

# Progressive Democrats

An Páirtí Daonlathach

## Local Elections Manifesto 2004



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## Introduction by An Tánaiste and Party Leader, Mary Harney, T.D.

This manifesto holds our commitments and our ideas for better local government for our society.

I am proud of our candidates who are making these commitments to their communities.

The majority are new to politics.

They are people who have the courage of their convictions to run for public office. They are not looking for safe seats or honours or recognition. They are courageous and caring people offering service to their communities.

The Progressive Democrats put ourselves forward in these local elections on the basis we have always sought support from the public:

- we will work in the public interest with integrity and independence
- we offer policy ideas and solutions, based on our principles, that we believe will improve our communities and our country
- we will remain accountable to, and in touch with, the electorate.

Our country has done very well in recent years. In every county, the population has grown, employment is up and standards of living have improved.

There remain many challenges. And there will always be challenges for people who want to see constant improvement for their country.

Our economic success spurs us on to be more ambitious for Ireland. In the Progressive Democrats, we believe we can overcome the barriers that hold us back in small things at local level as well as big things at national level.

With ideas, hard work and dedication, we have shown we can implement change at national level.

We ask your support in these local elections and we are confident that with your support we can deliver progress in our local communities.

With best wishes.



Mary Harney, T.D.  
Tánaiste and Leader of the Progressive Democrats

*"We work in government for social justice.  
Social justice means jobs, no forced emigration, and opportunity through education.  
Social justice means real pensions increases and real support for carers.  
Social justice means hospital treatment for public patients who have waited the longest.  
Social justice means fair prices and fair competition, no cartels and no compo culture.  
Social justice means respect for the law, respect for the courts and respect for the Gardaí."*

Annual Party Conference Speech, 27 March 2004

#### Crime and anti-social behaviour:

- new local authority committees to work with Gardaí
- use powers to set policy on closing times for bar extensions
- new role for Community Wardens
- more CCTV, better street lighting
- tougher sentences for major crimes

#### Housing:

- support strong supply of social and private housing
- require community facilities in all new housing developments
- landlords getting rents from public funds to get tax clearance cert
- make identity of registered landlords publicly available

#### Planning:

- stronger enforcement with dedicated enforcement units
- publication of all enforcement notices
- end private windfall profits from re-zoning of land
- allow one off homes for rural dwellers with proper planning
- support clustered development in villages and rural settings
- review of fee for planning objections and comments

#### Waste:

- bin charges: pay by weight or pay by volume
- bin charge exemptions for low earners in all counties
- strictly enforce law on bin charges and litter
- more recycling and composting facilities

#### Better local services:

- insist on clear value for money in local expenditure
- more customer-friendly local services
- remove insurance obstacles for community events
- publication of all spurious compensation claims
- support competition for consumers in planning for shops
- greater use of local referenda
- directly-elected mayors with clearly defined powers
- make better use of publicly-owned transport in rural areas

#### Decentralisation:

- support government plan for large-scale decentralisation
- work in local authorities to make it happen

## Section 1: Our people, our beliefs, our record

We in the Progressive Democrats are people from all walks of life in Ireland.

We are urban and rural, old and young, students, salaried, self-employed and unemployed.

We work on the land, in offices, in factories, in schools and hospitals, in the caring professions and the commercial professions.

We come from every county in the country. And our policies and beliefs come from all our people.

We share beliefs and values that are independent of civil war politics, class, race or social background. We believe in opportunity for every person in our country, whatever their background or starting point in life.

We are liberal: we trust and respect individual freedom.

We believe in the power of choice, competition and enterprise to deliver lasting prosperity and social justice for Ireland.

We are ambitious for Ireland. We are a party of change, of ideas and of innovation.

We share a commitment to getting things done for our country.

We passionately believe that we should never settle for second best for Ireland in any area, be it roads, jobs, public order, insurance, education, health services, trade or enterprise. And we are committed to taking action in government, not just protesting in opposition.

We are prepared to break the barriers to first rate performance for Ireland.

We have already changed the thinking and the set ways in order to implement solutions. And we'll continue to do that.

We believe that the only sustainable government actions are based on the sound management of public finances and getting best value for money.

And we believe that government at all levels, local, national and European, must be straight, open and transparent. That means government that serves the wide public interest, not the narrow vested interest.

### ***Our belief: Basic social justice means jobs and no forced emigration.***

Our record:

- 400,000 more jobs since 1997
- 600,000 more jobs and an end to emigration in last ten years
- Unemployment below 5% one of the lowest in Europe
- New exciting opportunities for jobs in research and development
- By 2001, poverty cut to a third of the level of 1994

***Our belief: Low tax is fair tax, promoting more economic activity.  
Low tax requires high tax compliance, in fairness.***

Our record:

- 90 per cent of the minimum wage is exempt from tax.
- Tánaiste introduced minimum wage, €7 per hour from 1st February.
- Wages are up, taxes are down:
  - Average industrial wage up €10,000 since 1997, now over €29,000;
  - tax on average industrial wage down from 28% to 18%.
  - tax/levies in 1997, €5,500. Now €5,100, on much higher wage.
- Firm commitment to tax average industrial wage taxed at standard rate only
- Low business taxes have increased resources massively for public services: e.g. corporation taxes up from €1.8bn in 1997 to over €5bn now.
- Most income tax comes from higher earners: 80 per cent of income tax is paid by top 22 per cent of earners.
- Progressive closing of tax avoidance schemes.
- New powers and better enforcement by Revenue yielding billions in tax revenue.

