



COMMUNITIES THAT WORK FOR ALL

OUR LABOUR PARTY
LOCAL ELECTION MANIFESTO 2024

CONTENTS

Foreword	02
Introduction	03
Getting the Basics Right	05
Housing and Regeneration	07
Planning and Development	10
Communities and Quality of Life	12
Environment and Climate	18
Sustainable Transport and Traffic	21
Arts, Culture and Heritage	23
Rural Development and Tourism	24
Democracy, Equality and Fairness	26
Economic Development and Budgets	29

FOREWORD



Across Ireland, Labour Councillors and candidates are working hard to deliver real change in their communities. The Labour Party is running 110 candidates in the June 2024 local elections across Ireland, passionate and committed activists whose election would make a significant positive difference to the areas they represent.

Far too many people across Ireland today feel left behind by this Government. Every community is experiencing the impact of the Government's failure to build homes.

The housing crisis is the most pressing issue facing Irish society, and it has impacts across every generation. Younger people are either living far too long in their childhood bedrooms or are paying above and beyond the odds for renting unaffordable homes. Families live in fear of eviction or are struggling to keep up with mortgage payments as they face the double whammy of housing costs, and the cost of living crisis. Older people and people with disabilities cannot access appropriate housing for their needs.

Local councils can do so much more to deliver homes, to tackle the scourge of vacancy and dereliction, and to ensure supports for all. Our Labour Councillors have a proud record of delivery on homes and on public amenities, and with your support they will continue to deliver for their communities.

Labour Councillors will also take the radical steps that are needed on climate action, and will deliver on sustainable public transport and active travel projects, while fighting for more parks, pitches, playgrounds, footpaths, benches and bins.

For sustainable communities we need strong and robust planning laws to ensure the provision of public and civic amenities like schools, libraries and creches to be included in new developments as they are built. We need Councils that work to get the basics right, from nature restoration projects to public lighting systems, while they also put in place plans to create vibrant urban centres and thriving sustainable rural communities.

In this document, we present our comprehensive Labour proposals, a programme for positive and achievable change, that our Councillors will seek to implement when elected – proposals to grow our cultural spaces and to harness the incredible diversity of our country, to ensure strong workers' rights, and to build community wealth, by ensuring that everyone has access to playing pitches, swimming pools, playgrounds and green spaces.

We also have a plan to put more power into the hands of local communities, by reforming local government so that more of the decisions that impact on you, your family and neighbourhood are made locally, democratically, and transparently.

A different approach is possible. We can build communities that work for all. I'm asking you to vote No. 1 for your local Labour candidate on Friday 7th June.

Ivana Bacik

INTRODUCTION



Labour Councillors will put communities back at the heart of local government. They play a vital role in representing our neighbourhoods. Whether it is making representations about footpaths in poor repair or parks that need tending; facilitating arts and cultural events; helping to address and provide alternatives to those involved in anti-social behaviour or ensuring good quality planning and housing, a Councillor's work is fundamentally about creating and maintaining well-functioning communities.

As humans, we are social beings and connection with others promotes wellbeing. Cohesion within society makes us all feel better and place-based belonging can play a significant role in building such cohesion. The work of our Councillors helps to grow and strengthen the bonds between people. They allow people's participation so that they feel heard, respected, and valued. This is especially important as modern technology competes for our attention, with social media and online outlets threatening to weaken solidarity and human interaction among us.

Our local Councillors help to bridge this gap and are involved in finding good ways to solve our problems collectively so that people have fewer hurdles to jump in their own lives. Labour believes community development is at the heart of building a resilient, compassionate, and confident nation.

Labour has a vision for our communities and for the role local Councillors can play in creating the conditions for people's optimal development across the life course. They understand the job of local government and serve our communities with distinction. They get the job done. They believe in the power of local democracy, and building a relationship of trust with you who they are privileged to represent.

Local Election manifestos will often list lots of great ideas and proposals that elected Councillors simply cannot deliver on because they either don't have the powers, the resources, or as we've seen over the last eight years, have had even more functions removed from them by central government.

For 2024 the Labour Party is proposing a series of policies that our Councillors, if elected will pursue on your behalf. We also outline where national reforms are needed to deliver the real change. We need to have communities that work for all – to build more homes, deliver safer neighbourhoods, and act on climate change.

Alongside our manifesto we have published our Labour plan for what real reform of local government would look like, 'Putting Power back in Communities'.

What does your Councillor and your local Council do?

There are 31 local authorities in Ireland, and they deliver vital services including housing, paths, cycleways, roads, planning, libraries, recreational amenities, waste and environmental protection, fire services, the register of electors, and animal control. As you can see this includes many basic things that matter to people, like clean streets and parks, road repairs, pitches, playgrounds and swimming pools, street lighting and recycling facilities.

Your local Councillor is elected for a term of five years, and is responsible for representing their local community, having been elected by the people living there.

Councillors provide community leadership and contribute to the development of Council policy. The decisions made by Councillors are central to how our communities develop, grow, and function, so who they are really matters.

Key responsibilities of Councillors include:

- » Adopting the Annual Budget.
- » Making (or varying) the City or County Development Plan every six years (due to increase to 10 years with a review after five).
- » Make, amend or revoke byelaws.
- » Approving borrowings.
- » Disposal of public assets.

Your Councillor can advocate for better local services through the annual budget process. They can ensure that Council management is held to account and advocate for local improvements at monthly Council meetings as well as at municipal district or local area meetings. Your Councillor may also sit on special committees responsible for housing, finance, climate action or other policy areas.

Through the Development Plan they determine what can get built where, and when, and where essential public amenities like parks are provided.

Unfortunately, Councillors in Ireland have very little real power compared to those in other European countries, but there are things they can do, and this manifesto is our vision for what your Labour Councillor will seek to do if elected in June.

