

Sinn Féin



Local Election Manifesto 2009

Ag Athrú an Rialtais Áitiúil

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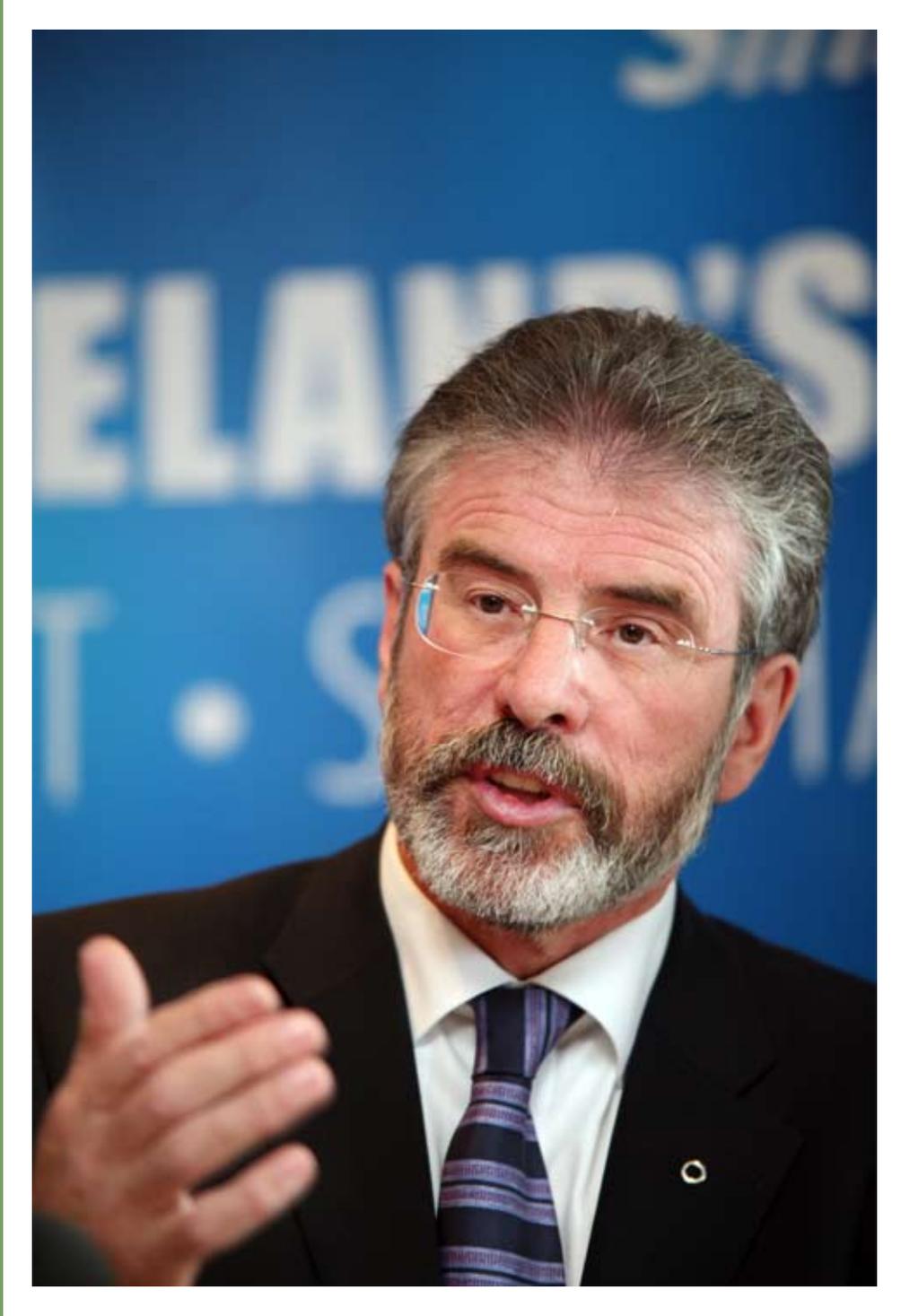
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Time for real leadership



A Message from Gerry Adams MP, President of Sinn Féin

People's patience and belief in politics and politicians have been sorely tested by the scandalous mismanagement of the economy, decades of unchecked corruption and by the fact there has been little difference in the policies implemented by the main parties – Fianna Fail and Fine Gael in particular.

'Why Vote Sinn Féin?'

For decades, Sinn Féin elected representatives have provided the highest quality of leadership and advocacy for their local communities. They are known for their dedication, for integrity and ethics, for innovation and for delivering change to the communities they represent. And we take the public trust embodied by your vote very seriously.

But when you vote Sinn Féin it is more than an endorsement of a particular individual. You vote for a vision of how things could be different. How things could be better for you and your family in your local area. We know that not all communities are treated equally in this country and not all people are treated equally within their communities. We want to change all that.

The mismanagement of the economic boom is now apparent for all to see. And every day you live with similar impacts from the neglect and mismanagement of local government – whether it's ongoing water crises in Galway and Clare, the commuter bottlenecks caused by inefficient transport provision from Navan to Dublin, the broken and dangerous roads in country areas, the lack of support for those trying to create new jobs and set up enterprises within their own communities, the high level of rates local business are forced to pay as cash strapped local authorities seek to raise funds in one of the only ways they are permitted, the developments left unfinished or planned without access to essential local services, the one in seven homes that remain empty while tens of thousands remain on housing waiting lists state-wide, or the areas in every city and county where children still don't have a safe place to play.

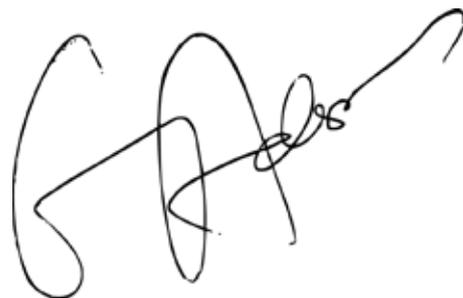
But good decisions in local government can make a positive difference in your daily life. Imagine electing someone who will fight for the services your community deserves and has a right to. Who is committed to work with local entrepreneurs, trade unions, farmers and fishermen to create new jobs and make every community's economy vibrant again.

Who will stand up to the big developers and landlords and do everything possible to ensure that everyone in your community has a decent place to live. Who is willing to hold the local Gardaí accountable for making your community safer. Who will ensure that you have the opportunity to participate directly in decisions that affect you and your family.

People need to exercise maximum control over their daily lives. This is true of Ireland as a nation and it is true of its local communities. Distant decisions, inappropriate, inefficient and ineffective one-size-fits-all 'solutions' must become a thing of the past. Strategic coordination and minimum standard-setting is important. But to be genuinely effective, planning and service delivery must be guided by local knowledge. Communities must be freed and empowered to each realise their unique potential.

So Sinn Féin is about building and leading sustainable, strong, mobilised, healthy, prosperous and dynamic communities where no individual is left behind. And we are about building a national network of such communities, based on equality, such that no community is left behind.

And that is what I am asking you to vote for when you vote Sinn Féin on June 5th. Bígí linn.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Gerry Adams', written in a cursive style.

Teachtaireacht ó Ghearóid Mac Adaim FP, Uachtarán Shinn Féin

Cuireadh foighne agus creideamh daoine i bpolaíocht agus i bpolaiteoirí faoi ghéartheist mar gheall ar mhíbhainistíocht scannalach an gheilleagair, blianta de chorbhadh gan mhaoirseacht agus toisc gur beag an difear idir na beartais a chuir na príomhpháirtithe i bhfeidhm – Fianna Fáil agus Fine Gael ach go háirithe.

Is féidir leat an cheist a chur, mar sin de, ‘Cad chuige Vótáil ar son Shinn Féin?’

Le blianta, thug ionadaithe tofa Shinn Féin an caighdeán ceannaireachta agus tacaíochta is fearr ar fáil dá bpobail áitiúla. Tá clú amuigh orthu mar gheall ar a ndíonbháilteacht, a n-ionracas agus a n-eitic, a nuálaíocht agus ar athrú a sholáthar do na pobail a ndéanann siad ionadaíocht dóibh. Agus is mór againn an mhuinín phoiblí a chuireann sibh ionainn trí do vóta.

Ach nuair a vótálann tú ar son Shinn Féin is mó ná tacaíocht a thabhairt do dhuine ar leith atá ann. Vótálann tú ar son físe ar an dóigh arbh fhéidir le rudaí a bheith difriúil. An dóigh a dtiocfadh le rudaí bheith níos fearr duitse agus do do theaghlach i do cheantar áitiúil. Tá a fhios againn nach bhfaigheann gach pobal sa tír seo cothrom na Féinne, agus nach bhfaigheann gach duine laistigh dá bpobail féin cothrom na Féinne. Ba mhaith linn sin uile a athrú.

Is léir an mhíbhainistíocht ar an fhás eacnamaíoch ag cách anois. Agus gach lá a bhíonn tú beo le tionchair den mhacasamhail mar gheall ar fhaillí agus ar mhíbhainistíocht rialtais áitiúil – más géarchéim uisce i nGaillimh agus i gcontae an Chláir atá ann, caolas tráchtá toisc soláthar neamhéifeachtach iompair ón Uaimh go Baile Átha Cliath, na bóithre briste baolacha i gceantair tuaithe, easpa tacaíochta dóibh siúd atá ag iarraidh poist nua a chruthú agus frontair a chur ar bun ina bpobail féin, na leibhéil arda rátaí is gá do ghnóthaí áitiúla a íoc agus comhairlí ar easpa airgid ag iarraidh maoin a bhailiú trí na bealaí teoranta atá ceadaithe, na forbairtí fágtha neamhchríochnaithe nó a bhí pleanáilte gan rochtain ar sheirbhísí áitiúla riachtanacha, baile as gach seachtar atá folamh agus na mílte duine ar liosta feithimh tithíochta fud fad an stáit, nó na ceantair i ngach cathair agus i ngach contae nach bhfuil áit shábháilte acu ina dtig leo súgradh go fóill.

Ach is féidir le cinní maithe i rialtas áitiúil difear dearfach a dhéanamh i do shaol laethúil. Samhlaigh duine a thoghadh a

throidfidh do na seirbhísí atá tuillte do do phobal agus atá mar cheart ag do phobal. Duine atá geallta le hobair le fiontraithe áitiúla, le ceardchumainn, le feirmeoirí agus le hiascairí chun poist nua a chruthú agus geilleagar gach pobal a dhéanamh bríomhar arís. Duine a sheasfaidh an fód in éadán forbróirí agus tiarnaí talún móra agus duine a dhéanfaidh gach ní is féidir leis a dhéanamh chun áit chónaithe oiriúnach do chách i do phobal a chinntiú. Duine atá toilteanach na Gardaí áitiúla a dhéanamh freagrach as do phobal a dhéanamh níos sábháilte. Duine a dhéanfaidh cinnte go mbíonn an deis agat chun bheith páirteach go díreach i gcinní a théann i bhfeidhm ort agus ar do theaghlach.

Caithfidh daoine uas-smacht a choinneáil ar a saol laethúil. Is fíor seo in Éirinn mar náisiún, agus is fíor é i bpobail áitiúla. Is gá cinní i gcéin atá neamhfhoirsteanach, neamhéifeachtach, neamhéifeachtúla agus na ‘réitigh’ chunga a fhágáil inár ndiaidh. Is tábhachtach comhordú straitéiseach agus íoschaighdeán a leagan síos. Ach le bheith fíoréifeachtach, is gá go dtéann eolas áitiúil i bhfeidhm ar phleanáil agus ar sholáthar seirbhíse. Is gá do phobail bheith saor agus cumhachtaithe chun a n-acmhainneacht uathúil féin a bhaint amach.

Mar sin de, tacaíonn Sinn Féin le pobail láidre rannpháirteacha shláintiúla rathúla agus dhinimiciúla a thógáil agus a threorú gan duine ar bith a fhágáil ar an dtrá fholamh. Tacaímid le líonra náisiúnta den chineál sin pobal a thógáil, bunaithe ar chomhionannas, sa dóigh nach bhféigfar duine ar bith ar an dtrá fholamh.

Agus is iad sin na nithe a n-iarraim ortsa vótáil ar a son nuair a vótálann tú ar son Shinn Féin ar 5ú Meitheamh. Bígí linn.

Time for real leadership



Executive Summary

Promoting Meaningful Local Democracy

Local Government Reform

- » A major transformation of local government including increased councillors' powers to include appropriate local control over the provision of services including greater local control over budgets and financing of local government, including the ability to collect tax revenue.
- » Restore or increase councillors' prior powers over planning, housing, transportation and waste management and correspondingly limit Managers' powers.
- » Reform the structure of local government to make it more accountable – including directly elected Chairs and Mayors who would assume many aspects of the council management oversight role.
- » Review the powers and functions of Regional Assemblies¹ and Regional Authorities² and introduce direct elections to these bodies. Empower them to develop, implement and oversee coordinated regional policies.
- » Build towards Irish Unity by increasing local, regional and cross-border coordination and integration of council work in development planning and service provision.

Local Government Finance

- » Demand the accountable, efficient and effective spending of local authority finances.
- » Adjust local service and procurement contracts to create a level pitch for local businesses by breaking tenders into segments, allowing smaller contractors to efficiently tender.
- » Oppose privatisation of local authority services and the use of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs).
- » Call for a review of the expenses regime for councillors and Committee Chairs to eliminate excess and abuse and subject claims to strict limits and scrutiny.
- » Oppose the imposition of double taxation through new service charges or user fees for essential public services.

Building Sustainable Communities

Planning

- » Ensure community participation and input at pre-planning and planning enforcement stages and extensive participation during all stages of County/City/Town/Local Area Development Planning.
- » Ensure that planning permission favours the development of sustainable rural housing and that development levies do not penalise rural dwellers building family homes, or first-time buyers building modest principal homes.
- » Ensure development plans frontload building of community facilities, with onus on the developer.
- » For developments of a significant nature, size or scale, demand initial site notification and notification of any amendments to all resident within 400 yards of a site.
- » Hold developers accountable by systematically imposing substantial, index-linked bonds (refundable in the event of full compliance with planning conditions).