***Our belief: Care for older people is a basic social duty***

Our record:

- We have committed the SSIA hundreds of millions of tax revenue to care for older people.
- We first campaigned for and delivered £100 per week pension.
- The old age pension is up from €99 in 1997 to €167.
- We will deliver €200 pension in this government.
- All initiatives for Carers have been introduced with the Progressive Democrats in government.

***Our belief: Social justice also means consumers getting fair prices.***

Our record:

- Insurance prices down and compo culture being tackled by the Tánaiste and the Minister for Justice
- New consumer focus in financial regulator, IFSRA
- New consumer panel appointed by the Tánaiste
- Inflation down below 1.5 per cent

***Our belief: Competition benefits all consumers***

Our record:

- Three times more taxis in three years, since de-regulation in November 2000

<i>Taxi numbers</i>	<i>Before (2000)</i>	<i>After (2003)</i>
Dublin	2,722	9,320
Whole country	3,934	12,809

- Government to allow freedom for Shannon and Cork airports to develop in competition with Dublin
- Firm government policy to introduce competition in bus transport by franchising routes
- Strengthened Competition Authority

***Our belief: Regional economic development is essential***

Our record:

- The government is investing massive amounts in roads, rail, hospitals, schools and broadband for the whole country.
- €5.5 billion being invested this year alone, nearly €1,400 for every person in the country.
- Decentralisation programme promised by the Tánaiste in April 2003 has now begun.
- We are building an Ireland of the regions.

***Our belief: Education is the key to opportunity***

Our record:

- We committed in our 2002 manifesto to bringing the primary school buildings budget over €200 million. We have already met this target.  
The primary school building programme is now at an all time high of over €200m.
- Total investment in schools buildings is €387m.
- 6,000 more teachers in schools.

***Our belief: Social justice includes crime prevention, respect for the law, and support for Gardai***

Our record

- Minister for Justice has introduced reforming Crime Bill.
- New laws made to combat drink-induced public disorder
- Comprehensive Garda modernisation Bill introduced

- Major crimes are down:

Provisional crime figures for 2003:

	2002	2003	Change
Murder	52	46	-12%
Rape / sexual assault	2,249	2,002	-18%
Assault causing harm	5,016	3,946	-21%

These and other levels of crime are obviously still far too high but clear progress is being made.

### ***Our belief: Patients come first in health services***

Our record:

- National Treatment Purchase Fund has treated over 12,000 people
- Treatment expected for 12,000 people in 2004
- Over €10bn for health this year – 3 times 1997 level.
- Over €70m invested in GP co-ops since 2000 for better out of hours services; 1,200 GPs taking part so far.
- Comprehensive reform policies: health boards being abolished and new single health executive being put in place.

### ***Our belief: Services for people with disabilities are a priority***

Our record:

- Priority given to disability services when additional funding became available last year: in July, €30m more and in the Budget, €25 million on top of the normal increase.
- Education for People with Disabilities Bill introduced.
- Disabilities Bill will provide right to assessment and will reach best international standards on the legal basis for services.

### ***Our belief: The public should get best value for money from State assets***

Our record:

- Ministers McDowell, Tim O'Malley and Tom Parlon have begun the process of selling land at the Central Mental Hospital in order to fund an entirely new mental hospital.
- Minister Tom Parlon in OPW is selling under-used State land to invest in urgently needed projects.
- We stood against an excessive stadium project and agreed an affordable stadium in Lansdowne Road that meets the needs of the sporting organisations.

***Our belief: Coalition government works better***

Our record:

- We work in government as an independent party.
- We implement policies based on an agreed Programme for Government.
- We seek to resolve differences to avoid unstable government.

***Our belief: Local government should be open and responsive to the real needs of local communities.***

Our record:

- Our local councillors work tirelessly for their communities.
- We have stood for openness and enforcement in planning.
- We have worked to set up and support the Tribunal of Enquiry into Planning (Flood / Mahon).

## Section 2: Ireland 2004 – our policies

### Public safety, policing and crime prevention

A major challenge for Ireland in 2004 is to ensure safe streets, public order and effective action to deter and detect crime and anti-social behaviour.

Our Party President and Minister for Justice, Michael McDowell, T.D. is leading government action to address this challenge. It is a challenge that affects every person, every family and every community in the country.

The Progressive Democrats work for a society where we can all feel safe in our homes, communities and businesses. To achieve that goal will require work at national level, at local level and within families.

Crime of all type is a direct attack on the common good. Major crime gets major media attention, but for all of us, it is often so-called 'petty' criminality and anti-social behaviour that undermines our quality of life and our sense of safety.

Many communities are also struggling with public disorder on their roads, in their estates and on their streets.

Some of this is not criminal in nature but is clearly anti-social and distressing to people who are within their rights to live in safe and respectful neighbourhoods.

We are fully aware of the wide range of issues involved, from the causes of anti-social and low level criminal behaviour to court procedures, sentencing policy and prison reform.

We support the key measures Michael McDowell has introduced at national level to fight crime.

#### Longer sentences for murder

- We support tougher prison sentences for those convicted of murder. In the past, the Parole Board considered for release people convicted of life imprisonment for murder after just 7 years.
- The Minister for Justice has tightened policy for those convicted of life imprisonment for murder. From now on, the Parole Board will wait until a prisoner has served at least 10 – 12 years before considering him/her for release. In the case of a person convicted of a murder carried out in the context of serious crime (e.g. gangland murder), at least 15 – 20 years must be served.