GETTING THE BASICS RIGHT



Your Labour Councillor will work tirelessly for your community and seek to ensure that your local council is getting the basics right. We want a larger portion of your local council budget allocated to essential council services, so that they are delivered for everyone, in every community. We will seek ambitious annual performance targets from Council management that can be communicated to local communities, and then monitored for delivery.

Your Labour Councillors will campaign for:

- » An audit of the state of local footpaths, ensuring that the design and upkeep of paths and roads to cater for cyclists and pedestrians is a priority, including for buggies and people using mobility aids.
- » A relentless focus on vacant and derelict buildings by seeking additional funding in every budget for compulsory purchase orders and to bring these back into use as homes, social and cultural spaces, or new opportunities for start-up businesses.
- » Improvements in public lighting, street furniture and street design. Proper lighting is essential for providing safe places for women with clear lines of vision, while cluttered paths are a serious problem for those with impaired mobility.
- » New byelaws on dog fouling to strengthen the ability for fines to be levied through a zero-tolerance approach, with intensive enforcement for streets and roads where persistent offending occurs.
- » Increased funding for the maintenance of local and regional roads, paths and cycleways which are in a dreadful condition after recent weather.
- » The hiring of Community Wardens to be a familiar face in every locality and keep an eye out for antisocial behaviour, be quick to respond to issues like illegal dumping, dog fouling, persistent noise or anti-social behaviour, with the power to issue fines. There is also a need to hire more litter wardens, traffic wardens and dog wardens.
- » A regular Public Tree Census, the development of native tree planting plans, and work to increase biodiversity through no mow zones, nature corridors and nature restoration plans.
- » Introduction of a scheme to financially compensate town centre businesses that commit to provide access to toilet facilities for visitors, and campaign for the reopening and provision of new public toilets facilities.

- » Audit above the shop spaces in urban centres to ensure it is being used for business or accommodation purposes.
- » Each Council to publish an updated guide on the taking in charge process for new estates and developments, with a streamlined process for the transfer of responsibility and a designated single point of contact.
- » Local plans for areas at risk of flooding and improved availability of sandbags, with local town hall meetings and consultation on how best to prepare for flooding and what defences are best.
- » Amend standing orders to make a report on social housing a recurring item at every Council meeting which will list the current number of vacant “void” social homes, the number of new social homes in construction, the number in planning, the current number being leased, and the remaining budget for the year.



HOUSING AND REGENERATION



Ireland needs to build at least 50,000 homes a year, but the government's target for housebuilding is far too low. Labour has set out our ambition on housing calling for the delivery of one million homes over ten years. This would mean building a minimum of 50,000 new homes per year over the next decade; and enabling the provision of another 50,000 per year through deep retrofit and restoration of vacant and derelict properties.

This level of ambition is necessary to address our housing crisis, to meet our climate targets and to ensure sustainable use of our building stock. At the end of 2022, there were 146,438 social homes in Ireland. The State needs to build more homes but in 2023 only 90% of the new build target of 9,100 new social homes were delivered. Local authorities built 2,524 new builds, 3,713 were built by approved housing bodies, and a further 1,873 came from Part V. A further 1,830 homes were bought but many of these were through the tenant in situ scheme. The vacancy rate for social housing remains too high at around 3%. The State simply isn't building enough.

Labour representatives in both local and national Government will continue to campaign for proper investment in housing with policy changes to ensure a minimum of 50,000 new homes are built a year.

Social and Affordable Housing

- » Support the provision of social and affordable housing on publicly owned land and increased provision of cost rental housing. Our target is 20,000 publicly delivered homes a year rising to 25,000 and more over five years.
- » Seek to increase Council borrowings for investment in social and affordable housing, and the hiring of more apprentices in construction and retrofitting.
- » Publish annual Public Housing status reports on the amount of publicly owned land available, the status of ongoing developments and the pipeline of projects that are planned.
- » Promote housing co-operatives by making brownfield and infill sites available for development by community groups, and campaign for more financial and logistical supports from the Council in support of their plans.
- » Ensure new public housing projects have more one- and two-bedroom units to recognise and support single, and older households.

- » Seek binding social housing delivery targets in each annual Budget alongside recognition in the Development Plan of the projected social and affordable housing needs over its duration with a commitment for increased allocation for older people, and people with disabilities.
- » Mandate each Council to have a housing plan for disabled people with a minimum 10% of social housing ringfenced, and that all new public homes provided by local councils be built according to universal design principles and accessible by people who use mobility aids. Older buildings also need to be brought into compliance with accessibility standards.
- » Develop a Gaeltacht housing policy in any local authority with a Gaeltacht area under their remit.

Vacancy, Renovation and Regeneration

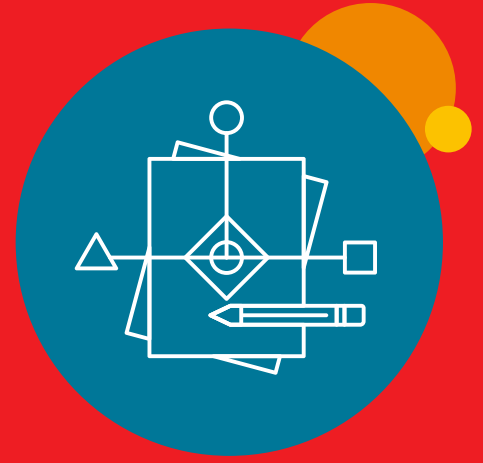
Labour Councillors will focus on an 'End Vacancy' campaign to tackle the scourge of vacancy and dereliction across communities.