Housing

- » Ensure the council sets and meets social housing targets and targets to eliminate homelessness.
- » Ensure that developers at least meet the full 20% social and affordable housing provision minimum requirement under the law.
- » Immediately double social housing output without budgetary increase by:
- » Extending the new shared equity scheme to allow local authorities to purchase housing units on a 50:50 basis in conjunction with the central Government.
- » Combining local authority capital and revenue streams alongside government loans to build and acquire more social units.
- » Purchasing existing vacant private units at or below market value, subject to appropriate standards and value for money criteria.
- » Ensure at a minimum unit-for-unit replacement of social housing, particularly as part of regeneration programmes.
- » Ensure that councils use their full powers of inspection of local rental accommodation, adhere to inspection and standards guidelines and engage in robust enforcement against rogue landlords.

¹ The Border-Midland-Western (BMW) Regional Assembly and the Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly.

² The Border Regional Authority, the Dublin Regional Authority, the Mid-East Regional Authority, the South-East Regional Authority, the Midlands Regional Authority, the West Regional Authority, the Mid-West Regional Authority and the South-West Regional Authority.

- » Campaign for Government assistance to those currently at risk of losing their homes due to reckless banking practices.

Environmental Protection and Waste Management

- » Return power over waste management to local elected representatives.
- » Progressive movement away from landfill and towards reduction, reuse and recycling, closure of all unsafe landfill sites and full remediation of contaminated dumpsites.
- » Oppose incineration or other thermal treatment.
- » Oppose the privatisation of waste management and the introduction of service charges for waste collection.
- » Ensure that each council adopts a Local Climate Change Strategy.
- » Advocate the use by local authorities of renewable energy sources, including biofuel, for authority-owned vehicles and facilities.

Delivering Responsive Public Services

Water

- » Work to ensure a clean and safe public water supply to all local residents within the council area.
- » Support enforcement of the principle that 'the polluter pays' against anyone responsible for contaminating or failing to protect the water supply.
- » Call for the introduction of Source Protection Measures for all public and group water schemes.
- » Oppose any attempt to privatise the water supply and fight to keep water treatment plants in public ownership.
- » Oppose charges for the use of water, including their imposition on schools and other non-commercial organisations under the EU Water Directive. Propose a waiver scheme in the interim.

Transportation Services

- » Significantly greater public investment in public transportation to ensure more affordable and more frequent service and full public ownership of bus and rail services.
- » Propose an audit of local unmet public transport need, focusing in particular on new developments and rural areas, taking into account changing demographics and increased demand.
- » Support community-based rural transport initiatives, including demand-responsive dial-up transit and ensure that all local transport operates to county boundaries and covers entire county..
- » Initiate local road network accident black spot audits and ensure that councils take appropriate measures.

- » Ensure the provision of sufficient taxi ranks to meet local need.

Fire and Ambulance Services

- » Propose inclusion of a Fire Brigade representative on the Planning Strategic/Municipal Policy Committee and other planning fora and ensure that planning decisions take into account emergency access and the need for sustainable traffic diversions.
- » Support a single ambulance command and control system for Fire Brigade and HSE ambulance deployment.
- » Support full North-South cooperation in emergency service provision in border areas.

Recreational Services and Amenities

- » Ensure that better use is made of existing civic buildings (including town halls and libraries) to deliver access to the arts (including music education and drama).
- » Ensure that all local authority leases to sports clubs are for multiple use to maximise available amenities.
- » Ensure that all development plans for towns with a population of 1,000 or more include the provision of one-stop recreational centres (including facilities such as a cinema, bowling alley, swimming pool and youth café).
- » Establish clear and fair criteria for public art contracts and ensure local community/artists input into the selection process.

Growing and Spreading Local Prosperity

Economic Development

- » Propose a review of the functioning and management of City and County Development Boards and City and County Enterprise Boards with the objective of making them more responsive to the needs of local businesses.
- » Propose the setting up of one-stop shops to provide business support for small to medium and social enterprise.
- » Propose to make unused IDA lands available for purchase by local authorities at less than current market value (in many cases these lands were sold to IDA by local authorities and state infrastructure has made them more valuable) and for local authorities to use these landbanks to provide low-cost serviced sites for local business start-up incubation units.
- » Ensure full application of Retail Planning Guidelines and propose development of a strategy to support retention of local retailers in local communities.
- » Support fair rates and development contributions that help local authorities

Education

- » Campaign against education cuts and for significant increases in investment in education with a focus on ensuring sufficient provision for local disadvantaged students.
- » Keep needed local school building and remediation works under review and maintain pressure on the Minister to deliver these.
- » Oppose the introduction of third level fees and support reform of the granting system in a way that truly opens access to third level to students from low income backgrounds.
- » Use positions on VECs to advocate a coordinated approach between the VECs, FÁS and the third level institutions, to ensure sufficient provision of local training for sectors that will provide jobs in the coming decades.
- » Propose that all available public classroom space is optimally utilised at all times, ie. for out-of-hours training for workers.

Childcare

- » Demand the scrapping of the fundamentally flawed Community Childcare Subvention Scheme and fight to keep local community crèches open.
- » Support provision or restoration of core funding to good quality childcare to all local community-based crèches, to ensure equal access for all who need it.
- » Require developers to construct childcare facilities in all new housing developments and transfer these to the ownership of the local authority upon completion.

Communications Infrastructure

- » Continue to monitor broadband availability in their local areas and push for 100% connectivity.
- » Insist on inspections led by the Department of Communications to verify private provider claims of connectivity where the local authority has identified persistent broadband blackspots.
- » Propose mandatory telecommunications ducting as a condition of planning permission for all new significant residential, commercial and public building developments.
- » Ensure minimum bandwidth of 7MB/s for all towns with populations of over 5,000 by 2011.

Energy Infrastructure

- » Ensure each council investigates the potential for local conversion to, generation of and public investment in renewable energy.
- » Ensure each council adopts a Local Renewable Energy Strategy for incorporation into the local Development Plan

- and regularly monitors and reviews its implementation
- » Propose preferential planning approval for energy efficient developments and conversions and for renewable energy projects where all other standards are also met.
- » Propose and seek granting support for conversion and retrofitting of all local authority-owned buildings.
- » Work with the local VEC to make free retraining opportunities available to unemployed tradespeople to qualify them as energy rating assessors, or in the installation of solar, wood-pellet, ground-heating and mini-wind turbine systems, as well as energy-saving and insulation systems.

Raising the Quality of Life

Community Safety

- » Fight to establish Joint Policing Committees (JPCs) in all Councils.
- » Use their membership of JPCs to influence local policing, with a view to increasing and ring-fencing the number of community Gardaí and juvenile liaison officers and to changing rostering and deployment arrangements so that Gardaí are on patrol in the locations and during the hours that they are most needed.
- » Campaign for a coherent strategy to maximise Garda visibility in rural areas.
- » Demand that all drug-related monies seized by Gardaí or by CAB are channelled into community development initiatives.
- » Work to ensure that local councils work together with the Gardaí, the HSE, education providers and the community and voluntary sector to introduce real and lasting solutions to crime and anti-social behaviour with an emphasis on early intervention and prevention.
- » Promote the introduction of Good Community Agreements inclusive of all residents and other stakeholders, 12 month Local Authority Introductory Tenancy Agreements subject to appeal and robust eviction guidelines.

Healthcare

- » Replacement of our current two-tier, inequitable and inefficient healthcare system with a new universal public health system for Ireland that provides care to all free at the point of delivery on the basis of need alone.
- » The retention and further development of the maximum feasible range of services at local hospitals and the provision of quality hospital care for all, regardless of income or geographic location. A halt to the over-centralisation of hospital facilities and reversal of cutbacks in services at local hospitals.

- » Work with communities and healthcare workers to campaign for delivery of the best possible local healthcare services.
- » Campaign against health cutbacks, including the HSE recruitment embargo and against centralisation and privatisation of hospital services.
- » Propose local public information campaigns to enhance awareness of local mental health and suicide prevention services.

Addiction Services

- » Provision of full spectrum addiction services (for alcohol, prescription drugs, illegal drugs and solvents) for all who need them.
- » No more addiction treatment waiting lists. Treatment made available as soon as the addicted person is ready for help.
- » Restriction on the number and type of outlets where alcohol is sold, the number of licenses granted and the hours and days of sale.
- » Work directly with communities worst-affected by alcohol-related public disorder and the illegal drugs trade. Lobby for increased RAPID and CLÁR funding for proven effective prevention resources to disadvantaged areas hardest hit and where individuals are most at risk.
- » Promote awareness programmes and harm reduction education and services to reduce unnecessary deaths by alcohol poisoning/solvent use/overdose, HIV or Hepatitis C.

Postal Services

- » Campaign with local communities to end the closure of post offices throughout the country.
- » Campaign to keep An Post as a public asset under public control.
- » Propose a Public Service Intervention Order to enable the subvention of post offices in rural areas along the Western Seaboard region to ensure post masters' incomes are brought to the minimum wage as a matter of priority.

Strengthening Equality and Diversity

Platform for the Irish Language

- » Support full implementation of the Official Languages Act at local level.
- » Propose that each council adopt an Irish Language Promotion Strategy and appoint an Irish Language Development Officer responsible for its implementation.
- » Support the interests of local Gaelscoileanna and stand with parents and teachers in demanding the retention of Irish language immersion education.

- » Ensure development of distinct Local Area Plans for na Gaeltachtaí, in consultation with socio-linguistic experts, to both protect the Irish language as a community language and increase the viability of these areas.

Platform for Women

- » Support the adoption and ensure the monitoring of affirmative action policies to increase hiring and promotion of equally able women in council employment and in the award of council contracts.
- » Ensure each council adopts official policies and guidelines on domestic violence, in consultation with local women's support service
- » Support equal access for all to good quality childcare.
- » Use positions on Development Boards to support initiatives promoting women's entrepreneurship, including expansion of Women's Enterprise Networks.

Platform for Children and Young People

- » Support emerging leadership among young people through the establishment of Youth Councils, to provide a forum for structured consultation and advice to local authorities.
- » Ensure all development plans include child and youth amenities to build safer communities.
- » Ensure that all councils focus on the provision of age appropriate sports and recreational facilities:

Platform for Older People

- » Ensure local authorities age-proof mainstream services (such as Assisted Bin Collection schemes) and adapt or provide specific services for older peoples' needs.
- » Ensure all new builds meet universal design standards to prevent the need for later adaptation by older residents experiencing a decline in mobility.
- » Use membership of Joint Policing Committees to ensure policing better meets the security needs of vulnerable older people. Support community-based voluntary schemes that provide vigilance on behalf of and other supports for, older people living alone.
- » Ensure local nursing homes are regularly inspected to guard against abuse and neglect of older people in such facilities.

Platform for People With Disabilities

- » Ensure each council has a Disability Access Officer to inspect planning applications.
- » Ensure provision for independent living within mixed tenure estates.
- » Ensure new builds meet universal design standards and require planning applications to include a specific

certification to this effect from the Association of Building Engineers or the Royal Institute of Architects.

- » Support the adoption and ensure the monitoring of affirmative action policies to increase hiring and promotion of people with disabilities in council employment.

Platform for New Communities

- » Promote the inclusion of New Communities in local consultation and planning processes, ensuring the representation of these communities on local bodies and inclusion in decision-making.
- » Campaign to end the unjust Direct Provision System.
- » Oppose segregated schooling. Promote local education and childcare provision more responsive to the needs of New Community children and their families, including targeted programmes where appropriate.

Platform for Travellers

- » Promote the inclusion of Travellers in local consultation and planning processes, ensuring their representation on local bodies and inclusion in decision-making.
- » Ensure full and timely delivery of local Traveller Accommodation Plans.
- » Promote ongoing and constructive dialogue between local Traveller and settled communities on matters of shared concern.

Achoimre Feidhmiúcháin

Daonlathas Fiúntach Áitiúil a Chur Chun Cinn

Athchóiriú Rialtais Áitiúil

- » Athrú mór ar rialtas áitiúil ina mbeidh cumhacht méadaithe comhairleoirí san áireamh, smacht áitiúil cuí ar sholáthar seirbhísí mar aon le níos mó smachta ar bhuiséid agus ar rialtas áitiúil a mhaoiniú agus, lena n-áirítear an acmhainn chun cáin a bhailiú.
- » Iar-chumhachtaí comhairleoirí maidir le pleanáil, tithíocht, iompar agus bainistíocht dramháila a thabhairt ar ais agus teorainn comhfheagrach curtha le cumhachtaí Bainisteoirí.
- » Struchtúr rialtais áitiúil a leasú chun é a dhéanamh níos freagraí – Cathaoirligh agus Méaraí atá tofa go díreach san áireamh a ghlacadh cuid mhór gnéithe de bhainistíú agus de mhaoirseacht comhairle orthu féin.
- » Cumhachtaí agus feidhmeanna Tionól Réigiúnach¹ agus Údarás Réigiúnach a athbhreithniú,² agus toghcháin dhíreacha a thabhairt isteach chuig na comhlachtaí seo. An chumhacht a thabhairt dóibh chun beartais réigiúnacha chomhordaithe a fhorbairt, a chur i bhfeidhm agus mhaoirseacht a dhéanamh orthu.
- » Tógáil i leith Aontacht na hÉireann trí chomhordú áitiúil, réigiúnach trasteorann a mhéadú agus obair na comhairle i bpleanáil forbartha agus soláthar seirbhíse a imeascadh.

Airgeadas Rialtais Áitiúil

- » Caiteachas cuntasach éifeachtúil agus éifeachtach airgeadas údarás áitiúil a éileamh.
- » Conarthaí seirbhíse áitiúla agus conarthaí soláthair a choigeartú chun cothromaíocht a thabhairt do ghnóthaí áitiúla trí thairiscint a bhriseadh ina dteascáin, a chuireann ar chumas conraitheoirí atá níos lú tairiscint éifeachtúil a dhéanamh.
- » Cur in aghaidh seirbhísí údarás áitiúla a phríobháidíú agus in aghaidh úsáid Páirtíochtaí Poiblí Príobháideacha (PPPanna).
- » Athbhreithniú ar réimeas speansais do chomhairleoirí agus do Chathaoirligh Choiste a iarraidh chun iomarca agus mí-úsáid a dhíbirt, agus chun dianteorannacha a chur le héilimh agus iad a mhionscrúdú.
- » Cur in aghaidh cur i bhfeidhm cánachais dhúbailte trí tháillí nua seirbhísí nó táillí úsáideoirí do sheirbhísí poiblí riachtanacha.