#### Public order

- The government is taking a tough approach to public disorder offences. The Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003 has tightened up the law by making it easier for Gardai to prosecute underage drinking and by putting an onus on publicans not to serve people who are already intoxicated.

#### Garda reform and increases

- We support the strengthening and the reform of An Garda Síochána.
- When the government came into office in 1997, full-time Garda numbers were 10,800. They are now up nearly 1,200 to approximately 12,200.
- We are committed to increasing Garda numbers to 14,000 as soon as budgetary circumstance permit.
- The Minister for Justice has introduced the Garda Síochána Bill in order to modernise management structures and to set up the Garda Ombudsman Commission.

### Combating crime and disorder at local level

- We want to reverse some of the erosion in the power of local authorities. Minister Michael McDowell has given additional powers to local authorities in combating crime.
- We will use the new powers of local authorities to set policy on closing time for bar extensions for licensed premises in their area. Under the Intoxicating Liquor Act 2003, local authorities may set general policy in this area once they have consulted with relevant local interests such as Gardaí, residents and representatives of the local licensed trade.
- We will set up local joint policing committees made up of Gardaí and local elected representatives under the Garda Síochána Bill 2004. These committees will allow for local representatives to make recommendations about local policing matters. They will also allow the Gardaí make recommendations to local authorities about steps which they can take to reduce crime e.g. in the design of housing estates, street lighting etc.
- Our councillors will work with local Gardaí to make the new joint policing committees effective in dealing with local crime.
- We will also be responsive to Garda suggestions for improving estates, sports facilities etc.

### More CCTV

- We will support a continued roll-out of the Garda Síochána's CCTV schemes across the country.
- Where the Garda do not install a CCTV scheme, we will grant aid local communities to provide their own schemes.

Government spending on CCTV systems is now 4.5 times the level of 1997. Where local partnerships comprising Gardaí and local interests have been set up – as in Cork for example – street crime has been reduced by as much as one third.

- We support improved public lighting in areas where there are public order problems and anti-social behaviour, and where it contributes to fighting crime and making our communities safer.

### Family responsibility

- We believe that personal and family responsibility go hand in hand with society's responsibilities. Parents have a major responsibility for their children's behaviour. That is why this government passed the Children's Act in 2001. This Act provides for:
  - the establishment of a Children's Court for speedier processing of crime by minors;
  - introduction of a fines structure for children found guilty of offences and for the payment of compensation by parents in respect of offences committed by their children;
  - court orders to parents to exercise proper control over their children; and,
  - the introduction of a curfew for children found guilty of offences.

### Community wardens

- We support an increased role for our Community Wardens.
- We will expand the pilot scheme currently operating in Galway County Council, Galway City Council, Leitrim County Council, Wexford County Council and Naas Town Council.

Under this scheme, wardens help build better communities by developing contacts with older and vulnerable people and with Neighbourhood Watch/Community Alert Schemes and act as a conduit back into the local authority on matters such as public lighting and activities in public parks. We want them to liaise with Gardaí in fighting anti-social and petty criminal behaviour.

## Housing

Ireland is building houses at one of the fastest rates in the world.

Last year, 69,000 houses were completed.

A sixth of all houses/apartments in Ireland have been built in the last seven years.

This is a testament to our strong economic performance. A decade ago, just over 20,000 new houses were being built annually.

This means we are rapidly modernising the housing stock for a changing society in Ireland.

Increasing supply is the only sustainable way to keep house prices from rising too fast. Government interventions in the housing market have been tried in good faith but have not always had the desired effect.

However, there is already evidence that the increase in the supply of housing has reduced rental levels and some experts believe that this will translate into lower price increases for house purchasers.

Significant progress has been made in recent years in relation to house completions by local authorities. Houses completed or acquired for social purposes by local authorities are now at record levels.

	<i>Acquired or completed</i>	
2000	3,207	
2001	5,022	
2002	5,074	
2003 (first nine months)	<b>3,504</b>	Commenced: <b>5,802</b>

This involves a significant investment of €1.8bn annually and demonstrates a significant commitment on behalf of the government.

Over 5,500 households have benefited under the Shared Ownership and Affordable Housing Schemes.

The government's social and affordable housing measures are meeting the needs of 13,000 households each year.

Housing policy is a critical function of local democracy.

### New housing

- We are fundamentally in favour of increasing the supply of housing, private and social, in Ireland and we will implement that in our decisions at local authority level.
- We strongly support the rapid building by local authorities of social housing. This is the most effective way to address housing waiting lists.
- We strongly support local authority tenants being enabled and encouraged to purchase houses they rent. We will work to extend this policy to local authority flats and apartments.

### Rural housing

- We believe that people should be able, if they wish, to build their house, set up home and work near where they grew up, particularly in rural areas.
- We favour permitting one-off housing in rural areas with proper planning. This should make it easier for people to get planning permission to build houses on family farms.

- The revitalization on rural communities means encouraging, not discouraging, new people to live in rural areas, subject to proper planning, and to integrate into community life.
- We favour new schemes to encourage the renovation or replacement of existing old or abandoned houses.
- We favour giving outline planning for standard, approved architectural designs and we will ensure that such outline permission is meaningful.
- We will emphasise and incentivise clustered housing in rural areas and villages, to include integrated community facilities, for social reasons and so that services can be provided most cost-effectively.
- We agree on the need for controls on building houses in certain settings for environmental reasons and for reasons related to the cost of providing services.

