'Youth Mental Health' initiative which is aimed at teachers and other adults who have frequent contact with young people.

Suicide

- Fine Gael will introduce a suicide prevention strategy, the fundamental aim of which is to prevent suicide and deliberate self-harm and to reduce level of suicide ideation in the general population. Suicide rates are rising exponentially.

Budget for Suicide Prevention

- We will increase the budget of the National Suicide Prevention Office to €10 million in year 1, rising to €20 million in year 5.

Schools

- We will provide a comprehensive package for all primary and secondary schools, including mental health programmes and comprehensive counselling services.

Partnership

- We will set up formal structured partnerships between the voluntary and community sector and the statutory sector to strengthen community-based suicide prevention strategies and bereavement support.

CHILD PROTECTION

- We will provide real legislative and systematic protection for children from exploitation and abuse.

Referendum on Children's Rights

- We will ensure that the issue of children's rights is dealt with, by holding a referendum amending the Constitution to take account of changes in society and children's rights.

Recommendations on Child Protection

- We will implement the 62 recommendations of the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on Child Protection, except for No. 19, which concerns the lowering of the age of consent to 16.

Age of Consent

- We will retain the age of consent at 17.

Zone of Protection

- We will impose a zone of absolute protection for children under 16.

CHILDCARE

Parental Leave

- We will introduce 1 weeks paid Paternity leave for the first time
- We will give 1 weeks paid Parental leave for either parent to take, giving them more choice. In the first phase, this proposal would give parents an additional 2 weeks paid leave - including, for the first time the right of fathers to paid leave. They may also choose to take additional unpaid leave.

Financial Support

- We will continue to make a direct payment of €1,000 each year for each child until the age of 6
- We will make available a childcare credit of €1,500 for every child up to age of 5 which can be used by parents to access quality assured childcare for their children

Pre School Education

- We will also ensure that every child has access to one year of pre-school education, giving a guaranteed two-thirds subsidy to cover the cost of this education for all children rising to 100% free pre-school based on means

YOUNG CARERS

- Fine Gael will put a new focus on the approximately 3,000 carers under the age of 18 carrying out caring responsibilities. This is a group of carers who get absolutely no recognition from the State. Fine Gael will increase supports from the State such as home helps and will work with the education system to ensure that these young people are not isolated.

EDUCATION

Laptops

- We will give a laptop to every child entering secondary school, redesigning course material around the new technology and completing a radical teacher-training programme.

Speech Therapy

- We will create a speech therapy service within the education system to cater exclusively for children and young people needing this service.

Pre School

- We will expand the number of community pre-school places offering free pre-school in areas of educational disadvantage, and will also subsidise this education by at least two-thirds for all other children.

Youthreach

- We will expand Youthreach, increasing the number of places available on this programme and rolling-out this service nationally.

Career Guidance

- We will progressively increase the allocation of careers guidance hours per week to all second-level schools.

Youth Work

- We will support the development and expansion of youth work projects.

Flexible Leaving Cert

- We will introduce greater flexibility, in terms of learning and assessment, in the Leaving Certificate examination whilst maintaining high standards.

Transition Year

- We believe that a full transition year programme should be available to all students at second-level. The curriculum for transition year programmes should allow flexibility according to the differing priorities of individual schools, including the development of modules on driver education, environmental awareness, entrepreneurial education, and Irish Sign Language (ISL) education.

Entrepreneurial Education

- We believe that County Enterprise Boards should also play an enhanced role in entrepreneurial education at second-level, and in supporting groups such as Junior Achievement Ireland in this role.

Language support and immigration

- We will support schools dealing with new challenges posed by immigration, including enhancing the allocation of Language Support Teachers and ensuring that schools with a higher enrolment of students with English language needs will be allocated a higher number of teaching hours.
- We will develop English language classes for immigrant communities, to ensure that places on adult education classes are retained for those requiring literacy education not language education.

NEPS

- We will expand the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) bringing all schools under the cover of this service, and ensuring that the waiting time for a NEPS assessment for any child is no longer than one school term.

Anti Bullying

- We will introduce a national anti-bullying strategy in all schools, designed to address bullying, homophobia and racism, which will involve students, teachers and parents.

Stay Safe and RSE

- We will ensure that the 'Stay Safe' programme is offered in every primary school, and that all second-level students have access to Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).