Pobail Inbhuanaithe a Thógáil

Pleanáil

- » Rannpháirtíocht agus ionchur pobail a chinntiú ag céimeanna réamhphleanála agus forfheidhmiúchán pleanála, agus rannpháirtíocht fhorleathan a chinntiú le linn gach céim de Phleanáil Forbartha ag leibhéal Contae/Cathrach/Baile/ Ceantair Áitiúil.
- » Cead pleanála i bhfách le forbairt tithíocht tuaithe inbhuanaithe a chinntiú, agus nach gcuireann táillí forbartha pionós ar chónaitheoirí tuaithe ag tógáil tithe teaghlaigh, nó ar cheannaitheoirí den chéad uair ag tógáil príomhtheach measartha.
- » Pleananna forbartha a thugann tús áite d'áiseanna pobail a chinntiú, agus an fhreagracht ar an bhforbróir.
- » D'fhorbairtí de chineál, méid nó scála suntasach, fógra láithreáin a éileamh agus fógra ar aon leasú a chuireann seo in iúl do gach cónaitheoir atá laistigh de 400 slat de láithreán.
- » Forbróirí a dhéanamh freagrach trí bhannaí treoirnasctha substaintiúla a chur i bhfeidhm (inaisíoctha má chomhlíontar coinníollacha pleanála ina n-iomláine).

Tithíocht

- » A chinntiú go leagann an chomhairle síos, agus go gcomhlíonann sí, spriocanna tithíochta sóisialta chun easpa dídine a chealú.
- » A chinntiú go gcomhlíonann forbróirí a riachtanas chun 20% ar a laghad dá n-íosriachtanas faoin dlí chun tithíocht shóisialta ar phraghas réasúnta a sholáthar.
- » Aschur tithíochta sóisialta a dhúbail láithreach gan méadú cáinainéiseach trí:
 - » An scéim nua cothromais chomhroinnte a leathnú chun cead a thabhairt d'údarás áitiúla aonaid tithíochta a cheannach ar bhonn 50:50 i gcomhair leis an rialtas láir.
 - » Caipitil údarás áitiúil agus srutháin ioncaim a chur le hiasachtaí rialtais chun tuilleadh aonad sóisialta a thógáil agus a fháil.
 - » Aonaid fholmha phríobháideacha faoi láthair a cheannach faoi luach an mhargaidh, de réir caighdeán cuí agus critéir luach ar airgead.
- » A chinntiú, ar a laghad, go bhfuil athsholáthar aonad-ar-aonad de thithíocht shóisialta ann, go háirithe mar chuid de chlár athbheochana.

¹ Tionól Réigiúnach Teorainn-Lárnach-Iartharach (BMW) Tionól Réigiúnach agus An Tionól Réigiúnach Deisceartach agus Oirthearach.

² Údarás Réigiúnach na Teorann, Údarás Réigiúnach Bhaile Átha Cliath, Údarás Réigiúnach an Lár-Oirthir, An tÚdarás Réigiúnach Thior-Theas, Údarás Réigiúnach an Lár-Réigiúin, Údarás Réigiúnach an Iarthair, Údarás Réigiúnach an Lár-Iarthair, agus An tÚdarás Réigiúnach Theas-Thiar.

- » A chinntiú go n-úsáideann comhairlí a gcumhachtaí iomlána cigireachta chun cóiríocht áitiúil ar cíós a iniúchadh, go gcloíonn siad le treoirlínte cigireachta agus caighdeán, agus go ndéanann sé forfheidhmiú daingean in éadan tiarnaí talún díolúnacha.
- » Dul i mbun feachtais ar mhaithe le cúnaimh Rialtais dóibh siúd atá i mbaol a dteach a chailleadh de dheasca cleachtais mheargánta baincúireachta.

Cosaint Comhshaoil agus Seirbhísí Bainistíocht Dramhaíola

- » An chumhacht ar bhainistíocht dramhaíola a thabhairt ar ais d'ionadaithe tofa áitiúla.
- » Bogadh forásach ar shiúl ó líonadh talún agus i dtreo laghdaithe, athúsáide agus athchúrsála, clabhsúr láithreáin líonta talún nach bhfuil sábháilte, agus leasúchán iomlán de láithreáin thruaillithe dumpála.
- » Cur in aghaidh loisthe nó cóireála teirmí eile.
- » Cur in aghaidh bainistíocht dramhaíola a phríobháidíú agus tabhairt isteach táillí seirbhíse do bhailiú dramhaíola.
- » A chinntiú go nglacann gach comhairle le Straitéis Áitiúil ar Athrú Aeráide.
- » Tacú le húsáid foinsí fuinnimh in-athnuaite ag údaráis áitiúla, bithbhreosla san áireamh, i bhfeithicilí agus i bhfoirgnimh an údaráis.

Seirbhísí Poiblí Sofhreagracha a Sholáthar

Seirbhísí Uisce

- » Obair chun soláthar uisce atá glan agus sábháilte a chinntiú do gach cónaitheoir áitiúil laistigh de cheantar na comhairle.
- » Tacú le cur i bhfeidhm an phrionsabail 'foc mar a thruaillítear' in aghaidh duine ar bith atá freagrach as soláthar uisce a thruailliú nó as teip gan é a chosaint.
- » Tabhairt isteach Bearta Cosanta Foinsé a iarraidh do gach scéim uisce poiblí agus scéim uisce grúpa.
- » Cur in aghaidh iarracht ar bith chun soláthar uisce a phríobháidíú, agus troid chun stáisiúin chóireála uisce a choinneáil faoi úinéireacht phoiblí.
- » Cur in aghaidh táillí úsáidte uisce agus in aghaidh a bhforchur ar scoileanna agus ar eagraíochtaí eile neamh-thráchtála faoi Threoir Uisce AE. Scéim tarscaoilte idir an dá linn a mholadh.

Seirbhísí Iompair

- » Infheistíocht phoiblí shuntasach a chur in iompar poiblí chun seirbhís níos inacmhainne agus níos minice a chinntiú, agus úinéireacht iomlán phoiblí de sheirbhísí bus agus iarnróid.
- » Iniúchadh ar riachtanas iompair phoiblí nár comhlíonadh a mholadh, ag díriú, ach go háirithe, ar fhorbairtí nua ceantair tuaithe, ag cur san áireamh éileamh méadaithe agus déimeagrafaic atá ag athrú.
- » Tacú le tionscnaimh iompar tuaithe atá pobalbhunaithe, iompar diailchaoi bunaithe ar éileamh san áireamh, agus a chinntiú go n-oibríonn gach iompar áitiúil go teorainneacha contae agus go gclúdaíonn sé an contae uile.
- » Tús a chur le hiniúchtaí ar bhail dhubha timpiste ar líonra bóithre áitiúla agus a chinntiú go ndéanann comhairlí bearta cuí.
- » Soláthar de go leor seastáin tacsaithe a chinntiú a chomhlíonann an riachtanas áitiúil.

Seirbhísí Dóiteáin agus Otharchair

- » Cuimsiú ionadaí ón mBriogáid Dóiteáin le dul ar Choiste Pleanála Straitéisí/Beartas Cathrach agus fóraim phleanála eile a chinntiú, agus a chinntiú go gcuirfear sna cinntí pleanála rochtain éigeandála agus an gá le hatreoruithe tráchta inbhuanaithe san áireamh.
- » Tacú le córas amháin ordaithe agus smachta don Bhriogáid Dóiteáin agus imlonnú otharcharr FSS.
- » Tacú le comhoibriú iomlán Thuaidh-Theas i dtaca le soláthar seirbhísí éigeandála i gceantair na teorann.

Áiseanna Áineasa agus Conláistí

- » A chinntiú go mbaintear úsáid níos fearr as foirgnimh shibhialta faoi láthair (hallaí baile agus leabharlanna san áireamh) chun rochtain ar na healaíona a sholáthar (oideachas ceoil agus drámaíocht san áireamh).
- » A chinntiú go dtugann gach údarás áitiúil léasanna il-úsáide do chumainn spóirt chun conláistí ar fáil a uasmhéadú.
- » A chinntiú go gclúdaíonn gach plean forbartha do bhailte le daonra de 1,000 nó níos mó soláthar ionaid áineasa aonuaire (áiseanna amhail pictiúrlann, pinniúr bollaí, linn snámha agus caife don aois óg san áireamh).
- » Critéir shoiléire chthroime a bhunú do chonarthaí d'ealaín phoiblí agus ionchur ag an bpobal áitiúil/ag ealaíontóirí sa phróiseas roghnúcháin a chinntiú.

Rath Áitiúil a Fhás agus a Scaipeadh

Forbairt Eacnamaíoch

- » Athbhreithniú ar fheidhmiú agus ar bhainistiú Boird Forbartha Cathrach agus Contae agus Boird Fiontair Cathrach agus Contae a mholadh lena ndéanamh níos sofhreagraí do riachtanais áitiúla
- » Bunú ionaid ilfhreastail a mholadh chun tacaíocht gnó a chur ar fáil do fhiontraíocht shóisialta idir bheag agus mheasartha.
- » Na fearainn a mholadh nach bhfuil in úsáid ag an IDA a chur ar fáil d'údarás áitiúla le gur féidir leo iad a cheannach ar phraghas níos lú ná luach an mhargaidh reatha (i gcuid mhór cásanna dhíol na húdarás áitiúla na fearainn seo leis an IDA agus rinne bonneagar stáit iad níos luachmaire), agus le gur féidir le húdarás áitiúla na bainc talún a úsáid chun láithreáin seirbhíse ar chostas íseal d'aonaid tosaithe cothaithe gnó áitiúil a chur ar fáil.
- » Cur i bhfeidhm iomlán de Threoirlínte Pleanála Miondíoltóireachta a chinntiú, agus forbairt straitéise a mholadh le tacú le miondíoltóirí áitiúla a choinneáil i bpobail áitiúla.
- » Tacú le rátaí córa agus ranniocaíochtaí forbartha a chabhraíonn le húdarás áitiúla

Oideachas

- » Feachtas in éadan ciorruithe oideachais agus ar son méaduithe suntasacha ar infheistíocht san oideachas, ag díriú ar go leor soláthair a chinntiú do scoláirí áitiúla atá faoi mhíbhuntáiste.
- » Oibreacha tógála do scoileanna áitiúla agus oibreacha feabhais atá de dhíth a choinneáil faoi athbhreithniú, agus brú a choinneáil ar an Aire chun iad a sholáthar.
- » Cur in éadan tabhairt isteach táillí tríú leibhéal, agus tacú le hathchóirí an chórais deonaithe ar shlí a n-osclaíonn rochtain do scoláirí ó chúlaí ioncaim ísil.
- » Áiteanna ar VECanna a úsáid chun cur cúige comhordaithe a chur chun cinn idir na VECanna, FÁS agus na forais tríú leibhéal, lena chinntiú go bhfuil go leor soláthair ann d'oiliúint áitiúil d'earnálacha a chuirfidh poist ar fáil sna blianta romhainn.
- » A mholadh go mbíonn an spás poiblí seomra ranga atá ar fáil úsáidte a mhéad is féidir i gcónaí, is é sin, d'oiliúint lasmuigh d'uaireanta d'oibríthe.

Cúram Leanaí

- » A éileamh go bhfuil an Scéim Fóirdheontais um Chúram Leanaí Pobail atá lochtach go bunúsach curtha ar ceal, agus troid chun naíolanna áitiúla pobail a choinneáil oscailte.
- » Tacú le soláthar nó athbhunú croí-mhaoinithe ar gach

naíolann áitiúil phobalbhunaithe, lena chinntiú go bhfuil rochtain chothrom ar chúram leanaí ar cháilíocht mhaith do gach duine a bhfuil se de dhíth orthu.

- » A éileamh ar fhorbróirí áiseanna cúram leanaí a thógail i ngach forbairt nua tithíochta agus iad a aistriú go húinéireacht an údarás áitiúil tar éis a gcríochnaithe.

Bonneagar Cumarsáide

- » Monatóireacht a dhéanamh go fóill ar infhaighteacht leathanbhanda ina gceantair áitiúla, agus nascacht 100% a éileamh.
- » Cigireachtaí a chur faoi deara faoi threoir na Roinne Cumarsáide chun éilimh na soláthraithe príobháideacha maidir le nascacht a dheimhniú áiteanna ar aimsigh an t-údarás áitiúil ceantair gan nascacht sheasmhach leathanbhanda.
- » Duchtú teileachumarsáide éigeantach a mholadh mar choinníoll i dtaca le cead pleanála do gach forbairt tógála shuntasach úr chónaitheach, thráchtála agus phoiblí.
- » A chinntiú go bhfuil leithead banda 7MB ar a laghad ann do gach baile ina bhfuil breis agus 5,000 duine faoi 2011.

Bonneagar Fuinnimh

- » A chinntiú go bhfiosróidh gach comhairle an fhéidearthacht maidir le hathrú áitiúil go fuinneamh inathnuaite, é a ghineadh agus infheistíocht phoiblí a dhéanamh ann.
- » A chinntiú go dtugann gach comhairle Straitéis Áitiúil um Fhuinneamh Inathnuaite isteach agus í a bheith mar chuid de Phlean Forbartha áitiúil, agus a athbhreithniú a cur i bhfeidhm agus a dhéanann monatóireacht uirthi.
- » Ceadú fabhrach pleanála a mholadh maidir le forbairtí agus le hathchóirí atá tíosach ar fhuinneamh, agus ar mhaithe le tionscadail fuinnimh inathnuaite áit a bhfuil gach caighdeán eile comhlíonta fosta.
- » Tacaíocht deonaithe a mholadh agus a iarraidh le haghaidh athchóiríthe agus gach foirgneamh ar leis an t-údarás iad a fheistiú go cúlghabhálach.
- » Obair leis an VEC áitiúil chun deiseanna saora athoiliúna a chur ar fáil do cheardaithe dífhostaithe lena gcáiliú mar mheasúnóirí ráitithe fuinnimh, nó chun chórais ghréine, millíní adhmaid, téamh talún, agus miontuirbíní gaoithe mar aon le córais inslitheacha agus iad tíosach ar fhuinneamh a shuiteáil.