#### New community facilities

- We will require any new housing developments to include the building of community amenities in order to receive planning permission.
- We will also strictly require developers to complete basics such as footpaths and lighting.
- We will require the inclusion of proper playground, bicycle storage and recycling facilities in all new housing developments as part of planning permission.
- We will also require the development of new parks and green areas.
- We will proof all development projects for compatibility with broadband and communications infrastructure.

#### Design for sustainability, older people, people with disabilities

- In new apartment developments we believe a set proportion of all units must be designated as continental style 'family friendly' units, i.e. three to four bedrooms.
- We will emphasise the design of proposed houses for sustainability and environmental efficiency as much as the location of houses.
- Planning and building regulations for housing must also be designed to meet the needs of older people and people with disabilities. We favour making make best use of innovative design for older people now rather than re-engineering housing in coming decades.
- We will ensure that the design of new public buildings in our localities will also take account of the needs older people and people with disabilities.

#### Rental of private accommodation

- We favour requiring those landlords who receive more than a certain amount of rent from public sources to provide a tax clearance certificate.
- We also favour making publicly available the names of registered landlords so that the public can easily see who is responsible for the condition of properties in their neighbourhood.
- There must be a higher level of compliance with the requirement for landlords to register. This information must be kept up to date.

## Planning and development

Planning and development is a key issue in the local elections 2004.

People want a planning system that meets real needs for local economic development, for a good supply of affordable housing and for enhanced quality of life.

We are determined to ensure that murky planning decisions and windfall profits for small numbers of people are part of Ireland's past, not our future.

We are determined to create a planning system that is enforced.

As in crime, so in planning: **make the law, enforce the law.**

Enforcement required resources, political will and effective management.

Enforcing planning law and decisions is critical to public confidence in local government. Enforcement starts with the political direction and political will from elected representatives. Progressive Democrats local representatives will give this leadership.

### Practical planning enforcement

- We support much greater enforcement of planning rules and decisions at all levels and resourcing enforcement accordingly.
- We will require each Council to create a dedicated planning enforcement unit, with a specific budget, workplan and reporting line.
- We will insist that where developments go ahead and infringe planning conditions, work must stop until a fresh application for planning has been assessed and approved by the planning authority.
- All enforcement actions should be published on websites and elsewhere when possible.
- We will work for a culture of compliance with planning law.

### Planning objection fee

- We favour a review of the fee for planning objections and comment introduced in the Planning and Development Act 2000.

## Re-zoning and Development Land

The role of the price of land in house price increases provokes a lot of debate.

The All Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution recently completed a report that looked at the many issues involved. It made the fundamental point that it is the demand for housing that drives prices for redevelopment land higher, not the price of development land that is driving house prices.

This report, like many others, supports our view that the basic task is to increase the supply of housing to meet demand in order to stabilise house prices.

In addition, there is a real concern about some people making huge windfall profits on re-zoned land. There is also widespread public concern about some developers apparently holding on to development land without proceeding to build houses, thereby restricting supply and making prices rise faster.

The Progressive Democrats share these concerns.

We believe that the value of land that arises from a re-zoning decision by a local authority is not inherent in the land itself, but is created by public decision. Therefore, the public authority should capture more of the value that it has created by its own decision.

In other words, the development potential value of land should be treated separately from the existing use land value.

We do not believe that ownership of land entitles the owner to capture all the development potential value of the land that arises from a re-zoning decision.

This has resulted in windfall and lottery-like, arbitrary profits for some land owners and for people who speculate in land before re-zoning decisions.

### Development land value for public good

- We believe that a change in the law and practice at national level is needed to address this anomaly.
- We favour the separation of land value and development potential value and will implement the most effective means to achieve this in a fair and legal way.
- We favour significant increases in the supply of rezoned and serviced land as one way to keep upward pressure off house prices.
- We support actions to encourage the release of more development land by developers, for example, the public disclosure of options on land and the expiry of these options if not disclosed.

### End to windfall profits

- Where Compulsory Purchase Orders are used by local authorities to buy land, the price should not include the full value of development potential value. Only a portion of the proceeds of the development potential auction price should be allocated to the land owner.
- As strong advocates of the power of competition, we will strongly advocate all measures necessary by the Competition Authority to ensure that cartels do not operate in development land purchasing.

### Re-zoning decisions method

- We also favour a review of the means by which re-zoning decisions are made. While county development plans should remain the key basis for decisions and elected representatives the decision-makers, there is a need for an open, technically-based process that would recommend the quantity and location of land that should be re-zoned. A national agency could provide this assessment.

## National infrastructure and planning

Our national infrastructure is a key to our sustainable economic and social development. National infrastructure includes major roads, rail, energy, water and waste facilities.

Every region of the country needs national infrastructure. Planning delays to national infrastructure will only delay regional development. It is vital to the interests of local communities that national infrastructure is developed fast, in a sustainable and democratic way.

The Progressive Democrats in government are working on a Critical Infrastructure Bill.

We support the introduction of a new fast-tracked planning process for projects that are clearly important enough to be national infrastructure.

We believe this fast-track process can be introduced without removing appropriate democratic control and public engagement.

In regard to public projects, democratic control is exercised at national level by the elected government bringing forward national infrastructure projects as part of the National Development Plan. Local government will continue to produce county development plans. The fast track approval process will have to have regard to both these plans.

The fast track approval process will also respect the constitutional right to make objections, but not as an absolute or unlimited right, as is the case at present.

The goal is to make the planning process faster, not less democratic. The common good and our social and economic needs do not mean that there should be scope for multiple court challenges and appeals in regard to new infrastructure.