Vetting of Staff

- We will ensure that all new teachers and school support staff are vetted prior to taking up employment, and will also introduce the retrospective vetting of all those currently working in our schools. We will ensure that 'soft', non-conviction information, forms part of the vetting process.
- We will establish a register of persons considered unsafe to work with children, young people or the vulnerable of any age.

Grants and Subsidised Loans

- We will increase grants at third level, and enhance funding to student hardship funds.
- We will ensure that any further increases in student registration charges do not exceed inflation.
- We will not reintroduce fees at undergraduate level.
- We will introduce a package of subsidised loans of up to €10,000, repayable within 4 years of graduation, to post-graduate students. We will also establish a new post-graduate fund to assist students doing Ph.D. research without sponsorship.
- We will streamline the application procedure for all grants and for the new package of subsidised loans. We will:
 1. Establish a Student Support Unit to coordinate grants for Diploma, Certificate and Degree courses, at both Institutes of Technology and the universities, within Ireland and Northern Ireland and for those studying abroad, and to manage the new package of subsidised loans.

2. This Unit will ensure that applications are processed quickly and according to a customer service charter for students and, where successful, grant funding is issued without delay
 3. Students will have the option of having monthly or weekly grant payments made to them, instead of lump sums released each term.
- We will examine the possible introduction of a new system of student loans at undergraduate level.
 - We will use the National Training Fund (NTF) to introduce a scheme for individuals who have not already benefited from higher education to pay for courses in higher educational institutions taken on a part-time basis.

ELECTIONS

Voting Age

- We will reduce the voting age to 17.

Electoral Register

- We will ensure the Electoral Register is accurate and up to date through the automatic registration of all individuals when they turn 17 years of age and the use of the PPS system to ensure accuracy.

Election to Dáil Éireann

- We will reduce the minimum age for election to Dáil Éireann from 21 to 17.

SPORT

- We will ensure that all primary and secondary students have 2 hours of physical education per week, and will establish a Commission on Physical Education to ensure that PE programmes are implemented in all schools.
- We will ring fence funding of €100 million for a Schools Sports Fund, drawing from the Schools Modernisation and Development Fund of the National Development Plan (NDP), to allow for the development of sporting facilities at primary and secondary schools.
- We will designate certain secondary schools as Sports Colleges with a special focus on physical education and school sport, which will then work with other schools in their areas to help teachers improve the quality and quantity of physical education and sport.
- We will introduce an out of school hour's sports programme, initially on a pilot basis, to provide an opportunity for children to participate in structured sport after school hours linking school and community sport.
- We will give priority to community groups or sporting organisations that apply for National Lottery funding for sporting facilities on or adjacent to the grounds of a school, provided the facilities can be used by the school during school hours.
- We will enhance the provision of parks and playgrounds, especially in areas of residential growth.
- We will increase the national stock of swimming pools, putting in place a new Local Authority Swimming Pool programme. Over the course of one full term in office, we will work to provide 50 new swimming pools nationally.

Fine Gael – Financing the Manifesto Commitments

Our manifesto commitments are fully costed and affordable in the context of the prudent budgetary assumptions drawn from the most authoritative economic sources. The Economic and Budgetary Framework agreed with Labour provides for continued government surpluses, and a reduction in net debt to below 7% of GDP by 2012.