An Caighdeán Saoil a Ardú

Sábháilteacht Pobail

- » Troid a dhéanamh chun Comhchoistí Póilíneachta (CCP) a bhunú i ngach Comhairle.
- » A mballraíocht ar na CCPanna a úsáid le dul i bhfeidhm ar phóilíneacht áitiúil, arb aidhm di líon Gardaí pobail agus oifigigh idirchaidrimh don óige a mhéadú agus a chosaint, agus chun socruithe uainchláir agus úsáidte a athrú le gur féidir le Gardaí a bheith ar dualgas sna háiteanna le linn na n-uaireanta a bhfuil an gá is mó leo.
- » Dul i mbun feachtais maidir le straitéis chuimsitheach chun infheiceacht Garda a uasmhéadú i gceantair tuaithe.
- » A éileamh go gcuirfear airgead ar bith a bhaineann le drugaí a fuair na Gardaí nó CAB, go gcuirfear é isteach i dtionscnaimh forbartha pobail.
- » A oibriú lena chinntiú go n-oibríonn comhairlí áitiúla le chéile leis na Gardaí, leis an FSS, le soláthróirí oideachais agus leis an earnáil pobail agus leis an earnáil dheonach chun fíor-réitigh ar choiriúlacht agus ar iompar frithshóisialta a thabhairt isteach atá buan agus a bhfuil béim ar chosc agus ar idirghabháil luath.
- » Tabhairt isteach Comhaontuithe Dea-phobail a chur chun cinn ina bhfuil gach cónaitheoir agus páirtí leasmhar páirteach, Comhaontuithe Tionóntachta Tosaigh 12 mhí an Údarás Áitiúil a thabhairt isteach faoi réir achomhairc, agus treoirínte daingne díshealbhaithe.

Cúram Sláinte

- » Á r gcóras dhá shraith faoi láthair atá éagothrom agus neamhéifeachtúil a athsoláthar le córas nua sláinte uileghabhálach d'Éirinn a thugann cúram saor in aisce ag pointe an tsoláthair ar bhonn riachtanais amháin.
- » Uasraon seirbhísí féideartha ag ospidéal áitiúla a choinneáil agus a fhorbairt a thuilleadh agus soláthar cúram ospidéal d'ardcháilíocht do chách, beag beann ar ioncam nó ar áit gheoghrafach. Stop a chur le rólárú áiseanna ospidéal, ciorruithe i seirbhísí ag ospidéal áitiúla a fhreaschur.
- » Obair le pobail agus le hoibrithe sláinte le dul i mbun feachtais maidir le soláthar na seirbhísí áitiúla cúram sláinte is fearr is féidir.
- » Dul i mbun feachtais in éadan ciorruithe sláinte, cosc ar earcaíocht san FSS san áireamh agus in éadan seirbhísí ospidéal a lárú agus a phríobháidiú.
- » Feachtais áitiúla eolais phoiblí a mholadh chun feachtas ar sheirbhísí áitiúla sláinte meabhach agus ar sheirbhísí um fhéinmharú a chosc a fheabhsú.

Seirbhísí Andúile

- » Speictream iomlán seirbhísí andúile a sholáthar (i dtaca le halcól, le drugaí ar oideas, drugaí mídhleathacha agus le tuaslagóirí) dóibh siúd a bhfuil sé de dhíth orthu.
- » Gan a thuilleadh liostaí feithimh i dtaca le cóireáil ar andúil. Cóireáil ar fáil a luaithe agus atá an t-andúileach réidh chun cuidiú a fháil.
- » Teorann ar líon agus ar chineál na n-asraonta ina ndíoltar alcól, ar líon na gceadúnas a thugtar agus ar uaireanta agus laethanta a ndíolta.
- » Oibriú go díreach leis na pobail is mó a ndeachaigh mí-ord poiblí agus trádáil drugaí mídhleathacha i bhfeidhm orthu. Stocaireacht ar son maoiniú méadaithe RAPID agus CLÁR i dtaca le háiseanna éifeachtacha cruthaithe coiscithe chuig ceantair is mó faoi mhíbhuntáiste áit a bhfuil na daoine is mó i mbaol.
- » Cláir feasachta a chur chun cinn, agus oideachas agus seirbhísí ar laghdú gortaithe chun básanna gan gá a laghdú mar gheall ar nimhiú alcóil/ ar úsáid tuaslagóirí/ar ródháileog, ar VEID nó ar Heipitíteas C.

Seirbhísí Poist

- » Dul i mbun feachtais le pobail áitiúla chun deireadh a chur le clabhsúr oifigí poist ar fud na tíre.
- » Dul i mbun feachtais chun An Post a choinneáil mar shócmhainn phoiblí faoi riail phoiblí.
- » Ordú Idirghabhála Seirbhíse Poiblí a mholadh chun fóirdheontas oifigí poist a chumasú i gceantair tuaithe ar fud bhord farraige an Iarthair lena chinntiú go bhfuil, mar ábhar tosaíochta, ioncaim ag máistir poist ag leibhéal an íosphá.

Comhionannas agus Iolrachas a Dhaingniú

Ardán don Ghaeilge

- » Tacú le lánchur i feidhm an Achta um Theangacha Oifigiúla ag leibhéal an phobail.
- » A mholadh go dtugann gach comhairle isteach Straitéis um Chothú na Gaeilge, agus Oifigeach Forbartha Gaeilge a cheapadh atá freagrach as a cur i bhfeidhm.
- » Tacú le leasa Gaelscoileanna, agus seasamh le tuismitheoirí agus le múinteoirí chun coinneáil thumoideachas na Gaeilge a éileamh.
- » A chinntiú go bhfuil Pleananna sainiúla Áitiúla Ceantair ann do na Gaeltachtaí, i gcomhairle leis na saineolaithe sochtheangeolaíocha, chun an Ghaeilge a chosaint mar theanga pobail agus inmharthanacht na gceantar seo a mhéadú.

Ardán do Mhná

- » Tacú le tabhairt isteach beartais gníomhaíochta dearfaí agus a chinntiú go ndéantar monatóireacht orthu chun earcaíocht agus ardú céime na mban atá ar comhchumas a mhéadú i bhfostaíocht comhairle agus nuair a bhronntar conarthaí comhairle.
- » A chinntiú go dtugann gach comhairle beartais oifigiúla agus treoirlínte isteach ar fhoréigin baile, i gcomhairle le seirbhís áitiúil tacaíochta na mban.
- » Tacú le comhrochtain ar chúram leanaí ar chaighdeán maithe do chách.
- » Áiteanna ar Bhoird Forbartha chun tacú le tionscnaimh a chuireann fiontraíocht na mban chun cinn, leathnú ar Ghréasáin Fiontraíochta na mBan san áireamh.

Ardán do Leanaí agus do Dhaoine Óga

- » Tacú le ceannasaíocht atá ag teacht chun cinn i measc daoine óga trí Chomhairlí Óige a bhunú, chun fóram a thabhairt le haghaidh comhairliúcháin agus comhairle struchtúrtha ar údaráis áitiúla.
- » A chinntiú go gcuirtear san áireamh i ngach plan forbartha áiseanna chun pobail níos sábháilte a thógáil.
- » A chinntiú go ndíríonn gach comhairle ar sholáthar spóirt oiriúnach don aois agus ar áiseanna áineasa.

Ardán do Dhaoine Breacaosta

- » A chinntiú go ndéanann údaráis áitiúla seirbhísí príomhshrutha a phromhadh ó thaobh aoise de (amhail scéimeanna Bailiúchán Cúnta Boscaí Bruscair) agus seirbhísí a chur in oiriúint nó sainseirbhísí a sholáthar do riachtanais daoine breacaosta.
- » A chinntiú go gcomhlíonann gach tógáil nua caighdeán deartha chun cosc a chur ar an ghá le haghaidh athchóirithe amach anseo mar gheall chónaitheoirí breacaosta a bhfuil meath ar an ngluaiseacht acu.
- » Ballraíocht ar Chomhchoistí Póilíneachta a úsáid lena chinntiú go bhfuil freastal níos fearr ag an phóilíneacht ar riachtanais slándála daoine breacaosta atá soghonta. Tacú le scéimeanna deonacha pobalbhunaithe a thugann airdeall thar ceann daoine breacaosta a chónaíonn leo féin, agus le tacaíochtaí eile.
- » A chinntiú go ndéantar cigireacht rialta ar theaghlaigh altranais lena gcosaint in éadan mí-úsáid agus neamart daoine breacaosta ina leithéid d'áis.

Ardán do Dhaoine faoi Mhíchumas

- » A chinntiú go bhfuil Oifigeach Rochtana do Dhaoine faoi Mhíchumas chun cigireacht a dhéanamh ar iarratais phleanála.
- » Soláthar a chinntiú do mhaireachtáil neamhspleách laistigh d'eastáit le tionacht mheasctha.
- » A chinntiú go gcomhlíonann tógáil nua caighdeán uileghabhálacha deartha, agus a iarrann ar iarratais phleanála chun saindeimhniúchán a chur leis chuige sin ón gCumann Innealtóirí Foirgníochta nó ón bhForas Ríoga Ailtirí.
- » Tacú le tabhairt isteach beartais gníomhaíochta dearfaí agus a chinntiú go ndéanfar monatóireacht orthu chun daoine faoi mhíchumas a earcú agus ardú céime a thabhairt dóibh i bhfostaíocht comhairle.

Ardán do Phobail Nua

- » Pobail Nua a chuimsiú i bpróisis áitiúla chomhairliúcháin agus phleanála a chur chun cinn, agus a chinntiú go bhfuil na pobail seo ionadaithe ar chomhlachtaí áitiúla agus go gcuirtear san áireamh iad i gcinnteoireacht.
- » Feachtas chun deireadh a chur le Córas Soláthair Dhíriú atá éagothrom.
- » Cur in éadan na scolaíochta leithscartha. Oideachas áitiúil agus soláthar cúram leanaí a chur chun cinn atá níos sofheagraí ar riachtanais leanaí ó Phobail Nua agus ar a dteaghlaigh, agus sprioc-chláir dhírithe san áireamh nuair is cuí é.

Ardán do Thaistealaithe

- » Cuimsiú na dtaistealaithe i bpróisis áitiúla chomhairliúcháin agus phleanála a chur chun cinn, a chinntiú go bhfuil siad ionadaithe ar chomhlachtaí áitiúla agus curtha san áireamh i gcinnteoireacht.
- » A chinntiú go bhfuil soláthar iomlán agus tráthúil de Phleananna Cóiríochta Taistealaithe áitiúla ann.
- » Comhrá leanúnach dearfach cuiditheach a chur chun cinn idir Pobail áitiúla Taistealaithe agus pobail shocraithe ar ábhar a bhaineann leo beirt.

Time for real leadership



Promoting Meaningful Local Democracy

Republicanism is about maximising democratic rights. In former times, this meant campaigning for no taxation without representation and one person-one vote. In our generation, it is still about the right to Irish national self-determination, but it is also about promoting meaningful local democracy and full accountability in public service provision.

What we have now in this state is local government stifled by limited powers, underfunding, corruption and a lack of vision. Business in local government must be done differently. Local councils should be centres of community innovation and dynamism. They should be engines for growing and spreading prosperity and equality. They should be where the community's best and brightest come together to deliver responsive services and to solve problems cooperatively, efficiently and effectively. Moreover council halls and chambers are the property of the people. Council business affects everyone, everyday. Both should be inclusive of and accessible to all.

New challenges from climate change to the global financial crisis show us that the maxim to think globally but act locally has never been more relevant to Ireland than in the 21st century. Sinn Féin is ready to step up to the mark and to lead.

In each area of local policy, we have identified fundamental changes for which we will campaign, but also priorities to guide our political action within current local powers over the lifetime of the next council administrations.

Local Government Reform

Local government in the 26 Counties has a much narrower range of powers and functions than most other EU states. There is no real local control over most essential public services or economic development. This is bad for democracy and needs to change. In particular, the current system effectively prevents communities and their local public representatives from responding adequately to changes in economic circumstances, yet help from central level is rarely sufficient. Local councillors' roles in policy making are too limited and many very important decisions are made instead by unelected and unaccountable Council Managers or by distant Ministers. Indeed, the Minister for the Environment currently

has the power to override the democratic will of the people and dissolve a local council. All of this in turn constrains the ability of ordinary people to exert influence over the decisions that affect them every day.

We need to take control over matters of local importance back from distant or unelected decision-makers and put them into local hands.

In the Six Counties, Sinn Féin is spearheading a comprehensive and progressive reforming of local government and the widening of local powers and public accountability for services. What we really need is for this to become an island-wide reform initiative.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » A major transformation of local government, to empower local communities, increase participatory democracy and otherwise enable the delivery of planning and public services that correspond to local need.
- » Increase councillors' powers to include appropriate local control over the provision of services including education, healthcare, policing, infrastructure, investment and employment, childcare and social services,³ as well as greater local control over budgets and financing of local government, including the ability to collect tax revenue.
- » Correspondingly limit Ministers' powers. In particular, remove the power to dissolve local councils for failure to agree a budget.
- » Restore or increase prior councillors' powers over planning, housing, transportation and waste management and correspondingly limit Managers' powers. In particular, remove their powers to impose incineration or superdumps and introduce privatisation of waste management services against the will of the local council.
- » Reform the structure of local government to make it more accountable – including directly elected Chairs and Mayors who would assume many aspects of the council management oversight role.
- » Review the powers and functions of councils' Special Policy Committees and Community Development Boards

³ For more detailed proposals see the subsections on economic development, education and childcare and communications and energy infrastructure in 'Growing and Spreading Local Prosperity' and the subsections on healthcare and community safety 'Raising the Quality of Life'.

to ensure that these allow for maximum participation and effectiveness.