- » Amend standing orders to make a report on social housing a recurring item at every Council meeting which will list the current number of vacant "void" social homes, the number of new social homes in construction, the number in planning, the current number being leased, and the remaining budget for the year.
- » Introduce minimum turnaround time targets of 4 months for vacant houses and voids, with clear reporting every month. The current average reletting time is 35 weeks. Seek confirmation also of the number of Council owned properties not included in void figures due to listing for demolition or other purpose.
- » Ensure repairs are carried out by the Council within three months and seek a rolling programme of estate management and improvement including retrofitting and energy efficiency measures.
- » Increase the budget for the compulsory purchase of land for public housing development, with a specific focus on brownfield and infill sites. Councils will need additional financial support for preparing these sites for building.
- » Provide more resources for the inspection of private and public rental tenancies by local authorities as data shows huge levels of non-compliance, and ensure local authorities maintain their own housing stock to appropriate standards.
- » Seek the expansion of "right sizing" schemes to assist older people to sell their homes to the council, in exchange for housing that is easier for them to manage but importantly also located in their communities.
- » Ensure Choice Based letting is offered in every local authority.
- » Campaign for the limits for the Housing Adaptation grant scheme to be urgently reassessed to ensure they are in line with actual costs of delivery and increase direct local authority investment.
- » Ensure greater usage of the existing housing stock, more towards passive design standards, and greater investment and support for retrofitting.

At a national level Labour would:

- » Provide Councils with more responsibility to build homes cutting out the Custom House red tape by devolving construction budgets for their direct management.
- » Establish a State Home Building Company that would be available to deliver Council house building projects.
- » Seek to phase out social leasing, and HAP tenancies, replacing this inefficient spending with publicly owned homes.
- » Increase social housing income limits to €45,000 per single person, and benchmark to wage increases.
- » Seek to increase Part V to 30% of developments.
- » Legislate for the 1973 Kenny Report proposals, for the compulsory purchase of lands at existing use value with stronger compulsory purchase powers for the development of housing.
- » Provide for stronger democracy for tenants and owner-occupiers of apartment buildings and housing estates, to give them control over management companies and a greater say in the management of common areas.
- » Pass Labour's Renter's Rights bill to limit no fault evictions and ensure stronger regulation of the private rented sector to give more protection to people's homes when they rent.
- » Give Councils more powers to impose large fines on those who leave buildings and land vacant for unacceptable periods of time.
- » Extend the rules on preventing dereliction to include occupied buildings as well as derelict ones.
- » Allocate funds to offset the additional cost of development of housing in brownfield and infill urban sites.
- » Make cost rental a condition of Croí Cónaithe (Cities) funding.
- » Lead a national conversation about how we can plan for old age in a way that maximises people's independence in sheltered housing and ensures their access to local shops and services.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT



Good planning with strong local participation should be the bedrock of our local government. It's what makes our communities function, and creates good, sustainable places to live, work and relax in. Your Labour Councillors will oppose developer led planning and will always put the needs of people and the environment at the heart of local development plans.

The stripping away of planning powers from local Councils by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil has weakened local democratic oversight and participation, and at the same time destroyed the reputation of An Bord Pleanála and slowed down the development of new housing and critical renewable energy developments.

The Labour Party wants to see planning powers back where they belong, in local government. Labour councillors have always and will continue to fight for good planning decisions that benefit the whole community, not the narrow commercial interests of the few.

- » Campaign for stronger planning enforcement, and the recruitment of a Clerk of Works role to monitor developments during construction to ensure compliance.
- » Properly engage with local communities when development plans are being drawn up, and fight to ensure local authorities have enough planners, architects and other skilled staff.
- » Insist on the provision of public services such as schools, creches, public transport, health care, and community facilities before large-scale housing developments are granted planning permission.
- » Seek to have public transport provision in place before commercial developments are granted planning permission, and encourage clustered rural and urban development to provide for sustainable communities.
- » Fight for the preservation of sufficient green space and public parks in urban areas, advocate for the preservation of green belts between existing urban areas and seek the provision of play areas as a condition for every 25 to 100 new housing units built.
- » Prioritise better planning protection for school playing fields and open spaces, including playgrounds and facilities for children and young people through the development plan process.
- » Make the provision of new allotments and community gardens a condition of new development and promote the creation of new growing spaces in existing communities.

- » Include provision for Student Accommodation as a specific objective in all City and County Development Plans and seek joint Local Authority/Third Level College Student Accommodation Development agreements in relevant Local Authority areas.
- » Establish pilot projects to involve the local community and their representatives to participate in the development of designs for future landmark buildings, street furniture and quality shop fronts.
- » Provide training to Councillors on the Planning and Development Act, and support knowledge sharing forums across Councils.
- » Maximise the public green spaces belonging to the local authority for recreational use.
- » Ensure that established public rights of way are protected and preserved through development plans and the planning process.
- » Support city and county development plans that include initiatives to improve our infrastructure for public transport, cycling and walking to reduce our reliance on cars.
- » Design housing and neighbourhoods to support the growing number of people likely to be affected by dementia in future.
- » Work to address the significant dysfunction between local authorities and Irish Water for the taking in charge of estates, and the development of zoned land.

At a national level Labour wants to:

- » Review the Planning and Development Act, return powers to local authorities, and restrict Ministerial directions.
- » Seek a transformational overhaul of the planning and development process in Ireland through a Green and White paper process consistent with the principle of subsidiarity.
- » Strengthen legislation to refuse future planning permission to developers who have failed to finish off housing developments in the past.
- » Introduce use it or lose clauses for developers who sit on planning permissions and increase existing enforcement penalties for those who break planning laws.



COMMUNITIES AND QUALITY OF LIFE



Vibrant cities and towns need to be focused on people's needs and serve their rural hinterlands. We will promote liveable villages, towns and cities, and advocate for a European-style culture of comfortable urban living and quality urban housing, alongside sustainable rural communities.

There must be appropriate sport and recreational facilities for all ages, more parks and cleaner beaches, supports for communities and faith groups.

Parks, Recreation and Public Amenities

Everyone deserves to have easy access to clean, healthy environments like parks, outdoor gym equipment, sports grounds, swimming pools, children's playgrounds, hill walks, beaches and woods, including for dog owners and for people practising sports.