Agreed Fine Gael – Labour Economic and Budgetary Framework

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012		
Current Spending								
Baseline Voted Current Exchequer Spending	37,165	40,020	41,950	44,467	47,046	49,634		
Agreed FG-Lab Commitments on Health/Crime		404	808	1,211	1,615	2,019		
Allocation for Additional Strategic Priorities		458	1,517	1,917	2,408	2,890		
Total Voted Current Exchequer Spending	37,165	40,882	44,275	47,595	51,070	54,542		
Non-Voted (Central Fund) Spending	4,425	4,406	4,609	4,800	4,900	5,000		
Total Current Exchequer Spending	41,590	45,288	48,884	52,395	55,970	59,542		
Current Receipts								
Baseline Exchequer Tax Revenue	49,075	53,190	57,176	61,457	66,059	71,005		
Agreed FG-Lab Tax Commitments (net)	-230	-1,050	-1,470	-2,060	-2,746	-3,433		
Exchequer Non-Tax Revenues	565	594	612	630	650	670		
Current Exchequer Resources	49,410	52,734	56,318	60,027	63,962	68,242		
Current Budget Balance								
as a % of GNP	7,820	7,446	7,435	7,632	7,993	8,699		
	4.8%	4.3%	4.0%	3.9%	3.8%	4.0%		
Capital Budget Balance								
as a % of GNP	-8,597	-9,562	-10,063	-10,440	-10,601	-12,089		
	-5.3%	-5.5%	-5.4%	-5.3%	-5.0%	-5.5%		
Exchequer Balance								
as a % of GNP	-777	-2,116	-2,628	-2,808	-2,608	-3,390		
	-0.5%	-1.2%	-1.4%	-1.4%	-1.2%	-1.5%		
GGB Adjustment								
	2,823	3,343	2,767	3,031	3,237	3,458		
General Government Balance								
as a % of GDP	2,046	1,227	139	223	629	68		
	1.1%	0.6%	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%	0.0%		
Memo Items							Average	
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2003-2007	2008-2012
Real GDP Growth	5.3%	4.6%	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%	4.1%	5.0%	4.2%
Growth in Net Voted Current Spending	13.2%	10.0%	8.3%	7.5%	7.3%	6.8%	9.8%	8.0%
General Government Balance as a % of GDP	1.1%	0.6%	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%	0.0%	1.1%	0.2%
Net Debt (net of National Pension Fund) as a % of GDP	10.6%	9.3%	8.6%	8.0%	7.2%	6.7%	17.8%	8.0%

Tax Commitments

Cost of Agreed Fine Gael – Labour Tax Reforms

Tax Commitments	Cost in 2007 Terms
Standard Rate Cut	1,023
Band Restructuring (indexation plus one-income family measures)	1,247
Indexation of Personal Credits to Earnings	450
Increase in Home Carers' Credit to PAYE Credit (€1,760)	80
Stamp Duty Reform	460
Exclusion of Biofuels from Excise Duty	120
Recognition of "Civil Unions" for Tax Purposes	25
Gross Cost of Tax Reforms	3,405
Net Cost of Tax Reforms (Net of Tax Buoyancy)	2,384

The agreed Fine Gael – Labour tax reforms cost a net total €2.4 billion in 2007 terms, and will be delivered over the lifetime of a 5-year Government. This will result in an annual average gross tax relief package of €680 million each year.

Capital Spending Commitments

The projected capital balance in the Economic and Budgetary Framework is identical to Department of Finance projections for 2007-09, and for the entire period reflects our commitment to the spending targets set out in the NDP 2008-12 and to invest 1% of GNP in the National Pension Reserve Fund (NPRF) on an annual basis. All of our manifesto capital spending commitments will be financed out of these allocations.

Day-to-Day Spending Commitments

As set out in the Economic and Budgetary Framework, our spending commitments on day-to-day public services and social welfare will come under three headings:

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Current Spending						
Baseline Voted Current Exchequer Spending	37,165	40,020	41,950	44,467	47,046	49,634
Agreed FG-Lab Commitments on Health/Crime		404	808	1,211	1,615	2,019
Allocation for Additional Strategic Priorities		458	1,517	1,917	2,408	2,890

Baseline Voted Current Exchequer Spending

Many of our manifesto commitments are incremental in nature, and reflect a commitment to the continuation or expansion of existing programmes. In the agreed Fine Gael - Labour Economic and Budgetary Framework, we used the Department of Finance's cost estimates for delivering such ongoing and incremental improvements to public services ("Baseline Voted Current Exchequer Spending") for 2007-09. The baseline growth rate in voted current spending is then set at 6.0%, 5.8% and 5.5% for 2010, 2011 and 2012 respectively, resulting in an annual average of 6% for 2008-12.