- » Introduce mechanisms for real community participation in local decision-making and ensure communities and their representative organisations are at the very least meaningfully consulted on major decisions affecting them. Support the establishment of District, Community and Neighbourhood Councils that can formally link with local authorities.
- » Review the distribution of powers and division of labour between city/town/borough councils and county councils, ensure better integration through Area Committee work and reverse the unwarranted transfer of powers from town to county councils.
- » Review the powers and functions of Regional Assemblies⁴ and Regional Authorities,⁵ and introduce direct elections to these bodies. Empower them to develop, implement and oversee coordinated regional policies on planning, environmental protection, economic development, infrastructure and public service delivery.
- » Build towards Irish Unity by increasing local, regional and cross-border coordination and integration of council work in development planning and service provision. Use participation on General Council of County Councils, Association of Municipal Authorities of Ireland, Local Authority Members' Association and All-Ireland bodies to this effect. Work with northern colleagues on Cross-Border Corridor Groups to implement Integrated Area Plans for the three Border Corridor Areas (North West, Central and Eastern).

Local Government Finance

Underfunding of local government remains the biggest barrier to local authorities' delivery of improved services in the communities they represent. Central government provides some support through the Local Government Fund and grants for specific initiatives, but the level of finance is among the lowest in the EU at less than half the EU average. Councils struggle to balance their meagre budget allocations and inevitably some essential services suffer.

Meanwhile, again in contrast to most other developed world counterparts, our local authorities' powers to raise additional revenue are limited to the imposition of charges such as commercial rates, business charges, domestic charges and development charges and other user fees that amount to stealth taxes. This means that cash strapped local authorities are often

⁴ The Border-Midland-Western (BMW) Regional Assembly and the Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly.

⁵ The Border Regional Authority, the Dublin Regional Authority, the Mid-East Regional Authority, the South-East Regional Authority, the Midlands Regional Authority, the West Regional Authority, the Mid-West Regional Authority and the South-West Regional Authority.

compelled to introduce or increase rates, charges and fees beyond what would otherwise be considered reasonable. For example, whereas previously local authority infrastructure projects were funded mainly through government grants, increasingly councils have to produce matching funds in order to qualify for such support. This policy effectively discriminates against less prosperous areas and will further aggravate uneven regional development, since local revenue may not be available for the capital infrastructure needed to increase local competitiveness and prosperity.

The ability of local authorities to fund services is likely to worsen in the time ahead. In addition to the cuts introduced by central government to deal with the current Exchequer deficit, the downturn in the construction sector is already significantly affecting the amount of revenue local authorities now collect by way of development charges.

All recent analyses of local government financing agree that the current system is failing. In particular, a major 2006 report by Indecon International Economic Consultants concluded that reform is essential and that a truly sustainable system enabling local authorities to provide services remains to be established.

These challenging economic times also demand an end to local financial mismanagement. We need to take what resources we collectively own and share them out more equally to make our communities fairer, not less fair.

Sinn Féin wants a future for local government characterised by increased powers matched with the increased revenue necessary to deliver needed services. We need sustainable funding for better local government. This requires reform of both local government funding and its financial management.

Value for Money – The Republican Way

Everybody rightly wants value for money. More than that, governments spending hard-earned tax revenue have a duty to ensure the best value in public spending. Using an effective 'value for money' test is essential to counter corruption and waste. But for republicans, 'value for money' must measure more than just the direct costs and quality of goods and services and their timely delivery. 'Value for money' should under no circumstances be reduced to simple cost-cutting or containment. We must hold public spending to an even higher standard.

To achieve true value, public procurement decisions must also do the following:

Take into account both long-term and 'external' (indirect) costs.

Not undermine fundamental social goals, such as protection of the environment or workers' rights, or the achievement of economic equality – and if possible should enhance these.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » Make need the core principle in local government funding allocation. Central government spending on local government should be determined by the real needs of communities, the services local authorities are required to provide and their ability to raise additional revenue in an equitable manner locally.
 - » Progressively increase the proportion of central government funding transfers to local government commensurate with increased powers and service delivery needs.
 - » Increase local authorities' budgetary control, including greater discretion in the spending of central grant funding.
 - » Phase out the archaic model of annual budgeting in favour of multi-annual budgeting based on long-term planning at both local government and central government levels.
 - » Introduce appropriate local participatory budgeting mechanisms such as those used successfully in more than 200 municipalities worldwide, to ensure full transparency and accountability in setting of rates and charges and in spending.
 - » End double-charging as a prop to a false 'low tax' system. The Commission on Taxation must bring forward proposals to ensure sustainable and equitable sources of tax revenue to enable government at all levels to improve quality and capacity in public services and to deliver the improvements in infrastructure that are necessary to restore economic competitiveness and improve quality of life for all.
- » Adjust local service and procurement contracts to create a level pitch for local businesses by breaking tenders into segments, allowing smaller contractors to efficiently tender.
 - » Oppose privatisation of local authority services and the use of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). These do not represent value for money since they result in public revenue foregone and also place a long term cost on local authorities that will eat into future budgets. Support local authorities' return to the conventional tendering process.
 - » Call for a review of the expenses regime for councillors and Committee Chairs to eliminate excess and abuse and subject claims to strict limits and scrutiny.
 - » Support the exercise of wage restraint at the top grades within local authority management and work with the local representatives of public sector workers to oppose service cuts and ensure fair pay and conditions.
 - » Oppose the imposition of double taxation through new service charges or user fees for essential public services. Instead fully investigate other possible sources of local public revenue.
 - » Oppose increases in and ensure fair and equitable application of, existing fees and charges.
 - » Press for consideration of the application of commercial rates based in part on the ability of businesses to pay – for example highly profitable businesses should be expected to pay more.
 - » Ensure that local authorities are enabled to recoup the full costs of providing services to non-principal private homes.
 - » Ensure that revenue raised through the introduction of any further environmental levies designed to reduce the production of waste or pollution (similar to the plastic bag levy) augment local government funds.
 - » Press for review of the requirement for matching local funding for infrastructural projects, to address the concern that certain local authorities are unable to progress with much needed infrastructure that would help build prosperity and competitiveness because they do not have the ability to raise matching funds.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Use the powers of elected representative oversight – including membership on Finance Special/Municipal Policy Committees and republican value for money criteria – to demand the accountable, efficient and effective spending of local authority finances.
- » Ensure that local public procurement (both current and capital and whether contracted-out or not) not only achieves value for money by conventional measures, but that winning bids are in full compliance with tax laws and environmental regulations, as well as labour law and good practice in areas including health, safety, equality, trade union recognition and collective bargaining.

Time for real leadership



Building Sustainable Communities

Too many communities suffer as a result of bad planning. Too many people don't have adequate or affordable housing – indeed an increasing number are homeless or living rough. This state shames the Irish people with its poor environmental record in the EU – with its contaminated water, its high carbon emissions, its far below average recycling infrastructure.

What we need are communities that are well-planned, that provide good shelter for all, that respect and protect the environment. Without these solid foundations, no community can improve its quality of life, much less genuinely prosper.

Sinn Féin is therefore committed to building a national network of sustainable communities that achieve these goals. This is at the heart of our political programme at local government level and we will use existing planning, housing, environmental protection and waste management powers in the councils to this end.

Planning

Good planning makes all the difference to community and family life. Responsible, ethical and sustainable planning, underpinned by equality considerations, is the right of all who live in Ireland. Yet current Government policy favours wealthy developers, speculators and landowners over the rest of us. This has resulted in corruption and bad planning decisions and we cannot allow this to continue.

We have all come across bad planning in the areas where we live and work. It denies us proper housing, schools and other public services and shopping, play and leisure facilities. It undermines public safety and a healthy environment. It can destroy whole communities and even cost lives.

One effect of bad planning in combination with the housing crisis is that average and lower-income first time buyers have been pushed into so-called commuter towns that are poorly serviced by transportation infrastructure and childcare services – both of which are necessitated by long commutes for employment. Property developers must not be allowed to build new housing developments without taking into account the need for provision of basic facilities and amenities. At the same time, rural people have a right to build principal homes on their own family's land and contribute to the regeneration of their own community. This

can benefit all by reducing demand for and pressure on sub/urban housing.

To thrive as sustainable, all communities require essential physical and social infrastructure. Sinn Féin has developed 'Sustainable Communities Criteria' based on the delivery of economic and social rights. All planning decisions must meet these criteria before earning our support.

Sinn Féin Sustainable Communities Criteria

Each community must have reasonable local access to the following:

- » a sufficient supply of social and affordable housing, in mixed areas
- » safe water supply and adequate sewerage
- » public transportation
- » employment
- » healthcare centres
- » childcare centres and schools

and reasonable access to local amenities such as:

- » shopping
- » public play and recreation areas
- » sports and leisure facilities
- » social and community centres, including youth cafés
- » cultural centres including libraries and museums, performance and exhibition spaces.

Direct community involvement in the planning process can provide an additional safeguard against corruption and bad planning. Local people are often better placed to inform decisions on community planning and management matters. We believe that many planning mistakes could be avoided if communities have a greater input in the planning process so that their needs are accounted for. People also have a right to participate in planning decisions that affect them. Yet the current system generally excludes local people from decision-making on planning. We believe that local authorities should act in partnership with the affected local communities to ensure that their planning decisions meet the real needs of the people they represent.

Sinn Féin elected representatives will use existing and campaign for additional planning powers to build communities that we all feel safe and proud to live in. We will work to hold developers accountable and ensure that all areas have the infrastructure necessary to be socially and environmentally sustainable and moreover use planning policy to contribute to community safety, as well as urban and rural regeneration.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » Long-term vision developed through a 10 year planning cycle with 3 mid-cycle reviews, commencing in 2011.
- » Accountability in planning through the establishment of Community Planning Fora as a permanent mechanism for local consultation and participation.
- » Extension and promotion of public Pre-Planning Clinics in every local council – maintaining a list of accredited local engineers – to offset unequal access to planning expertise.
- » Increased staffing for Council Planning Units to reduce delays, including new out-of-hours Community Planning Enforcement Officers, funded by a fair levy on developers.
- » Amendment of the Planning and Development Act to require at least 30% social and affordable housing in every new development.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Take an ethics pledge linked to an Elected Representatives Code of Conduct, as required by the party.
- » Use membership on the Planning Strategic/Municipal Policy Committees and otherwise advocate to ensure community participation and input at pre-planning and planning enforcement stages and extensive participation during all stages of County/City/Town/Local Area Development Planning.
- » Apply the ‘Sinn Féin Sustainable Communities Criteria’ and refuse to support unsustainable planning applications.
- » Ensure development plans make best use of existing space and focus on brownfield site development to promote both urban and rural regeneration.
- » Ensure proposed developments adhere to the (Dublin) Guidelines for Successful Apartment Living, the Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities urban design framework and the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines.
- » Ensure that planning permission favours the development of sustainable rural housing and that development levies do not penalise rural dwellers building family homes, or first-time buyers building modest principal homes.
- » Ensure development plans frontload building of community facilities, with onus on the developer.
- » Ensure development plans build safer communities by

including youth amenities (ie. green areas, playgrounds/skateboard parks, sports and recreation centres, libraries and culture and arts spaces, youth cafés), as well as better road crossings and traffic calming schemes, improved street lighting and night transport initiatives.

- » Target planning enforcements at big developers and ensure that planning enforcement resources are not misused on individual planning disputes between neighbours or insignificant breaches of conditions.
- » For developments of a significant nature, size or scale, demand initial site notification and notification of any amendments to all resident within 400 yards of a site. Oppose approval for spurious ‘change of use’ applications (for example, to vary ‘non-viable’ crèches to income generating private units).
- » Hold developers accountable by systematically imposing substantial, index-linked bonds (refundable in the event of full compliance with planning conditions) as provided for in the Planning and Development Act and by applying a bar from planning approval on those who fail to comply which includes both the parent company and subsidiaries. Ensure that development levies are paid on the granting of planning permission.
- » Propose and insist on Irish names for new roads and estates, reactivate the use of townland names and ensure that all planning decisions protect our cultural heritage, including heritage sites.

Housing

First it was massive year-on-year house price inflation. Now that the housing bubble has burst, it is the credit crunch. Between these two, owning a home has never been less attainable for those on low and middle incomes. The housing crisis in this state may currently be overshadowed by the economic crisis, but it is no less real. Moreover the economic crisis if not resolved will only aggravate the housing crisis further, as an increasing number are now at risk of mortgage default and repossession.

Private management companies make matters worse where they operate in estates and apartment complexes. As the sector remains unregulated these companies can charge extortionate fees and annual hikes of up to 50% that residents – already saddled with hefty mortgages – have no choice but to pay.

Those who rent privately are vulnerable to the approximately one in five rogue landlords who do not comply with minimum accommodation standards. Some are trapped in genuinely appalling conditions including rat infestations, dampness and mould, leaking water pipes and a lack of ventilation. Yet

local authorities mostly fail to exercise with diligence their responsibility for inspecting all rental accommodation and bringing prosecutions for violations, at least in part because they lack sufficient resources. Private tenants affected by the economic downturn are also increasingly at risk of illegal eviction.

Sufficient social housing provision solves many of these problems. Yet both the state and local authorities are failing in their responsibility to step into the breach.

Although social housing new build has increased in recent years, provision has not increased to the level required to cater for the more than 40,000 households who remain on waiting lists and indeed tenant purchases have depleted the public stock. The disastrous collapse of the Dublin Public-Private Partnership regeneration schemes proves that PPPs do not work and government should fund social housing from now on.

According to the most recent estimates available, there are approximately 2,400 households and 5,000 individuals that are homeless. More than 1,700 households live in unfit accommodation. Over 4,000 households live in overcrowded accommodation and nearly 3,400 are involuntarily sharing. The number of individual adults and children affected is of course much greater. And it is widely understood that these figures significantly understate the actual situation. Meanwhile, more than one in six private houses built remain vacant. This represents unconscionable waste in the face of dire need.