- » Provide public play areas, regular audits of existing playgrounds and installation of new equipment and facilities like scooter parks and handball courts.
- » Ensure young people have indoor places to go. We will create spaces such as recreation areas, community buildings and youth cafés in council properties, with the aim of encouraging community leadership and social participation by young people.
- » Include autistic adults in creating autism-friendly spaces and take into account sensory considerations when designing public buildings and amenities.
- » Ensure Councils take a more proactive approach to the provision of community playing pitches that will be accessible to all codes and support the redevelopment of League of Ireland facilities. For example, Labour on Dublin City Council will work with Sporting Liberties to prioritise the delivery of a full size multi sports playing pitch at the Marrowbone Lane Depot Site as part of a sports campus at this location.
- » Support and promote EDI initiatives at local clubs to ensure that sport is inclusive and welcoming of all, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, or nationality.
- » Every town with a population of over 5,000 should have local authority provided recreational playing pitches.
- » Deliver improved changing facilities for women and girls at all public sporting grounds and facilities, and ensure that combined toilet, shower and changing rooms are designed, and available for use by people with complex and multiple impairments or other disability.

- » Ensure there are appropriate changing and family friendly facilities at public beaches, with enough bins and adequate council staffing year-round, and campaign for the environmental action needed to bring more of our beaches up to Blue Flag status by ending the release of raw sewage and tackling single use plastics.
- » Support initiatives to introduce more safe outdoor swimming places, like the Dublin and Cork Lido campaigns.
- » Support the work of the Voluntary Rescue Services across the country, promote water safety campaigns with local schools and community stakeholders, and review provision of lifeguard services and extend where recommended.
- » There are 38 towns with a population greater than 5,000 without a swimming pool, and Labour will campaign for central government funding to deliver these.
- » Promote the continued development of 'Green Gyms' in public parks and green spaces, with more structured spaces, and other amenities like outdoor table tennis and chess table installations.
- » Encourage the continued development of green walkways along old railway tracks, rivers, canals and coastal areas and support the development of non-profit walking and jogging clubs.
- » Introduce where appropriate designated enclosed areas in public parks for dogs to be off the leash.

Vibrant Urban Centres

- » Seek the employment of Town Regeneration officers with a full back team in each local authority, including a dedicated Clerk of Works to progress urban regeneration projects, especially under the Town Renewal Scheme.
- » Support campaigns to reduce street clutter, and improve the appearance of our streets, public squares, and pedestrianised areas by investing in good design of street furniture, signage, and public utilities.
- » Provide for play areas in urban street locations, and appropriate bike sheds and bunkers, buggy and cargo bike parking in our cities and town centres.
- » Introduce a scheme to financially compensate town centre businesses that commit to provide access to toilet facilities for visitors, and campaign for the reopening and provision of new public toilets facilities.
- » Seek an improvement in street sweeping and publish a regular schedule for such cleaning.
- » Audit above the shop spaces in urban centres to ensure it is being used for business or accommodation purposes and explore local schemes for the retrofitting of multiple above-the-shop dwellings in town and city centres into single, integrated housing projects that can have proper access, operating independently of owners/occupiers of ground floor retail premises.

- » Campaign for Age Friendly Towns where older people are actively involved in social, economic, and cultural life and in creating a better local environment, to everybody's benefit.

Support Communities

All Councils should be empowered to work with the communities they serve. Labour Councillors will ensure that your local council is co-operating meaningfully with community, voluntary and neighbourhood groups that work to enhance people's lives.

- » Seek to allocate discretionary capital funding to support upkeep and maintenance works for community centres and other local facilities in the annual budget.
- » Work with local councils to make it easier for community groups to overcome barriers like insurance costs and accessing event permits.
- » Continue to support Tidy Towns Committees, Local Hero groups and community environmental maintenance groups but ensure these are not used as a substitute for work that should be carried out by the Council.
- » Provide local grants for, and promote little free neighbourhood libraries, and in coastal areas beach toy libraries.
- » Provide support for the development of neighbourhood shed shares for gardening tools, and equipment.
- » Support community swap events for Halloween and Christmas outfits, toys, bikes and other reusable equipment like buggies, car seats and sports equipment.
- » Campaign so that all neighbourhoods have access to affordable, and where possible free-of-charge, public spaces for use by community groups, and promote the use of public buildings after hours by non-profit community groups.
- » Develop strategies to address loneliness through social prescribing, working with local development companies, family resource centres and other stakeholders.
- » Provide more opportunities for people to be active citizens, especially for people from minority groups, people with disabilities and others who are under-represented in public life.
- » Encourage local authorities to provide information about local volunteering opportunities.
- » Address the problem of noise pollution and anti-social noise in local communities, by making the procedures for dealing with noise issues more accessible and ensuring that complaints are dealt with in a timely manner.

Ireland is now a vibrant multi-faith country. While upholding the principle of State secularism and pluralism we will support religious communities when they wish to hold festivals in line with their faiths.

- » Recognise the growing need for the provision of more secular spaces in local communities for life events such as weddings, funerals, and family gatherings.
- » Support religious communities in securing suitable spaces for worship and in maintaining their properties as hubs in the local community.
- » Ensure councils provide appropriate burial grounds for people of all faiths and for people who are not religious, including Columbarium walls for interring the remains of those who have been cremated.

Libraries and Educational Supports

Labour Councillors will continue to campaign for increased resources for our local libraries, the opening of new facilities, and support the great work carried out by their staff.

- » Seek funding to extend library opening hours and outreach programmes for those from marginalised and disadvantaged groups, including people with literacy or learning difficulties.
- » Ensure the capital programme provides for maintenance and refurbishment work in your local library, and support new libraries for growing communities.
- » Enhance the role of libraries as resource hubs for those seeking training or work, or wanting to set up their own business, with a dedicated focus on social enterprise, especially in the circular economy.
- » Promote library outreach and increase mobile library services in rural and disadvantaged communities. Ensure a proactive programmatic approach to ensure those most in need of library services are supported to update on the service through outreach and engagement programmes.
- » Encourage more digital literacy and online safety through library programmes that help older people in particular access online services and raise awareness of internet scams.
- » Allocate funding for homework clubs, family resource centres and community centres, run by family support and community development workers.