We remain committed to the concept of 'community gain' for communities who accept infrastructure projects and we will ensure at least that there is no diminution of services or amenities or communities arising from new national infrastructure in their areas.

## Clean environment and waste management

***'It is no longer an issue of jobs or the environment.***

***'In the nineties we look forward to jobs because of the environment.'***

- Minister of State Mary Harney T.D., 22 October 1991 (introducing the Environmental Protection Agency Bill)

The Progressive Democrats have always been strongly committed to a clean environment and sustainable development.

The first big move towards a cleaner environment in Ireland came with Mary Harney's abolition of smog in Dublin in 1990.

And with over two years of work, Mary Harney set up the Environmental Protection Agency in the 1992 Act.

We are realistic and determined about achieving a sustainable and clean environment. Unlike others who refuse to face facts, we do not pretend that waste can be eliminated altogether. Nor do we turn a blind eye to the consequences for jobs and investment of excessive proposals, such as punitive levels of carbon taxes. We believe that most people want to achieve good integration between the goals of environmental protection and economic and social development. And we are convinced that this is achievable.

We encourage and ask people to take personal responsibility about waste. And we support the 'polluter pays' principle, in relation to both business and households.

We will focus at local authority level on the facts about waste and solutions that have been proven to be effective.

We are beginning to make progress in Ireland in relation to waste management. Recycling is up from 9 per cent to 13 per cent.

### Bin charges

- For households, we favour pay by volume or weight. Government policy is that all local authorities will have volume or weight charging by January 2005. This rewards people who recycle, segregate and reduce waste.
- We support exemption from waste charges for lower income households, including where bin services are privatised.

### Enforcement of law

- We will insist on clear enforcement of the law in relation to those refuse to pay for their waste collection and in relation to dumping or other avoidance of the charges.
- We will implement strategies to tackle illegal dumping.

### More recycling / composting facilities

- We will increase investment in recycling and composting facilities including bring banks and kerbside collections. We remain committed to a target of one bring bank per 1,500 people.
- We will require private apartment developments to provide segregated waste and recycling facilities for tenants.
- We will examine the use of new technologies of dry treatment for mixed waste.

- We favour explicit and challenging local authority target for recycling with regular reporting of performance against targets.
- We support continuing programmes to promote recycling, reduction, re-use and composting.

Waste cannot be collected at no cost. We have to create incentives to reduce waste. The only fair and effective way this can be done is by the polluter pays principle.

It is completely wrong also to suggest that landfill is a solution or that we can, as a country, continue to export our waste.

### Hazardous waste

The Progressive Democrats recognise that we will always have hazardous waste. If we want hospitals, we will have hazardous waste. If we want battery-operated goods, we will have hazardous waste. If we want to manufacture and use computers, we will have hazardous waste.

We remain opposed to mass burn incinerators, where every possible type of waste is dumped into a great furnace and burned. The incentive in mass burn incinerators is to find large amounts of waste to burn, not to reduce and recycle as much as possible.

But we have to deal with residual and hazardous waste. We reiterate our general election manifesto, 2002, 'Where thermal treatment facilities for the processing and treatment of hazardous waste are required, the Progressive Democrats will ensure that they are managed and operated to the highest safety standards laid down by the EU. Such facilities must only be used where it can be shown that all options for prevention, minimisation, re-use and recycling have been fully utilised.'

Ireland does not need a plethora of incinerators. The more we demonstrate our determination to recycle, re-use and reduce, then the less need for incinerators we will have.

Not having a real strategy to deal with waste will cost us jobs and investment. Others may be prepared to pay that price, but the Progressive Democrats are not.

## Community leadership and community life

The Progressive Democrats believe that vibrant community and civic life is essential for Irish society. We will provide and support community leadership to achieve this.

Irish people show tremendous commitment and engagement in their communities. The richness of our community life has been built up over many decades by many people and organizations.

The challenge is to maintain and grow this commitment in a changing society, a changing economy and with changing technology.

We do not need to look to the past for community and civic life. Rather, we need to look to new ideas to build on our traditions for a changing Ireland.

Local authorities have a key role to support and foster community and civic life. They can act as vital support for voluntary organizations without in any way replacing or crowding out voluntary spirit.

Civic life involves responsibilities as well as rights and services and the community is entitled to expect that people will act responsibly. For example, compo culture is an attack on civic life at a local as well as a national level. Local authorities can work to support the change in civil law on fraudulent claims that the Minister for Justice is introducing.

Fundamentally, we want our local authorities to take all possible actions to enhance community and civic life.

### Insurance

- Too many community and voluntary events are made impossible by public insurance liabilities and charges. We will reform the civil law to allow for community and voluntary events to take place without high levels of liability on the organisers.
- We will not accept excuses for lack of community amenities, play areas, for example, on the basis of insurance difficulties, when any such difficulties have been overcome in other local authority areas.
- We favour each local authority publicising each compensation claim against it, the outcome of each case and the reasons for dismissal of failed cases. The public has a right in our local communities to know about spurious claims against our local authorities.

### Supporting enterprise

- At council level, the Progressive Democrats will ensure maximum support for enterprise and job creation. We believe there are few if any greater priorities for vibrant and active communities with jobs than thriving enterprises – large and small, rural and urban.
- we will work constructively to facilitate major investment projects in our areas
- we will also support farmer/food markets, butcher stalls and artisan food shops as an important shop window for locally produced food and rural tourism.