Social housing delivery is a key responsibility of local councils. Good housing decisions can make a difference. Delivery of housing for all, as of right, is a major priority for Sinn Féin and we will use all existing and campaign for additional powers and resources to help achieve this objective.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » A reorientation of housing policy to favour public provision of social housing and increased provision of cost-price affordable housing.
- » Public reporting of an annual local social housing needs assessment, alongside a report on the status of local housing stock (including local authority occupied, local authority vacant, local authority vacant but derelict, voluntary, affordable, vacant private and private rental) and public reporting of an annual survey of local homelessness.
- » A review of all Local Authority Design Guides to establish a state-wide minimum standard to ensure that each follows best practice.

- » A new regulated system for local assessment of social housing need, including provision for advocacy, multidisciplinary assessment, increased waiting list transparency and an appeals process.
- » A new regulated system for allocation of affordable housing, based on need, including independent oversight and increased waiting list transparency.
- » Increased resources for local authority inspections of rental accommodation, with a view to ensuring robust enforcement including prosecutions.
- » Establishment of the promised Property Services Regulatory Authority to monitor these companies, enforce standards and investigate complaints.
- » Government assistance to those currently at risk of losing their homes due to reckless banking practices, including:
 - » increase of Mortgage Interest Supplement;
 - » a requirement on banks to take all steps necessary to protect low income and unemployed people facing mortgage default and home repossession including rescheduling payments or allowing interest-only payments for a period of time;
 - » establishment of a new payments scheme for newly unemployed mortgage holders in which interest payments are suspended until new employment is found; and
 - » a moratorium on principal home repossessions for low and middle income homeowners until after the recession.
- » An end to illegal evictions.

*Sinn Féin Councillors Will:*⁶

- » Use membership on the Housing Strategic/Municipal Policy Committees to work with the local Homeless Forum and other housing rights advocacy partners including Residents' Associations.
- » Ensure the council sets and meets social housing targets and targets to eliminate homelessness within the Local Authority Housing Strategy and Homeless Action Plan, including a ringfenced percentage of allocations for homeless households.
- » Oppose dependence on private provision of social and affordable housing under Part V of the Planning and Development Act in favour of public provision, but also ensure that developers at least meet the full 20% social and affordable housing provision minimum requirement under the law. Ensure that such housing is not clustered but spread throughout new estates. Ensure that councils purchase all of it, allocate at least 50% for social housing and sell the remainder as cost-price affordable housing.

⁶ See proposals related to housing for vulnerable populations in the section 'Strengthening Equality and Diversity', including in the Platform for Women, Platform for People with Disabilities, Platform for New Communities and Platform for Travellers.

- » Propose the following basket of measures to immediately double social housing output without budgetary increase by:
 - » Extending the new shared equity scheme to allow local authorities to purchase housing units on a 50:50 basis in conjunction with the central government and using this lending capacity to increase social housing output.
 - » Combining local authority capital and revenue streams alongside government loans to build and acquire more social units.
 - » Purchasing existing vacant private units at or below market value, subject to appropriate standards and value for money criteria.
- » Ensure full use of compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers on derelict buildings and sites, as well as vacant properties and other lands to convert these to social housing on an accelerated basis.
- » Ensure at a minimum unit-for-unit replacement of social housing, particularly as part of regeneration programmes.
- » Oppose over-concentration/isolation of social housing and ensure housing provision for people with particular social needs within mixed tenure estates.
- » Review the social housing points systems for equity to all social groups, to ensure fair allocations with preference to those most vulnerable.
- » Work to end substandard social housing design – the prevalence of smaller units, smaller rooms, less garden space, less soundproofing between units – by ensuring application of the same design specifications to social housing units as to private housing units.
- » Ensure adherence to all housing planning guidelines and propose state-wide extension of the Dublin Council Guidelines for Successful Apartment Living, especially for Part V new builds.
- » Ensure new builds meet universal design standards, for example as set out by the Committee for European Standardisation Guidelines and energy efficiency standards including those set out by Sustainable Energy Ireland.
- » Ensure that all local authority-owned properties benefit from Building Energy Rating (BER) upgrading and promote support for other sustainability upgrading, including energy efficiency/consumption reduction schemes and water use efficiency/water harvesting schemes, including maximum subsidy to low income households.
- » Ensure that councils use their full powers of inspection of local rental accommodation, adhere to inspection and standards guidelines and engage in robust enforcement against rogue landlords.
- » Ensure councils fulfill their own estate maintenance and refurbishment responsibilities and do not allow public properties to remain derelict.
- » Oppose outsourcing of estate management to private companies and renew an emphasis on/support for Residents' Associations and cooperative management of estates.

Environmental Protection and Waste Management

To say that this state's environmental record is poor is to understate the problem. It shows failure to meet carbon emissions reduction targets, failure to meet waste reduction and recycling targets, failure to protect boglands and wetlands and other sensitive habitats from development and exploitation, increased incidence of flooding as a consequence of failure to protect floodplains from development, consistent violations of EU standards on water quality. While it is welcome that all political parties are now committed to environmentalism at least in word, that is not enough. Robust action is needed and, as we all know, the best environmental protection starts at home, in our local communities.

'Going green' the republican way means ensuring that all of us are guaranteed, as a right, a safe and sustainable environment in which to live and work. We need to ensure that local authorities fulfil their obligations in areas for which they are directly responsible and also by making sure that local businesses and others comply fully with all the relevant regulations dealing with environmental protection and waste management.

Our commitment to the devolution of as much power as possible to locally elected representatives and the community itself is especially important, as the Government has tended in recent years to remove powers in this area from local authorities and transfer them to unelected Managers or to a distant Minister. This has had serious implications for waste management policy in particular and has resulted in proposals to build unnecessary incinerators, overdependence on landfill, the imposition of double taxation service charges for waste collection and also in illegal dumping.

We believe that councils need more powers to protect the local environment and that previous powers to control waste management decisions in particular must be restored. Sinn Féin will use all existing and campaign for additional powers to help councils uphold the environmental rights of all.⁷

⁷ See also relevant proposals in the subsections on Water Services and Transportation Services in the section 'Delivering Responsive Public Services' and in the subsection on Energy Infrastructure in the section 'Growing and Spreading Local Prosperity'.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » Return power over waste management to local elected representatives through enactment of the Sinn Féin Waste Management (Amendment) Bill 2003.
- » Progressive movement away from landfill and towards reduction, reuse and recycling, closure of all unsafe landfill sites and full remediation of contaminated dumpsites.
- » Sufficient funding for recycling infrastructure. Separated waste collection for every home and business and widespread provision of public recycling amenities.
- » An All-Ireland Landfill Levy to apply the polluter pays principle consistently nationwide and a levy requiring private operators to subsidise public recycling facilities, street cleaning and other civic amenities, as well as the combating of illegal dumping.
- » Repeal of the Strategic Infrastructure Act.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Use membership on the Environment Strategic/Municipal Policy Committees to work with local communities and other environmental advocacy partners.
- » Press all councils to use their Local and Regional Waste Management Plans to adopt a strategy of achieving Zero Waste through set targets for reduction, reuse and recycling, by making the necessary local facilities available and to further support this through minimum waste procurement decisions.
- » Oppose incineration or other thermal treatment and landfill for waste disposal and ensure each local electoral area has at least one civic amenity site for recycling.
- » Oppose the privatisation of waste management and the introduction of service charges for waste collection.
- » Support measures to eradicate illegal dumping, including increased enforcement and penalties.
- » Ensure that each council adopts a Local Climate Change Strategy.
- » Support the adoption of maximum energy conservation and renewable energy conversion measures. Advocate the use by local authorities of renewable energy sources, including biofuel, for authority-owned vehicles and facilities.
- » Encourage local energy generation from waste through Combined Heat and Power (CHP) plants using biofuel produced by mechanical-biological treatment or anaerobic digestion, (as well as energy from other sustainable and renewable sources such as wind power).
- » Protect the public interest by supporting the adoption of local environmental protection measures, in particular those that protect sensitive wildlife habitats including

wetlands and floodplains and those that ensure sustainable management of natural resources such as boglands.

- » Include the community and local businesses in the environmental protection process through regular consultation and provision of information.
- » Ensure their local authority has joined the Nuclear-Free Local Authority organisation and propose designation of their local authority area as free of Genetically Modified (GM) crops, to support Sinn Féin's objectives of making Ireland both Nuclear-Free and GM crop-Free.

Time for real leadership



Delivering Responsive Public Services

Delivery of public services is the whole reason people willingly pay taxes. Ensuring that those public services match local need is the reason people democratically elect their representatives to government and by doing so entrust in them responsibility for management and oversight. In return for their hard-earned money and for their vote, people rightly expect that these services will not only be made available but will correspond to their actual needs and moreover uphold their and their children's equal economic and social rights.

While local government in this state at present exercises few or no powers in some areas of public services – such as healthcare, education, communications, energy supply and community safety – it exercises considerable control over delivery in others such as water and sewerage, transportation, fire services and recreational services and amenities. Where this is the case, it is imperative that local elected representatives ensure these powers are used responsibly in the public interest, to ensure the delivery of local services in a way that responds to local need and peoples' rights.

Sinn Féin will campaign for new local government powers to use public services to uphold the rights to healthcare, to education, to work, to an adequate standard of living, to safety and to ensure that the provision of these services meets the needs of our individual communities.⁸

We will also use existing local government powers over public service delivery to uphold peoples' equal rights: to clean water, to access by transportation, to safety, to leisure and play and to participate in cultural life.

Water Services

The importance of responsible water provision is brought into stark relief by the recent plight of the people of Galway and Clare, who have been periodically unable to use their domestic water supply for long periods due to contamination from sewage, lead and other bacterial sources. Sinn Féin has called for an independent enquiry into the causes of these water crises and outlined our proposals to prevent recurrence. This should act as

a wake-up call to councils across the state to take water supply protection seriously and to proactively prevent similar problems emerging elsewhere.

All people have a fundamental and equal right to safe water and to its 'free' public supply, which is paid for by direct taxation. That entails ensuring that the water supply is protected from any threat of contamination and that the provision of water is retained in public hands to ensure both best management in the public interest and universal provision regardless of income. This is a core obligation of government at all levels. It can literally be a matter of life and death. Moreover businesses and the local economy suffer when an area develops a reputation for contaminated water – no one will want to invest or locate in such an area, with its risk of revenue loss or additional cost.

Unnecessary water waste is of course another major environmental problem that is primarily caused by leakage as a consequence of inadequate water infrastructure. Imposing water charges or water metering to monitor household or commercial usage is not the answer. Investment in comprehensive infrastructural remediation is the only way to fully and finally solve the twin problems of both wastage and contamination. There is no way around this.

Sinn Féin will use the full extent of our powers at local level to ensure responsible management of water services and we will also use our political strength to campaign for longer term solutions to uphold the right to water.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » A comprehensive urgent review of need, driving planned investment in remediation of water infrastructure in all areas throughout the state. The outcome must ensure that each and every urban and rural household has access to a reliably safe public supply of water, the quality of which complies with or exceeds the highest EU and EPA standards and delivery of which eliminates or minimises waste through leakage.

⁸ In recognition of the current limitations in local authority powers over these areas, they are dealt with under the two subsequent sections 'Growing and Spreading Local Prosperity' and 'Raising the Quality of Life'.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Use membership on the Water and Sewerage Strategic/Municipal Policy Committees and otherwise to ensure that councils are diligent and proactive in water supply monitoring.
- » Work to ensure a clean and safe public water supply to all local residents within the council area.
- » Support the vigorous implementation of all EU and other regulations to ensure that the water supply is safe from contamination.
- » Support enforcement of the principle that 'the polluter pays' against anyone responsible for contaminating or failing to protect the water supply.
- » Call for the introduction of Source Protection Measures for all public and group water schemes.
- » Ensure that councils engage in door-to-door public health notifications in contamination affected areas, arrange for free bottled or otherwise safe water to residents and lobby for state rebates for additional electricity use by those under boil water notices and for subsidised remediation measures where individual low and middle income private householders require pipe replacement, since people should not have to pay for failures of the state.
- » Oppose any attempt to privatise the water supply and fight to keep water treatment plants in public ownership.
- » Oppose charges for the use of water, including their imposition on schools and other non-commercial organisations under the EU Water Directive. Propose a waiver scheme in the interim.
- » Support the implementation of effective strategies to conserve water and reduce waste and misuse pending structural remediation, such as education and information campaigns.
- » Advocate grant support for public water conservation measures by farmers, including water self-sufficiency and water recycling for non-consumption purposes.

Transportation Services

Looking at the state of transportation in the 26 Counties, you would never know that the Celtic Tiger had come and gone. Both local and state-wide public transport is still characterised by a lack of availability, lack of accessibility and a lack of integration between services. Large portions of a formerly comprehensive rail network were closed down and much of the rolling stock is still from a bygone era. Many local and secondary road networks are crumbling and the countryside in particular is beset by accident blackspots that regularly claim lives. Most cities and towns also lack adequate provision for pedestrians making it dangerous to even cross the road, particularly for the elderly, people with disabilities and those with prams or small children.

Since so many local developments were planned without consideration for access to public transport, people now have little choice but to use a car to participate in normal life. Our cities, towns and suburban beltways have consequently become car-congested and daily commuting a nightmare. Despite this and the environmental imperative to reduce private car dependency to stop climate change, the level of provision of environmentally sustainable public transport remains woeful. Indeed, the Irish Government's grand Transport 21 plan offers nothing whatsoever to cyclists or pedestrians.

We need to bring Irish transportation into the 21st century, with comprehensive local and national networks of sustainable public transport – biofuel or electric buses, commuter and freight trains, light and ultra lightrail trams in cities and major towns, a metro in the capital, cycle and pedestrian lanes, as well as special provision for both taxis and carpooling. We also need road networks that are sufficient to deal with volume, safely designed and well-maintained, with effective traffic management measures to maximise vehicular, cyclist and pedestrian safety. These are crucial not only to improve quality of life but also essential for economic prosperity. Yet local authority powers over transportation and public transportation in particular remain limited.