Safer Communities – Crime and Policing

Councillors must have a central role on Community Safety Partnerships to root these in local democracy as representatives of their areas. We know the benefits of local Joint Policing Committees when it comes to combating crime. Labour Councillors will work to improve the relationship between local councils and the Gardaí, and to promote community policing.

- » Unaddressed adverse childhood experiences, poverty, and trauma can compromise the safety of communities and lead to intergenerational cycles of crime. Promote a prevention and early intervention approach to interrupt such cycles as part of local policing plans and other local authority initiatives.

- » Promote and facilitate more local policing forums at neighbourhood level to reconnect local people to their Community Gardai.
- » Support more Home Security schemes to be put in place to help people, especially older members of our community, upgrade the locks and security systems on their homes.
- » Rural crime is on the rise, and many communities are rightly extremely worried. Labour funded the rural CCTV scheme, and we want to see it developed further to deter crime and speeding.
- » Campaign for the re-establishment of the Community Graffiti Reduction Programme with funding for public bodies, community groups and businesses to remove graffiti, to improve landscapes and to divert young people into community arts activities including graffiti art zones, while also calling for a minimum age to purchase spray paint.
- » Insist on good planning standards in terms of safe and well-lit, inclusive public spaces that prevent the development of anti-social behaviour black spots and provides safe spaces for women and girls in the public realm.
- » Review Council bye-laws on anti-social behaviour such as the possession or consumption of alcohol or the use of public spaces, ensure their effective enforcement, and proactively manage and prevent the development of such blackspots.
- » Work with Drug and Alcohol Taskforces at local and regional levels to ensure communities are resourced.
- » Propose local authorities to play the role of community mediation to resolve local disputes between neighbours.
- » Work with Council Officials, Community groups and An Garda Síochána to control the unlawful and dangerous use of scrambler motorcycles on public roads and on public land, and the use of e-scooters on footpaths.

At a national level:

- » Labour wants visible policing for every community through the recruitment and deployment of more community Gardaí, and active measures to improve recruitment and retention of Gardaí.
- » Oversight of local and community policing should be devolved to local authorities, where local policing plans should be approved.

Childcare

Many families are struggling to secure a local childcare place for their child, and it is still completely unaffordable for so many parents. There simply aren't enough creche and early year places. Labour believes local councils could and should have a greater role in the provision of affordable childcare facilities. Under government plans City and County Childcare Committees will be centralised into a new national agency, Childcare Ireland. We would instead allocate more powers to local authorities to roll out a public led system of early years in Ireland.

- » Local Authorities should actively support the development of new community, and co-operative childcare facilities to address the shortage of places.
- » There must be rigorous enforcement of the provision for a childcare facility for every 75-100 new homes in new developments, and recognition of the need for afterschool services too.
- » At a national level, Labour would begin the rollout of a universal public early years model, with a guaranteed place for every child and professional wages for the staff working there.



ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE



To really empower local government to lead on climate change will require action at a national level, and Labour would designate councils as Energy Authorities with a responsibility for promoting renewable energy, community energy co-operatives, and council led retrofitting of streets and estates. In the meantime there is much Labour Councillors will still seek to do.

Climate Action

- » Ensure Local Authority Climate Action Plans are resourced and implemented and hold the Executive to account on their plans and targets.
- » Increase native tree planting across all local authority areas, with urban pocket forests, and nature restoration.
- » Allocate specific Climate Action funds in each Budget to finance practical ways to reduce emissions.
- » Seek updated Just Transition plans for every local area as part of the Development plan process.
- » Support the adoption of a local food procurement policy to ensure that councils support their local suppliers and reduce carbon footprint.

Energy

- » Seek the installation of solar panels on publicly owned and council buildings, and the conversion of carparks into solar carports as is being done in France.
- » Foster and support the rollout of the SEAI Sustainable Energy Communities programme, and carry out Energy Poverty surveys of Council tenants, disadvantaged and marginalised communities.
- » Support the rollout of district heating in urban settings, and work to ensure Councils invest more in retrofitting, and support the hiring of apprentices.

Climate Mitigation

As our climate changes we are already seeing more extreme weather events with increased risks of flooding due to intense bursts of rainfall, and wind damage from stronger storms.

- » Update and communicate to at-risk communities and residents the response plan for local flooding events, improve the availability of sandbags, and hold local town halls on how best to prepare for flooding and what defences are best.
- » Seek more investment in flood protection for towns and villages that need protection against extreme weather events, with a focus also on working with nature through land management to slow down rivers and water flow.
- » Work to secure community support for flood defence schemes, support sustainable drainage systems, work to increase permeability, and audit the capacity of existing drainage systems.
- » Ensure coastal local authorities reassess the risk of coastal erosion and storm damage to support affected communities, and review their harbour policies.

Biodiversity and Environment

- » In urban areas carry out a Public Tree Census, develop local native tree planting plans, and work to increase biodiversity through no mow zones, and nature restoration plans.
- » Commit to restoring habitats on council owned parks and other lands including mixed species afforestation and peatland restoration with more designated areas left to be wild.
- » Ensure hedgerows are protected, and sustainably managed.
- » Report on local species diversity and outline plans to protect and enhance habitats to ensure that the populations of native species are sustainable.
- » Promote allotments and community gardens, and report on how under-utilised land can be repurposed for these uses in urban areas.