### Competition

- We believe that competition is best at all levels of economic activity. We will consistently favour planning and other decisions by local authorities that facilitate competition.
- We will oppose, on the other hand, any anti-competition rules or policies in county development plans, for example, any bias in planning against discount stores. Lower prices benefit consumers and county development plans should not be an obstacle to these benefits for local communities and shoppers.

Community  
Employment  
and Rural  
Social  
Scheme

- We will support holding Community Employment numbers to present levels. We recognise the valuable community supports that many of these schemes provide and we will work positively on any re-organisation of CE schemes to provide permanent community supports.
- We will support a review and re-definition of the role of the FAS in local communities, in order to make sure it is constantly adapting to changing employment needs in our communities.
- We will support the new Rural Social Scheme announced in the government's 2004 budget. This will provide 2,500 secure, community-related employment opportunities for people eligible for the Farm Assist Scheme.

## Childcare

- We will continue to support childcare facilities, especially for people seeking to return to work. We will actively support in government the continuation and improvement of the capital grants for community childcare. We will pursue all options to make use of community facilities – schools, village halls etc. – for after school care.

Civic  
celebration

- Local pride is strong in Ireland, but it is not reflected adequately in local council actions and events. We favour local authorities organising more days and different forms of county events and celebration.
- We want to see increasing professionalism in marketing county events for the whole country and internationally.
- We will ensure local authorities display the national and local flags outside their offices.

## Heritage

- We favour much more use of our streets and public areas for civic events, celebrations and exhibitions, in sport, in the arts and in heritage. These do not have to be elaborate and expensive in order to be effective expressions of civic life.
- We will also work to ensure that the fabric of our town centres is valued and protected, both in terms of architecture and public use.

## An Ghaeilge

- Oibreoidh muid leis an nGaeilge a chosaint, a chaomhnú agus a chur chun cinn le go mairfidh sí mar theanga pobail agus teaghlaigh sna blianta atá amach romhainn.
- Molann muid go ngairfear teanga oifigiúil oibre de chuid an Aontais Eorpaigh den Ghaeilge.
- Cinnteoidh muid go gcuirfidh na heagraíochtaí stáit an Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla i bhfeidhm le go mbeidh seirbhísí uile an Stáit ar fáil trí Ghaeilge gan aon dua do phobal na Gaeltachta agus na Gaeilge.
- Tabharfaidh muid gach tacaíocht le go ndaingneofar an Ghaeilge mar theanga teaghlaigh, oibre, sóisialta agus i ngach gné de shaol na Gaeltachta agus de shaol phobal na Gaeilge.
- Creideann muid go seasann an Ghaeilge aisti féin mar mhodh cumarsáide atá chomh maith le haon teanga eile ar domhan.
- Oibreoidh muid le deiseanna cuimsitheacha, foirfe oideachais trí Ghaeilge a chur ar áil ó réimse na réamhscolaíochta go dtí oideachas fad saoil.

### Sport

- We will continue to support municipal and local sporting facilities, building on national policy with the Sports Capital Programme, Local Sports Partnerships and the Local Authority Swimming Pool Programme.

### Local education

- We will work to increase the engagement with our schools and colleges by local authorities to foster a sense of place and civic engagement among young people.
- We will seek local authority support to expand the Homework Clubs and pre school Breakfast Clubs in schools in disadvantaged areas.
- We will support the full provision of School Attendance Officers and all means possible to create incentives for school attendance for both parents and children.
- We favour the close involvement of parents in schools in properly constructed parents' councils. Our local representatives will work at VEC level to achieve this.
- We also favour the greater involvement of senior citizens in children's education. The link between generations is strengthened by older people helping in education.

### The Travelling Community

- We will work in local authorities to implement a full range of services for the travelling community, including housing and halting sites. Since 2000, over 1,400 accommodation units have been provided or refurbished. This has helped reduce the number of unauthorized sites from over 1,200 to less than 800.

### Services for asylum seekers, refugees

- There are many people of non-national background in our country – spouses of Irish nationals, people on work permits, asylum seekers waiting to have their case heard, and people who have refugee status. They have diverse needs.
- We are committed to ensuring that local authorities meet their responsibilities and adapt their services to meet the needs of all non-nationals in a fair and impartial way.
- We believe each local authority should appoint a specific person to manage, and support, integration services in their area, for example, in health, education and housing services.
- We will support at local authority level national integration policy for people with refugee status.

### Rural walkways

- We favour local authorities creating more walkways in the countryside which walkers and others can use without interfering with normal farming business and dealing with issues of public liability.

## Responsible and responsive local government

Local democracy in Ireland is often seen as the poor relation of democratic elections and office. The Progressive Democrats see it as vital. It is not just a stepping stone to the Dáil and national politics. The abolition of the dual mandate by the government has helped to ensure local representation is given importance in its own right.

Local government is a part of our precious democratic governance, fitting in with national and European level decision making.

Like all levels of government, local government must be relevant and responsible if it is to be respected and valued by the people.

The Progressive Democrats will work in local government to ensure it earns the respect of voters on the basis of hard work, effective use of public money, responsive services and reforming policies.

We will stand against gimmickry and gesture politics that rightly lessen people's respect for local democracy.

We also favour the following reforms to help build the status of local democracy.