Taxi provision is one area where private transport meets public transport and over which local authorities have some control. Taxi services are especially important in those areas that still lack comprehensive public transport by bus, rail and tram. Sinn Féin opposed the deregulation of the taxi industry and warned of the ensuing hardship for taxi drivers and their families and we supported the introduction of the regulation of taxi licensing. We need more efficient and effective state and local regulation of the taxi industry in a manner that is compatible with the interests of taxi drivers and operators and of course that of the travelling public.

Peoples' rights to work, to education and to public services depend on their access – hence their right – to transportation and to public transport in particular. Realising our collective right to a clean and safe environment also depends on this. We believe that councils should have more powers to provide and coordinate public transport and should incorporate transport needs into local and area planning involving all relevant stakeholders. Sinn Féin will use all existing and campaign for additional powers to help councils uphold the transportation rights of all.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » Significantly greater public investment in public transportation to ensure more affordable and more frequent service and full public ownership of bus and rail services.
- » The re-opening of the rail lines closed in the mid to late twentieth century and an extensive expansion of an all-Ireland rail network in the coming decades, including an extended Western Rail corridor serving Donegal and onwards to a Derry-Dublin rail link, as well as the restoration of the West Cork railway network.
- » Increasing investment to upgrade all bus fleets, including the ancient fleet of school buses to ensure children can travel safely to and from school and to increase frequency of service on public routes.
- » Improved public transport links to serve all major airports. Public shuttle bus services to all secondary airports, with schedules that reflect actual flight times.
- » Full ticketing and timetable integration between services, including the introduction of smartcards.
- » All public transport made accessible to those with impaired mobility.
- » Completion of the island-wide motorways, including and in particular the Atlantic Road Corridor from Waterford to Letterkenny as a seamless dual-carriageway built under public finance.
- » Air services to link all airports islandwide, with schedules that reflect the needs of business commuters. Increased investment in local and regional airport development.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Use membership on the Transport Strategic/Municipal Policy Committees and otherwise to ensure that councils use zoning and planning decisions to ensure that public transport services all populated areas instead of forcing car dependence on residents and tourists.
- » Propose the transformation of local Council Road Departments into 'Sustainable Transport Departments' with a mandate to develop local sustainable transportation, ensuring full integration of local road and rail services.
- » Propose an audit of local unmet public transport need, focusing in particular on new developments and rural areas, taking into account changing demographics and increased demand.
- » Propose to increase the quantity and standard of park-and-ride facilities and Quality Bus Corridors (QBCs) to make it more attractive to travel by bus, train or tram than by car. Ensure public shuttle or other bus services are available from all feeder towns to local train stations.

- » Take action to secure the provision of more public buses in rural areas, support community-based rural transport initiatives, including demand-responsive dial-up transit and ensure that all local transport operates to county boundaries and covers entire county.
- » Ensure sufficient provision of bus and tram shelters that effectively protect all public transport users, including schoolchildren, from the elements.
- » Oppose road tolling as a form of double taxation.
- » Initiate local road network accident black spot audits, with the participation of the local communities affected and ensure that councils take appropriate traffic management and road maintenance measures to effectively address findings.
- » Initiate pedestrian and cyclist safety audits of all cities, towns and villages and ensure expenditure concentrated on increasing cycle lanes and provision for pedestrians, including support for pedestrianised areas of city, town and village centres where appropriate.
- » Ensure the provision of sufficient taxi ranks to meet local need.
- » Ensure provision of recharging points for electric vehicles.
- » Work with the local representatives of transport workers to oppose service cuts and ensure fair pay and conditions.

Fire and Ambulance Services

Effective local emergency services are an essential component of community safety. Fire brigades respond to fires, road traffic accidents, ambulance calls, flooding, spills or leaks of hazardous substances. Ambulance teams regularly save lives. Society owes its respect and gratitude to firefighting and paramedical staff and their representatives, for their public service and the risks they willingly take on our behalf.

Communities have the right to expect effective protection from these services and local authorities have the responsibility to ensure that these services are well structured, well-run and receive adequate support. Yet too often local emergency services are starved of resources, equipment and personnel, are overstretched and firefighters in particular work without the benefit of updated fire risk assessments. This puts lives in unnecessary danger.

Community safety is a key priority for Sinn Féin and we will work with local emergency service providers and their representatives to ensure that all local powers are exercised fully to give them the support they need to do their jobs and make all our lives safer.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » A single Strategic Fire Services Executive to coordinate, administer and regulate the fire service state-wide and later island-wide, in line with international best practice.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Consult regularly with the representatives of local emergency service workers.
- » Propose inclusion of a Fire Brigade representative on the Planning Strategic/Municipal Policy Committee and other planning fora and ensure that planning decisions take into account emergency access and the need for sustainable traffic diversions.
- » Propose establishment of Fire Service Advisory Boards at local level including residents and local elected representatives to enhance communication and strategic planning with the local fire authority.
- » Propose regular regional fire risk assessments involving the local Fire Brigade/s, firefighters' representatives, local elected representatives, the HSE and other stakeholders.
- » Propose local equipment audits against need for both fire and ambulance services.
- » Support a single ambulance command and control system for Fire Brigade and HSE ambulance deployment.
- » Support full North-South cooperation in emergency service provision in border areas.

Recreational Services and Amenities

Over the last decade thousands of housing estates were built with no community centres, youth clubs, arts or sports facilities provided. Many established communities, particularly villages or economically marginal urban areas, face the same problem. The chronic lack of facilities for young people in particular, a legacy of bad planning, has been cited as a contributory factor to depression, drug and alcohol use and anti-social behaviour amongst teenagers. While recent improvements have been made in the provision of playgrounds for children, there is still much that needs to be done. Too many communities continue to lack library access, or permanent space for artists and audiences, or for community cultural events. Many potential historical and recreational amenities that could both serve local populations and attract tourists remain underdeveloped for lack of funding or vision.

Involvement in sports, arts and other recreational activities provides many benefits for both the individual and the community as a whole. It can enhance personal development and reduce anti-social activity among young people and provide a social outlet for adults and older people who might otherwise be prone to isolation. It can have important benefits for physical and mental health in all ages and contribute to increasing life chances. As such, investment in cultural infrastructure reaps broad and long term social benefits by, for example, reducing pressure on the health system from lifestyle induced illnesses such as obesity and alcoholism and reducing demand on Gardaí for policing anti-social behaviour. So even in recessionary times, such spending makes economic sense.

Local councils have considerable powers over provision of libraries, parks and open spaces, swimming pools, recreation centres, the arts, culture, museums, galleries and other amenities. But their ability to deliver is largely dependent on available resources and political will.

Local authorities can and must play a leading role in ensuring equitable access to public cultural and recreational facilities and amenities. Everyone, regardless of economic, social or cultural background should be included and welcome.

Sinn Féin will advocate the full exercise of all local powers and use our collective strength to lobby for additional resources to ensure that each community has and that all within our communities have, equal access to basic public arts, sports, cultural and recreational services and amenities as of right.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » A commitment from central government to put in place the public funding needed to redress the shortcomings identified in the audit of community, sports and arts facilities.
- » Provision of a funding package for local authorities to deliver community-based music and arts education projects in disadvantaged communities.
- » More local arts capital funding to support development of local arts infrastructure and for removal of the restrictions on subventions for temporary arts spaces.
- » Devolution of powers in respect of sports capital grants to local authorities in order to reduce bureaucracy and delays and allow better response to local needs.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Engage directly with all arts, sports, cultural and community groups to determine local needs and promote local leadership and participation in arts and sports and use membership on the Recreation and Amenities Strategic/ Municipal Policy Committees and otherwise to ensure that councils do the same.
- » Ensure that better use is made of existing civic buildings (including town halls and libraries) to deliver access to the arts (including music education and drama), while also ensuring that all such facilities are accessible to people with disabilities.
- » Ensure that all local authority leases to sports clubs are for multiple use to maximise available amenities.
- » Ensure that all development plans for towns with a population of 1,000 or more include the provision of one-stop recreational centres (including facilities such as a cinema, bowling alley, swimming pool and youth café).
- » Ensure fair and transparent allocation of local arts funding under the Percentage for Arts Scheme, including local democratic input and a focus on support for local artists and community arts projects in disadvantaged areas.
- » Establish clear and fair criteria for public art contracts and ensure local community/artists input into the selection process.
- » Ensure that all councils focus on the provision of age appropriate sports and recreational facilities:
 - » For children: a centrally located play ground in each population centre (village, pre-village/low order settlement and urban development).
 - » For young people and adults: sports and recreation facilities including skate parks and tennis/basketball courts, to be provided in existing open spaces under local authority ownership.

- » For older people: outdoor gyms such as that recently developed in Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath (facilities similar to what exists in other countries including various equipment designed to improve joint mobility, muscle strength and increase overall activity levels).
- » Ensure adequate resources for the upkeep of parks and open spaces, including the provision of wardens to ensure maintenance and the safety of those using the amenity.
- » Ensure that people on low incomes, particularly young people from low income families, are not excluded from participation in arts, sports and recreation due to cost considerations.
- » Ensure councils use local arts and sports funding to promote interculturalism, Irish language, arts and other activities and inclusion of women and people with disabilities.

Time for real leadership



Growing and Spreading Local Prosperity

Imagine a national network of vibrant and prosperous local economies supporting our communities. And imagine that within these economies there are enough good quality jobs with fair pay and conditions for all. That all can access the kind and level of education required to reach their full potential. That all the necessary infrastructure is publicly provided – including childcare for workers, transportation, communications and renewable energy – so that businesses want to invest and locate and remain. That innovation in business and diversification of entrepreneurship is supported and fostered. That enterprises need not turn over massive or even any profits to be valued for their social benefit to the community and economy, whether that is in employment or services provided. Prosperity with equality. With no one and no community left behind. That is the Sinn Féin economic vision and we will not be deterred.

While local government in this state at present exercises few or no real powers related to supporting local economies – such as over economic development, or provision of education, childcare, or communications infrastructure and energy supply – local elected representatives are often appointed to other bodies of relevance: Development Boards, LEADER and Partnership Boards, Vocational Education Committees, Ports and Airport Authorities and Harbour Boards and more.

Sinn Féin will campaign for new local government powers to manage the local economy and to uphold related rights to education, to work and to an adequate standard of living. And we will use any and all positions and influence available to our councillors to help grow and spread local prosperity in a way that responds to local need and peoples' rights.

Economic Development

Approximately four out of five industrial enterprises in this state are small firms employing less than 50 people. Moreover, 95% of small industrial firms are Irish-owned and likely to stay put if they can survive, while almost half of all larger firms are foreign-owned and therefore just as likely to relocate due to factors beyond Irish control. Despite providing the bulk of Irish employment, small to medium firms receive the least state investment. This is both unfair and economically unwise. Councils could play a much bigger role in providing help and support for this kind of enterprise and thereby help keep both business and jobs local.

The 'National Development Plan', with all its important commitments to build infrastructure essential for prosperity, must be implemented in full if local economies are to grow, attract and retain businesses and further investment. Yet local authorities have no real control over its content or progress.

For all its granting support that has benefited local communities, the EU also imposes significant constraints on the ability to grow local economies and create conditions that foster local prosperity. For example, EU state aid rules restrict government's ability to inject assistance. EU Directives aimed at privatising public services are pressuring councils to let private operators run essential local authority services that benefit businesses as well, such as waste collection and water provision. A number of councils have fought back against this trend and continue to provide excellent services themselves. But where they have failed to do so and services have been privatised, businesses and domestic users face higher charges, arbitrary price increases and service cutbacks. This does not help.

Precisely because central government refuses to provide adequate funding to local authorities based on need, councils have become reliant on alternative income from local businesses including commercial rates, development levies and other charges. We agree that businesses should pay their fair share back into local communities but the wide variance in rates and charges from one council to the next is aggravating unequal development. Companies naturally search for the 'cheaper' local authority areas – that is, those that can charge less because they are already more economically robust and better serviced. Weaker local economies are thereby locked into a low-income, low-service/infrastructure, low-growth cycle from which they cannot escape.

Quite simply, local authorities are hamstrung by their lack of powers to support local economies and local businesses. Local councils should act as an effective lobby on central government to provide needed supports and cooperate with local businesses and workers to create conditions that attract inward investment without compromising the rights of people to public services, or to decent pay and conditions.

Sinn Féin is committed to keeping business local. Uneven and under-development is a remnant from the previous century and must end. All communities have the right to access that which makes an area economically competitive: a well-educated workforce, good childcare and healthcare, good infrastructure, fair rates. We will use what powers are available to us – on councils, on Development Boards, LEADER and Partnership Boards and on Ports and Airport Authorities and otherwise – to support in particular the small and medium enterprises less likely to relocate and social enterprises especially. We believe that local business deserves fair support, backed by fair contributions to the local community from them, to achieve the common objective of sustainable local economic growth for the benefit of all.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » The same quantity and quality of grants and other supports to be made available to indigenous enterprise as to inward investors.
- » A mandatory penalty clause in the event of closure or relocation, applied to all new agreements with companies receiving government grants. Where legally allowable under current contracts for one or both parties to alter terms, insertion of a new penalty clause. Otherwise, a policy of denying future contracts on this basis to such companies and their parents or subsidiaries.
- » An end to EU restrictions on state aid, particularly where such aid assists local economic development and regeneration.
- » Establishment of a bi-annual state-wide forum involving all public stakeholders in economic development, ensuring collective accountability, better coordination and elimination of duplication.
- » Social and economic data collected and published county by county to inform and enable tailored needs-based plans for job creation, infrastructure and public service delivery.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Engage directly with local businesses, trade unions, farmers, fishing communities and other social partners and use membership on City and County Development Boards and Enterprise Boards, LEADER and Partnership Boards and otherwise to ensure that councils do the same.
- » Propose a review of the functioning and management of City and County Development Boards and City and County Enterprise Boards with the objective of making them more responsive to the needs of local communities and businesses.
- » Propose that City and County Enterprise Boards and Development Boards conduct a thorough review of the

barriers to local small, medium and social enterprises availing of grant aid. Support schemes should be revised to increase employment grants, stock grants, cashflow support grants, internal efficiency supports, knowledge developments supports and remove the matching funds requirement.