Circular Economy, Pollution and Waste management

- » Expand the circular economy by supporting community repair hubs in libraries, and other civic buildings, fostering social enterprises focused on reusing materials and promoting local enterprises that offer repair services.
- » Seek expanded local air pollution monitoring and designate clean air zones.
- » Look for longer opening hours of recycling and bring centres especially at weekends, the provision of more public bins, and the introduction of underground waste bins in denser urban areas to reduce street clutter.
- » Reduce reliance on single-use plastic bottles by providing more public water fountains in civic buildings, public parks, and designated urban areas.
- » Take action on food waste at local level, to minimise food spoilage and to encourage the redistribution of surplus food by producers and retailers.

- » Promote an expansion in the collection of household organic waste and the development of more local composting facilities as part of allotments and community gardens.
- » Strongly enforce existing legislation on environmental crime, such as illegal dumping and graffiti. Use modern technology and CCTV to trace those responsible for illegal dumping, littering and pollution. Ensure each Council has a plan to tackle this, and use the national powers provided through Labour's CCTV amendment.

At a National Level:

- » Re-Municipalise waste collection as a public service, and incentivise reduction of waste, and repair of products over disposal.
- » Guarantee that water services remain in public ownership, and that investment is targeted at reducing leaks, and ensuring connections to the mains is not a barrier to new housing development.
- » Designate councils as Energy Authorities with increased responsibility for addressing energy poverty, retrofitting, and district heating.
- » Transfer the Aircraft Noise Competent Authority from Fingal Council to the Environment Protection Agency.



SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT



Labour Councillors will ensure that city and county development plans include initiatives that improve our infrastructure for public transport, cycling and walking in order to reduce our reliance on cars.

On the basics, Labour Councillors will support traffic calming, address delays in fixing potholes, ensure road paint lines are visible, support cycleways, and regular audits of road conditions and accident blackspots.

There is a chronic shortage of funding for the maintenance of local and regional roads across the country which are in a dangerous state after winter storms and changed weather patterns, and Labour Councillors will be seeking increased funding for restoration work.

Your Labour Councillors will campaign for:

- » **Active Travel:** support new cycle ways and other active transport infrastructure including BusConnects and improved pedestrian facilities. We need more continuous and segregated cycleways especially in urban centres, safe counter-flow cycle lanes, secure cycle stands in towns and at schools, and safe routes for schoolchildren cycling to school.
- » **Accessible Public Spaces:** Town and city centres should be designed to be walkable spaces, not dominated by cars and other vehicles.
- » **Cycling Officers:** ensure every council has a dedicated full time Cycling Officer to promote cycling and insist on primacy for cycling and pedestrian improvements in local road projects.
- » **Public Transport Surveys:** in county areas, have the Council carry out a public transportation survey to identify all deficiencies in bus, rail and private hire provision, and have the results sent to the NTA, then have representatives from the NTA, Irish Rail, Bus Éireann and other relevant providers attend a meeting with local Councillors to address the identified concerns.
- » **Bus Shelters:** provide more bus shelters with suitable seating in both urban and rural areas. Providing proper shelter from Irish weather will encourage greater use of public transport. A local programme could:
 - develop plans for the development of local networks and seek national funding for a build programme.
 - carry out local design competitions for the shelters that reflects local vernacular architecture, heritage, and culture.

- develop bus shelters as a hub for local public information with community noticeboards.
- Provide secure bicycle storage facilities at all bus shelters and transport hubs.

» **Expand City Bikes and Town Bike Schemes:** across urban areas of more than 5,000 people campaign for the expansion and development of new City and Town Bike schemes focused first on linking public transport hubs with landmark facilities such as colleges, business and shopping centres, libraries and hospitals.

» **Electric Car Charging Points:** ensure there are enough on street electric car charging points in denser urban areas, prioritise using public lampposts where possible, and survey and support increased provision in rural areas.

» **No Idling Zones:** Introduce no-idling zones around schools with local bye-laws.

» **Park and Ride:** promote more park and ride facilities in city and suburban areas, with discount rates to increase uptake, and encourage carpooling.

» **Improve Public Transport:** pursue new solutions to extend services and improve journey times including:

- There should be a dedicated town bus service, starting with those towns with a population of over 20,000.
- Work with the School Transport Scheme to see where additional rural transport options can be provided using existing services.
- Ensure new junction designs prioritise pedestrians and cyclists first, then buses.
- Seek extended night, evening and early morning services, especially at peak times like Christmas and at weekends.
- Introduce monthly car free days in urban centres.

At a national level:

» Ensure transport funding continues to prioritise active travel and public transport and introduce a Bike to School scheme to make bicycles more affordable like the Cycle to Work scheme did.

» Make the National Transport Authority more accountable to local authorities, devolve transportation powers to Councillors, and designate the local authority as a transport authority for rural areas to ensure adequate service provision.

» Fund the expansion of City Bikes as a publicly owned resource, and expand into towns.

ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE



Across Ireland we have a wonderful resource in our culture, and local heritage, and the community of artists and creatives who reflect our values and spirit. Labour has a proud record of supporting our community arts organisations and promoting inclusive community cultural activities. We will continue to do so right across the country.

- » Ensure that libraries, arts and cultural centres have longer opening hours, especially at evenings, weekend and on bank holidays.
- » Campaign for the provision of more publicly owned spaces for artists and cultural activities, including the use of derelict and vacant spaces in urban centres.
- » Promote the installation of local sculpture and art in public parks and spaces.
- » Support traditional Irish festivals and parades, including promotion of our Irish language.
- » Promote vibrant main streets as the centre of all activity in towns and villages and introduce schemes to enable the temporary use of empty shops by artists and community groups.
- » Introduce a scheme to offer exhibition space in community and civic buildings to local artists.
- » Ensure children and families have access to community-based arts and cultural activities.
- » Continue to support the publication of local and county histories, and the development and protection of county archives.
- » Carry out a census of plaques on local buildings that highlight buildings of historical importance and the lives of famous inhabitants and hold a public call for new additions to recognise those who have made a significant local or national contribution to public life.
- » Protect the character and heritage of our historic village centres, and ensure local heritage sites are recognised, protected, and maintained.
- » Work with local schools on the publication of short biographies on famous women and men who have lived in the area.
- » Support local schools, youth groups and libraries in enhancing their music resources and to provide access to musical training and instruments for the benefit of local communities.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM



Local authorities have a critical role in supporting balanced regional and economic development. The Labour Party believes we now also need to ensure there is a rebalancing towards also supporting community development, and a closer working relationship with the community and voluntary sector to build solidarity and democratic input.