### Value for money

- The public must get value for their money at local level. The public is entitled to see that service charges and commercial rates are kept to the lowest possible level and that the highest possible efficiency is achieved in spending.
- Effective local government does not come cheap. Service charges are a reasonable and fair basis to pay for local services. We will keep under review the adequacy of funding mechanisms for local government.
- We insist that this public money is used effectively and accounted for to the highest standards.
- Where lands or property are sold by the local authority, we will require public, open sales as the norm.
- We will keep an open mind on outsourcing or privatizing certain services where practical, for example, parking enforcement, as in Dublin.
- We will require many more value for money audits of local authority spending programmes. We support expanding the Local Government Audit Service.
- We will require local authority management to achieve greater efficiencies constantly in their spending.
- We favour increased use of shared services among local authorities in order to achieve cost efficiencies.
- We will seek external reviews of spending programmes and charges.
- We will also require value for money assessment of the various area partnerships/development boards. Where savings are identified, we will reallocate money directly to community and environmental groups.

Customer friendly services

- Local government reform also means constant improvement in the delivery of local services.
- We favour the use of performance indicators and minimum standards in a Service Charter for all local authorities. In particular, we will work for constant improvement in customer service standards from local authorities, in personal contacts, over the phone or over the web and in every service area.
- In recognition of the financial role of commercial rate payers in funding local services, we will establish a consultative Rate-payers' Forum in each local authority area.
- Local democracy can be more open and responsive by using technology better. We favour the timely publication of council agendas in advance; the webcasting of council meetings in open session; and the publication of minutes of council meetings within a short, specified time of adoption.
- We will seek the appointment by the council of area-based single contact points in the council for residents.
- We will introduce single phone number that citizens can ring to contact their council. This will help ensure better management of calls to connect to the right person and a prompt response.
- We will work for the devolution of decision-making of some functions to local residents associations, where fully established e.g. estate grass cutting, litter etc.

Directly-elected mayors

- We favour creating, in city and county areas, the position of a directly-elected mayor with clearly-defined executive powers. This would be a more democratic way to allocate power than the tendency to transfer power to the county manager. It would complement the abolition of the dual mandate which has now been achieved, with the reduction of the power of independent TDs in this Dáil.

Local referenda

- Local democracy will be relevant if people feel empowered to make it relevant. To enhance local decision-making, we favour the greater use of local referenda on local issues, with appropriate safeguards against abuse. This mechanism is well-established and works well in many parts of the United States and other countries.

New town councils

- We believe that the creation of new town councils should be on the basis of set population levels, and that there should be a right for a particular population meeting that level to have a council established. This would mean that particular centres within large urban areas could have their own town council. Many are greatly under-represented compared to rural towns.

## Local transport

### Local networks

The transport needs of rural communities need continued attention and innovative solutions to build on the Rural Transport Initiatives implemented by the government. The government is already committed to extending the Free Transport Scheme to Rural Transport Initiatives.

There are various State agencies involved in local transport. We believe there is more scope to integrate the use of public service vehicles – school buses, post vans, health service vehicles - in a local area to maintain or create small local transport networks.

#### Better use of local transport services

- We believe a start can be made with a pilot scheme to audit all public and private transportation services in a community to see
  - (a) how they could support each other's viability;
  - (b) how they might be brought together to support an area where no service is currently supplied but is seen as necessary by the local community.

With increasing vehicle numbers, many urban and rural communities are under siege from traffic. They need more attention at national level.

#### Safeguards for local road networks

- With schemes such as the M50 widening, we believe the National Roads Authority should be required to account within the plan for the impact on local communities whose road networks have to cope with those accessing and egressing major roads.
- In many villages and small towns, low cost by-passes could be put in place that would restore a quality of life for residents and which would also enhance their tourist attractiveness.

#### Competition in transport locally

- We strongly favour competition in transport services. We work to implement choice for consumers and the dynamic for lower prices that come from different service providers. And we also advocate the freedom for entrepreneurs to provide services.
- We will work to ensure that local authorities facilitate all providers of transport services for their areas.
- We will examine the scope for taxis and hackneys to do 'stage work' picking up passengers at bus stops, especially in QBCs.
- In cities with public transport services, we will insist on better co-ordination by local authorities of ancillary transport needs. For example, we favour common bus stops, to avoid each company installing their own, with funding coming from the operators.

#### Freedom for Cork and Shannon

- We strongly back the freedom to compete for Cork and Shannon airports as independent State-owned companies. We believe this will be essential to increase passenger numbers, to support regional tourism and to achieve a viable and commercial future for the airports.

#### Disabled parking spaces

- We will allow traffic wardens enforce the law against able-bodied drivers who use designated parking spaces for people with disabilities in privately-owned shopping centre car-parks

#### Mobile technology for timing

- We also strongly support fast implementation of the use of mobile and other technology to provide real information on timetables and arrival times for buses and trains.

## Decentralisation

We are implementing the national Programme of Decentralisation announced in Budget 2004.

The first moves will take place this year, 2004.

It will share the economic benefits of government administration across the country. It will bring government close to the people and closer to the regions. It will bring government payroll and other expenditure to towns and counties that have seen little or none since the foundation of the State.

As Minister of State at the Department of Finance and in charge of the Office of Public Works, Tom Parlon is working on behalf of our party in government to make this happen.

The civil service will be enriched by the experience of working around the country. We recognise and support the integrity and professionalism of the civil service. Nothing in decentralisation will undermine these values. We are committed also to addressing in a fair way the management issues involved, within the overall policy of large scale decentralisation.