These projections by the Department of Finance for 2007-09, and our own estimates for 2010-12, provide for:

- The rising cost of delivering existing public services, including the impact of public sector pay agreements and the rising cost of procured goods and services;
- Commitments in the National Development Plan and the latest Social Partnership Agreement, Towards 2016 (e.g. the commitment to increase the level of Ireland's Overseas Development Assistance to 0.7% of GNP by 2012);
- Budgets of €1.1 billion and €2.7 billion available for allocation in 2008 and 2009 respectively to support emerging public services and welfare priorities; and
- An additional €3.1 billion to cover incremental expansion of existing programmes across a range of areas for the period 2010-12.¹

Agreed Fine Gael - Labour Commitments on Health / Crime

As part of our preparation for Government with Labour, we have set out a number of agreed spending commitments in the areas of health and policing. In our joint Health and Crime statements, Fine Gael and Labour committed to fund additional day-to-day spending on these priority services. When delivered in full, these improvements will cost €1.6 billion in 2007 prices (€2.0 billion in 2012 prices).²

¹ This assumes average cost inflation for existing services of 3.5% for the 2008-12 period.

² This assumes average cost inflation of 5%. This is higher than our estimate of cost inflation across the public sector (3.5%), reflecting the higher rates of inflation for health-related expenditure.

Cost of FG/Lab Spending Commitments on Health and Crime (€millions)

Spending Commitments	Full Cost in	Incrementally delivered in:				
	2007 Prices	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Extend Medical Card Coverage to 40% of pop.	330	84	168	253	337	421
Free GP Visits for under 5s	32	8	16	25	33	41
Ongoing Costs for Extra 2,300 Acute Beds	600	153	306	459	613	766
Subvention for Health Insurance for under 16s	100	26	51	77	102	128
A&E Commitments (including Step Down Beds)	180	46	92	138	184	230
Reaching Recovery - Agreed Agenda on Mental Health	251	64	128	192	256	320
Increasing Garda Strength to 15,000	89	23	45	68	91	114
Total	1,582	404	808	1,211	1,615	2,019

Additional Fine Gael Strategic Priorities

In our manifesto, we have also promised to deliver new programmes, and / or a step-change in the resources allocated to existing programmes above the baseline increases provided for above, across a range of areas. The cost of these commitments is set out in detail below. We have also provided for a Contingency Reserve to cover the costs of other emerging welfare and public service priorities.

Cost of Additional Fine Gael Current Spending Priorities (€millions)

Spending Commitments		Full Cost in	Incrementally delivered in:				
		2007 Prices	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Education	<i>Pre-school Education Initiative</i>	162	20	77	115	154	192
	<i>Schools Excellence (Primary)</i>	100	10	48	71	95	119
	<i>Schools Excellence (Secondary)</i>	100	10	48	71	95	119
	<i>Expansion of Educational Disadvantage programmes</i>	73	17	35	52	69	87
	<i>Increase in School Capitation</i>	72	17	34	51	68	86
	<i>Enhanced Higher Education Grants</i>	65	15	31	46	62	77
	<i>Other</i>	191	45	91	136	182	227
Total		763	135	363	544	725	906
Social Cohesion and Welfare	<i>Increase State Pension to €300 per Week</i>	425	0	0	172	363	539
	<i>Childcare credits</i>	200	25	95	143	190	238
	<i>Individual Means Test for Carers</i>	140	33	67	100	133	166
	<i>Cost of Disability Payment</i>	94	22	45	67	89	112
	<i>Fund for Community Creche Support</i>	50	12	24	36	48	59
	<i>Paternity Leave / Extension of Parental Leave</i>	28	7	13	20	27	33
	<i>Rate Exemption for Childcare - Refund to LAs</i>	3	1	1	2	3	4
Total		940	100	245	539	852	1,151
Health (on top of joint initiatives with Labour)	Health Screening	100	6	51	77	102	128
Housing	SSIA-Type House Deposit Savings Scheme	189	40	90	135	180	224
Justice (on top of joint initiatives with Labour)	<i>Anti Social Behaviour Fund</i>	50	13	26	38	51	64
	<i>1st Time Offenders' Programme</i>	50	13	26	38	51	64
	<i>Other</i>	8	2	4	6	8	10
	Total		108	27	55	82	110
Green Energy / Climate Change	R&D, Biofuel Subsidies and Renewable Grants	29	7	14	20	27	34
Other	Marine, Broadcasting, Agriculture, Defense	101	34	55	77	98	119
Contingency			108	645	443	314	190
Total			458	1,517	1,917	2,408	2,890

Fine Gael Headquarters

51, Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2.
Tel: 01 6198444 Fax: 01 6625046
email: finegael@finegael.ie
www.finegael.ie