Tourism

- » Propose that every Council produces a new tourism strategy with a public survey looking at the variety and quality of accommodation, signage, visitor facilities, visitor attractions, heritage, eco, arts and sports tourism potential, and the cleaning and maintenance of streets and roadsides to ensure they are as attractive as possible.
- » Develop local tourist trails like the East Westmeath Tourist Trail with integrated signage, and promotion by the local authority and Fáilte Ireland.
- » Develop Camper Van “Aire” facilities in suitable locations around the country to encourage local development opportunities and tourism provision based partially on the “Graiguenamanagh” model of joint Community/Tourism provision.

Rural Development

- » Seek to implement our Labour Towns and Villages policy proposals including Town partnerships.
- » Ensure that public transport surveys are carried out to assess the level of service provision.
- » Foster farmer and local producer markets, to incentivise farmers and local agricultural to diversify into local-need agriculture and horticultural produce.
- » Support partnerships between local authorities and farmers to provide Community Supported Agriculture, for example on land that is not in use by the local authority.
- » Ensure the council proactively supports the retention of core community infrastructure including Post Offices, banks, Garda Stations, schools and local shops.
- » Support a public community banking model modelled on the German Sparkassen model, to support rural and regional development.
- » Campaign for subsidies to be made available for rural hackney/taxi schemes, to ensure people in rural areas can access shops and services in neighbouring villages and towns.

- » Empower local councils to fund pilot rural public transport schemes, community car schemes, and volunteer programmes to help people who need a lift to hospital appointments or other once off trips.

Local Development

- » Work with local councils to ensure that their economic plans are focused on creating sustainable jobs, especially in rural areas and disadvantaged urban areas
 - Labour councillors are extremely supportive of LoveLocal campaigns and will support initiatives to ensure the viability of local towns and community shopping streets.
 - Boost local shops and town centre services, as an alternative to out of town shopping centres with better and more affordable public transport.
 - Review the effect of local council rates on the ability of local shops and services to allow local businesses to compete with online shopping.
 - Seek for local councils to advance the availability of broadband in towns and hubs.
 - Improve roads and other transport infrastructure that are under local government control and require harbour plans to be developed.
 - Support the ongoing development of Night Mayors in urban areas to support the development of the night economy while ensuring public safety and noise control is kept in check. Nightlife officers could explore ways of financially supporting late night venues that are not viable on a purely commercial basis, as well as ensuring evening activities are available for teenagers as a socialising option, such as nighttime sports.



DEMOCRACY, EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS



Local authorities must be transparent, and accessible to all local residents, not just serving those who shout loudest. Labour Councillors will work to ensure our values of solidarity, fairness and equality are reflected in how your local council works to support minorities, women, older people, those with disabilities and new migrant communities.

Democratic Accountability

- » Ensure greater accountability from the Local Authority Chief Executive, and that they attend municipal district and area meetings once every quarter.
- » Review and reform Public Participation Networks to ensure they continue to provide real benefits to local communities.
- » Trial new ways to give local communities and the people who live there a voice, to discuss and propose ideas for their neighbourhoods, such as community forums or “town hall” style public meetings as well as online forums.
- » Support the development and extension of participatory budgeting at local level.
- » Ensure that Irish speakers can engage with their local council as Gaeilge, and that each Council has a resourced strategy for the Irish language that includes a staffed Irish language unit and an Irish language committee.
- » Mandate local councils to produce materials in Plain English to meet the needs of people who do not have strong English or literacy concerns.
- » Meetings of the Council should rotate through different towns to increase visibility and accessibility of the Council’s deliberations.
- » Introduce public petition systems for local councils.
- » Increase transparency, and ensure all Council meetings including SPCs are public, and live-streamed, with a playback function for all archived meetings.
- » Each Council should have a single data hub.

At a national level:

- » Support the introduction of directly elected Mayors in our major urban areas.
- » Increase the number of reserved functions for Councillors and reduce the range of decisions that Chief Executives can make without reference to elected representatives.

- » State agencies that make decisions that impact on local communities such as the HSE, TII, EPA, An Garda Síochána, NTA, Solas and many others should be accountable to local councils for decisions that impact locally.

Gender Equality

Labour is proud to have been the strongest advocate for greater gender equality in Ireland for many decades.

- » 40% of our candidates for local elections will be women, as it was in 2019.
- » Local councils should be leaders when it comes to reporting on gender pay gaps. Each council should publish statistics on its own workforce in terms of the gender of employees at every grade, the gender pay gap, the employment of those from ethnic minorities, the employment of people with disabilities, and the employment of people from other minorities.
- » We will seek a greater proportion of women to be employed at management level in local government, and every council should carry out equality impact assessments.
- » Build on the “We’re Breastfeeding Friendly” campaigns so that every council in Ireland takes part, and rollout out more breastfeeding spaces and benches.
- » ‘Period Poverty’ affects girls and women who require sanitary products but are unable to afford them. Following campaigns by Labour Councillors many councils are trialling free period products on a pilot basis. Free sanitary products should be provided in all public buildings. This should now be followed by menopause action plans.
- » Councils should be more proactive in the provision of domestic violence refuges and show flexibility and sensitivity towards victims of domestic violence (some of whom may have tenancies or joint ownership of a home) so that they are not barred from local council housing and then forced to choose between homelessness and returning to an abusive home.

As we saw with recent protests against books in our libraries, councils provide vital supports to the LGBTQ+ community, and Labour Councillors will continue to work for greater equality, support local Pride parades, and safe spaces for LGBTQ+ youth.