At local level, our elected representatives will

- support fully the national policy to bring government to the regions
- facilitate in every possible way public service organisations and their people who are moving to the regions
- keep up the political momentum for decentralisation
- ensure our local housing and amenities policies make decentralisation work
- encourage programmes of interaction between council and decentralised public services so that learning and information sharing takes place in both direction

## Decentralisation at a glance

Department /offices	Posts by county	Total
Agriculture and Food	Carlow 100, Cork 70, Laois 400, Wexford 85	655
Arts, Sport and Tourism	Cork 200, Kerry 165, Kilkenny 45	410
Communications, Marine and Natural Resources	Cavan 425, Cork 150, Leitrim 40	615
Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs	Donegal 30, Galway 50, Mayo 140	220
Defence	Kildare 500	500
Education & Science	Laois 70, Offaly 75, Westmeath 445	590
Enterprise, Trade and Employment	Carlow 250, Clare 300, Kilkenny 110, Offaly 250, Wicklow 140	1,050
Environment, Heritage & Local Government	Kilkenny 60, Waterford 200, Wexford 455	715
Finance	Cork 200, Offaly 130, Waterford 300	630
Foreign Affairs	Limerick 130	130
Justice, Equality & Law reform	Laois 40, Lonford 130, Meath 100, Roscommon 230, Tipperary 480	980
Office of Public Works	Cork 100, Mayo 150, Meath 275	525
Revenue Commissioners	Clare 50, Kerry 50, Kildare 250, Limerick 50	400
Social & Family Affairs	Donegal 350, Leitrim 225, Louth 300, Monaghan 110, Sligo 100	1,085
Transport	Clare 100, Cork 200, Galway 160	460
Various	To be decided	1,335
<b>Total</b>		<b>10,300</b>

## Current national issues

Local elections are about issues within the existing powers of local authorities or ideas for new powers to be allocated to local authorities. However, issues of national policy are always considered at any election time. For that reason, we set out in summary form our position on topical national issues.

### Tax

As re-iterated by the Tánaiste, Mary Harney, T.D. at the Progressive Democrats national conference this April:

'The tax results we will seek to achieve in this government are:

- the minimum wage will be exempt from tax
- the average industrial wage will not be taxed at the higher rate
- the real value of tax cuts will be protected by indexation
- tax rates will be kept low and tax compliance high.
- policy in Europe on direct taxation will be made at national level with unanimity.

'We are keeping to our promises that

- we will not stifle jobs with higher PRSI
- we will not stifle workers with higher income tax
- we will not stifle enterprise with higher corporation tax
- we will not stifle investment with higher capital gains tax.'

### Care for older people

- We believe that the first call on the €<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> billion revenue available from the end of the SSIA scheme should be used to fund improved care in the community for older people and people needing long term care.
- We will continue to provide real increases in the allowances and supports we have in place already for carers and for those who need care.
- We will work to bring forward policies that will put our whole care system on a sound, sustainable and fair footing for the coming decades.

### Health

- Our health services need reform if we are going to deliver much better services to patients at all levels.
- We favour the abolition of the health boards and the creation of a national Health Service Executive.
- We are committed to priority investment in health from the fruits of our economic performance.
- We favour the appointment of hundreds more hospital consultants with a view to teams of consultants delivering top quality services, including round the clock Accident & Emergency, in regional hospitals.
- We believe that regional, general and local hospitals must work together in effective networks to deliver a full range of medical services for all communities.
- We are working to eliminate waiting lists with the National Treatment Purchase Fund coupled with on-going major investment in health services.

## National transport and capital investment

- We favour the increased use of GP co-ops and primary care centres so that people will get better services without having to go to hospitals.
- We will give priority to increasing services for people with disabilities.
- We favour the rapid completion of a network of motorways/dual carriageways between Dublin and the major cities that meet strict environmental and economic criteria.
- We are strongly committed to providing broadband for every community and will insist that local authorities we serve on apply for the full range of services available.
- We will work to achieve the planned level of balanced investment between the BMW region and the East/Dublin in the National Development Plan and will ensure the review of the NDP takes full account of the needs of the BMW region.
- We will work to bring forward rapid mass transit services in Dublin.
- We strongly support continued high levels of investment in public transport and encouraging its greater use by the public.
- We will maintain the national economic policies that generate the resources to allow us invest massively in making up the infrastructure deficit in Ireland.
- We will work in government to bring competition for bus routes by franchising.
- We favour the extension and effective management of QBCs. In Dublin, the government will double the number of QBCs from 8 to 19 by 2009. We will also implement QBCs in Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford.
- We will work in government for an independent second terminal at Dublin airport.

## Agriculture and rural development

- We support commercial farming as a vital part of the Irish economy.
- We favour maintaining the live cattle export trade with humane standards because it creates competition in the market and because it is worth over €100 million.
- The Progressive Democrats will ensure that State resources and scientific research will be fully used to ensure that this agriculture continues to prosper by adhering to the highest standards.
- We strongly favour measures to keep our water the cleanest in Europe. We will seek to allow the more intensive farmers to protect stocking rates without sacrificing our clean water.
- We believe that local authorities must adopt a commonsense approach to the Nitrates Directive and slurry storage requirements. The proposed requirement of six months slurry storage is not appropriate for all circumstances. This storage capacity should not be insisted upon in areas where housing of animals only gets underway in December and slurry spreading can start in mid-January.
- We adopt a responsible approach to GM crops, and will require independent scientific evidence for policy decision-making. We will safeguard the right of farmers to continue to produce non-GM foods. We are against the anti-competitive control of supply of any product including seeds.
- We will work to ensure that all parts of the BMW region qualify for disadvantaged area status.