Accessibility and Older People

- » Ensure every local authority has a full time Access Officer and a Disability and Inclusion Steering Committee.
- » Support age-friendly activities and Older Persons Councils to recognise the growing number and needs of older people in our communities.
- » Support Make Way Days but ensure every day that all shared spaces are designated as safe travel areas for older people, children, and persons with disabilities.
- » Campaign for more autism friendly towns and villages, allocate funding for necessary changes, and consult with neurodivergent community members about the changes they need.

- » All local council policies, developments and services must be disability proofed, meaning that the effects on people with disabilities should be clearly identified and given due consideration during the planning phases, and that DPOs are properly consulted with in a UNCRPD compliant way.
- » There must be safe and unimpeded access for people with disabilities on all footpaths and to all public buildings, and we'll advocate for a greater number of people with disabilities to be employed by local councils.
- » Ensure that council websites are fully accessible for people with additional needs and meet the standards of the EU accessibility directive (guaranteeing that persons with sight, hearing or dexterity needs can use local council websites as two-way communication portals).
- » Advocate for mandatory disability equality training for all local council staff, to include understanding of neurodiversity, mental health issues and learning difficulties, for example to simplify application forms.
- » Seek for more weekend services for people with disabilities, especially in rural areas where many supports are only available on weekdays.

Integration

Local councils should reach out more to new communities, and support minorities through information and education initiatives, to foster social inclusion and intercultural understanding.

- » Adopt a proactive anti-racist approach by opposing all attempts to sow division through anti-immigrant sentiment.
- » Review the role of Local Authority Integration Teams, to widen the remit beyond refugees, and increase resources for community response forums and integration officers.
- » Collaborate with local communities to support the successful integration of migrants and new Irish communities.
- » Ensure the necessary support is there for people from minority communities to hold festivals and other events celebrating their culture and traditions, and support access to public buildings for community activities.
- » It's important for a greater number of ethnic minorities, including Travellers, to be employed by local councils, and we'll push councils to ensure better job opportunities.
- » Demand all funds for Traveller housing are drawn down and used at local level.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUDGETS



As the party of the trade union movement, Labour will fight for decent pay and conditions, and the right to trade union representation, for any worker working directly for local councils or contracted by them. Labour Councillors will seek to embed the principles of Community Wealth Building into local economic development through progressive procurement, insourcing, making public land and property available for local uses, and the greater use of co-operatives. We believe there must be a much stronger role for local councils in supporting and fostering community development, but to achieve these goals requires the devolution of more functions and responsibility to democratically elected Councillors.

Workers' Rights and Ethical Development

- » Demand that all local councils provide decent pay and conditions to their employees and to anyone contracted to deliver goods or services.
- » Campaign for the increased employment of general operatives, craft workers and apprentices especially for housing, retrofitting and road maintenance.
- » Ensure the fire service is fully resourced, that stations are adequately staffed, and that fire risks are mapped and assessed in Dublin and denser urban areas.
- » Campaign for much stronger social clauses in all local council contracts and procurement, with requirements for decent pay and conditions, paying the Living Wage as the minimum. Council employees and contracted employees must have the right to trade union recognition and collective bargaining.
- » Ensure that all towns develop Living Wage and local Fair Trade initiatives.
- » Incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals in Councils' long-term strategies, budgets, performance indicators and reports.
- » Support access to Local Enterprise Office business supports for social enterprises, including increased local financial support, and policies that improve access to local procurement contracts.
- » Support Palestinian solidarity initiatives and the BDS movement at a local authority level.

Council Budgets and Finances

The European average for spending at local level is 21.6% but Ireland ranks fourth from the bottom with only 8.4% spent by local authorities. In Denmark it is 66%.

Labour Councillors will continue to ensure that the public are getting the best value for money but to deliver more services, they need more financial autonomy.

- » Propose that a portion of public budgets are set aside for participatory budgeting on each local authority to give local communities more say in the spending that takes place in their neighbourhoods.
- » Seek that the local authority public procurement budget and any other grants or supports to business have strong conditionality on workers' rights and collective bargaining, environmental and social standards.
- » Embed Community Wealth Building in our approach to development.
- » Ensure Councils adopt gender budgeting practices in their annual budget processes.
- » Support the principle of fair taxation of property and assets at local level and seek for local councils to have greater flexibility to modify the level of Local Property Tax (LPT).
- » Any additional revenue raised from LPT will be used to resource housing provision, climate adaptation and public realm improvements. Only in Dublin have Councillors from other parties continued to cut taxes for the wealthiest.
- » Pursue budget transparency by having Councils publish Plain English annual statements about local government revenue and spending, to demonstrate value for money for commercial rates, Local Property Tax and other local taxes and charges.

At a national Level:

The financial independence and autonomy of local councils needs to be strengthened but this can only be done by government. It is time to reduce interference by central government and other public agencies in deciding annual council budgets.

- » Grant allocations, and funding allocations from national government must be fair and transparent.
- » Councils should have 100% control over the Local Property Tax raised in their area, with separate national funding schemes for other local authorities.
- » Revenues from the Vacant Home tax and Residential Zoned Land Tax should be allocated to the Council it is collected from. This will ensure local councils have an incentive to identify empty homes. Active farming land should be exempt.
- » Give councils the option of introducing discretionary tourist levies, to fund local arts, culture and heritage facilities and festivals as is common in other European cities.
- » Ensure government departments and agencies pay local commercial rates as they did until the 1980s.

- » Commission a study of a Site Value Tax (SVT) as a future replacement for commercial rates, and give councils more power and flexibility to use commercial rates to achieve policy objectives.

We believe in the need to look at other countries to see how local councils deal with funding. For example, other countries allocate some tax revenue from income tax or VAT directly to local government. This should form part of a comprehensive reform of local government, with devolution of more powers, functions and responsibility.





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