- » Demand and monitor government delivery on all local transport, broadband, energy and educational commitments made in the National Development Plan.⁹
- » Propose the setting up of one-stop shops to provide business support for small to medium and social enterprise. These centres can be based out of local authority offices and should involve all the main business bodies: Chambers of Commerce, Enterprise Ireland, Industrial Development Agency (IDA).
- » Propose to make unused IDA lands available for purchase by local authorities at less than current market value (in many cases these lands were sold to IDA by local authorities and state infrastructure has made them more valuable) and for local authorities to use these landbanks to provide low-cost serviced sites for local business start-up incubation units.
- » Lobby Enterprise Ireland to support joint SME export ventures involving the development and marketing of local, regional and All-Ireland brands (ie., the West Cork Fuschia brand and the Homethrown Pottery network).
- » Ensure full application of Retail Planning Guidelines and propose development of a strategy to support retention of local retailers in local communities, including the enhancement of local retail infrastructure, to prevent the drainage of local small and medium retail business to big superstores in city and town centres, or in retail parks on their periphery.
- » Where there is identified need, make planning approval for new retail developments conditional on provision of facilities for farmers' markets and expand provision for casual traders.
- » Support fair rates and development contributions that help local authorities provide needed services to all, but do not penalise local businesses for a lack of central government funding.
- » Advocate funding for the establishment of community-based co-operative or other social enterprises.
- » Lobby for reduction of the qualification for the Back to Work Enterprise Allowance to 12 months for all applicants.
- » Lobby for a sustained supply of Community Employment (CE) and Job Initiative (JI) places and to protect these jobs against cuts imposed in the current recession.

⁹ See also our proposals and commitments under the subsections on Education, Communications Infrastructure and Energy Infrastructure following in this section and under the subsection on Transportation Services in the previous section.

- » Oppose privatisation of local authority services, which ends up costing service users more. Where such is already underway, ensure full cost/benefit analyses of public versus private contracts and propose the review of existing contracts to establish if they are providing value for money for business and domestic users.
- » Ensure enforcement of contracts awarded to private regeneration companies so that pull-outs meet severe penalties.
- » Ensure that all council decisions protect workers' rights including workplace safety and the right to collective bargaining and that councils themselves do not employ agency workers or hire contractors who do not provide the highest standard of workers' rights for their staff.

Education

Education is an essential tool for building an Ireland of Equals. It is also the engine for the prosperous economy needed to deliver this. Government has an obligation to enable learners of all ages and life stages to achieve their full potential through access to the levels of curriculum, institutions and type of teaching and learning best suited to support their personal success and hence ability to contribute to the economy. Looking at our schools, however, no one would know this is one of the world's wealthiest states. Decades of underinvestment in the education system have produced an appalling vista.

Our primary schools are in serious debt due to insufficient funds. Many schools find that central government funding Capitation Grants cover only half their daily running costs. Indeed, 8 out of 10 schools must now fundraise privately to meet their basic needs. Were it not for the commitment of Boards, principals, teachers, parents' associations and local communities many schools would have to close their doors. It will be much more difficult for schools to raise this revenue in the current economic climate.

Approximately €40m per year is wasted on renting run-down, damp and even rat-infested prefabs. These are funds that could otherwise be available to invest in improving schools' permanent accommodation. Perhaps to hide the truth, the Minister discontinued the School Buildings List which included priority ratings and indicative dates of construction for the one in three schools that have applied for help. More than a thousand school communities now have no idea when or even if their school will receive much needed repairs or extensions.

We have the most overcrowded classrooms in the EU. The quality of education depends on configuring provision to ensure class sizes small enough to enable all to learn effectively. Yet

persistently and increasingly large class sizes stack the deck against most children. There is no viable option but to invest to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio.

Too few special needs teachers mean children left behind and denied life chances. The only way children with special needs will ever achieve their full potential in education is through early intervention and the sufficient provision of trained special needs teachers. Yet children have to wait approximately two years to access speech and language therapy or assessment by educational psychologists. Almost nowhere is the provision of special needs teachers sufficient to meet demand.

After more than a decade of the Celtic Tiger, functional illiteracy remains widespread, affecting almost one in four of the adult population. Having an adaptable workforce equipped with the right skills is critical to economic performance. Yet, almost one in three adults has only junior certificate or less. One in ten workers has only primary level, or no formal qualifications at all. This is not acceptable. Where low levels of educational attainment are geographically concentrated, the results for local economies are obvious. Poverty becomes cyclical and generationally locked-in.

There is still huge inequality in access to and participation in third level education for economically disadvantaged young people. A truly prosperous society demands that third level education should no longer be the exclusive preserve of the wealthy, but accessible to all equally based on ability alone. Despite increased participation in third level education by students from disadvantaged areas, only one in five children of unskilled and semi-skilled workers attend university or college, while almost all children from affluent areas do so. The fundamentally flawed grants system does little to aid low income students. It comes in too late and does not cover the real costs of pursuing higher education – much less the major economic barriers for mature students, lower income groups and single parents: accommodation and childcare. Economically marginal students get into debt, work too many hours and under-perform at exams, or drop out. Hence the system effectively confers continued advantage on those who already have adequate means, confining others to either student poverty or exclusion from studies. Reintroduction of fees requiring student loans will only make this situation worse.

People pay taxes on the reasonable expectation that educational provision will be covered and universally provided to the highest possible standard. But the reality is that local educational needs are simply not met by central government. Contentment to remain near the bottom of the league of EU states on educational spend will come back to haunt Government, hampering its ability to engineer an economic recovery in these tougher times.

A significant increase in local powers and local control over education as well as funding and fundamental structural reform, are clearly warranted as a matter of urgency for our communities and their economies. Sinn Féin will campaign for this and in the meantime, where we have positions on VECs we will use their limited existing powers to the maximum in this regard.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » An end to education budget cuts and a significant increase in public investment in education to at least the OECD average (6% of GDP), to eliminate the need for private fundraising.
- » No Public-Private Partnerships in public education, which have proved detrimental or disastrous in other jurisdictions.
- » A 50% increase in the School Capitation Grant.
- » Eradication of prefabs and reinstatement of the School Buildings List.
- » Reduction of the pupil-teacher ratio to 20:1 or less, as is international best practice.
- » Full implementation of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN).
- » An end to chronic underfunding of the National Education Psychological Services (NEPS) and the situation whereby huge sections of the country, especially rural areas, have no access to this service at all.
- » Reversal of cuts to provision of learning support.
- » No reintroduction of third level fees. Part-time fees eliminated, the number of third level places reserved for mature students increased, social welfare recipients permitted to retain their benefits while in full-time study and the eligibility criteria for the Back to Work Allowance expanded – all of which will help enable low income and unemployed persons and single parents to return to education.
- » Realistic funding for basic essential student college expenses such as accommodation, childcare, travel, text books, etc.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Engage with local teachers' unions, parents' organisations, student groups and education providers to identify priorities and lobby the Minister for Education to ensure the educational needs of all in the community are met.
- » Campaign against education cuts and for significant increases in investment in education, with a focus on ensuring sufficient provision for local disadvantaged students.
- » Campaign for a reduction in class sizes and for greater provision of special needs teachers and other essential resources.

- » Keep needed local school building and remediation works under review and maintain pressure on the Minister to deliver these.
- » Oppose the introduction of third level fees and support reform of the granting system in a way that truly opens access to third level to students from low income backgrounds.
- » Propose a state-wide review of VECs to achieve standardisation of policy and any other reforms needed to make them more accountable to and representative of the local communities they serve.
- » Use positions on VECs to advocate a coordinated approach between the VECs, FÁS and the third level institutions, to ensure sufficient provision of local training for sectors that will provide jobs in the coming decades.
- » Use positions on VECs to ensure focus on tackling local educational disadvantage, including provision of breakfast and homework clubs.
- » Use positions on VECs to ensure an adequate network of local community training centres, literacy services and back to education programmes that correspond fully to the diversity of local need – including increased need as a result of recession-driven unemployment.
- » Propose that all available public classroom space is optimally utilised at all times, ie. for out-of-hours training for workers.

Childcare

In 21st century Ireland, childcare is essential for equality and for prosperity. It is crucial to improve early childhood education, increase family incomes and lift families out of poverty by allowing parents back to work or education and underpin women's equal right to work and to equal pay. State-led provision of childcare can make our economy more competitive by reducing childcare provision burdens on individual businesses and working parents. Moreover, childcare is a wise public investment that could earn between €4 and €7 for every euro spent. However, UNICEF has found that this state is bottom of the league table of 25 OECD countries in its provision of early childhood education and care.

Quite simply, Irish childcare is in crisis. It is notoriously expensive and simply out of reach for many low income families. Childcare costs are so high that it has become known as 'the second mortgage'. Such community-based childcare as exists is now under threat by the central government's new Community Childcare Subvention Scheme. This ill-conceived tiered income-related scheme is creating divisions between children from families who receive social welfare payments and those who earn low wages. It is not the right way to fund childcare and as a result

many crèches serving the community's most vulnerable families have had their funding cut and still others are being forced to close down. Many low income parents now face fees that have increased or even doubled. Central government has also completely failed to address the disgracefully low pay of childcare workers in the community sector.

While local government does not have direct powers or control over childcare provision at present, councillors can ensure that developers provide childcare facilities as part of their planning permission. All local communities and economies have a vested interest in making sure that childcare is available to all who need it. Sinn Féin councillors will stand with parents and providers in making this demand and will use their influence to ensure that local childcare needs are fully met.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » State-led provision of comprehensive childcare made available to all who need it equally as of right and funded by general direct and progressive taxation.
- » Introduction of universal early childhood education and care including universal pre-school for 3 to 5s and an afterschool childcare system.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Engage with City and County Childcare Committees through Council Working Groups on Childcare in order to ensure the local authority does everything within its power to meet the childcare needs of the community.
- » Stand with parents and childcare workers to demand the scrapping of the fundamentally flawed Community Childcare Subvention Scheme and fight to keep local community crèches open.
- » Support provision or restoration of core funding to all local community-based crèches, to ensure equal access for all who need it to good quality childcare.
- » Require developers to construct childcare facilities in all new housing developments and transfer these to the ownership of the local authority upon completion.
- » Propose that all councils adopt a Local Authority Childcare Policy.
- » Lobby the Minister to remove all childcare-related barriers to parents accessing VTOS and Back to Education Schemes, such as non-funding of childcare during holiday periods.

Communications Infrastructure

Broadband has become widely recognised as an essential tool for economic development in the 21st century. Communities, businesses and individuals without access to communications technology including broadband will simply get left behind. Yet after all the years of increasing wealth that was available for investment, this state still lacks 100% broadband connectivity. Many communities, businesses and individuals continue to do without. Indeed, Ireland is now the only EU country where more people still use narrow band or dial-up.

The state not only lags far behind the EU average in broadband rollout, it also has some of the highest costs and lowest speeds in the EU. This effectively penalises businesses who locate and remain here. It has to end.

The so-called 'Digital Divide' is real: and it runs along the standard axis of unequal regional development. The one in three uptake in Dublin may not be impressive, but it far outstrips the Border region at just over one in ten. The 'National Broadband Strategy' has glossed over this reality by listing areas as 'connected' that in reality are not. Broadband black spots continue to blight ostensibly connected counties and councils have played a crucial role in identifying this deficit.

Despite growth there are still problems with broadband access particularly in rural parts of Ireland. It is common for people in rural communities to struggle to send emails or even access the internet because they cannot get the service. Rollout of broadband in rural towns, villages and outlying areas is of vital importance to the future economic development of rural Ireland.

For the same economic reasons, every school without exception should be able to teach their curriculum through information and communications technologies and every school must be fully ICT enabled. This means providing and updating teacher training, equipment, teaching materials, PCs and laptops.

While broadband access is available to the majority of schools, most find their computers and technology are too old to operate it. Broadband needs modern computers and networks to operate effectively. It is simply a waste of taxpayer's money to introduce broadband into schools that cannot afford to replace or upgrade hardware. More than 8 in 10 of our schools need a significant proportion of their computer equipment repaired or updated.

Local authorities exercise no powers in relation to broadband provision, but that does not stop local councils and councillors from acting as advocates for broadband provision to all in their communities.

Sinn Féin understands that an all-Ireland broadband infrastructure is a vital element for future prosperity. We support a state-owned telecommunications grid and would prioritise investment in rolling out broadband networks across the island. We support universal and therefore equal access to broadband – for every business, library, school and home. Our councillors will use all their influence to achieve this.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » An all-Ireland approach to ensure accelerated broadband roll-out so that everyone on the island without exception has affordable and efficient access to broadband.
- » A timetabled plan to ensure broadband coverage of and provision to all communities by 2010.
- » Better regulation to ensure lower prices and higher speeds.
- » An end to EU restrictions that prevent local authorities from facilitating and developing free access to broadband.
- » Broadband services and technology labs for every primary and secondary school and ICT hubs for each classroom, with adequate teaching and curriculum support available to maximise the use of these resources.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Continue to monitor broadband availability in their local areas and push for 100% connectivity.
- » Insist on inspections led by the Department of Communications to verify private provider claims of connectivity where the local authority has identified persistent broadband blackspots.
- » Propose mandatory telecommunications ducting as a condition of planning permission for all new significant residential, commercial and public building developments.
- » Ensure minimum bandwidth of 7MB/s for all towns with populations of over 5,000 by 2011.
- » Propose a local public awareness campaign to promote and maximise broadband uptake by residential and business users.
- » Lobby for central government support to pilot next generation broadband schemes where existing broadband infrastructure supports this.

Energy Infrastructure

Energy infrastructure and provision plays a crucial role in our communities and their economies. Its availability and price are important considerations for businesses and can make a difference in attracting and retaining investment. The availability of renewable energy in particular is more important than ever before. Not only will it help protect our environment and

therefore our communities and economies from the effects of climate change by reducing carbon emissions from fossil fuel-based energy, but it is generally cheaper. Consequently increasing demand can expect to grow this sector, meaning local renewable energy infrastructure and generation has the potential to help stabilise and regenerate local economies.

Ireland remains stuck below the EU average in renewable energy generation, but with its abundant access to wind and wave power in particular, it has the potential to lead. Moreover, the island is still dangerously dependent on foreign fossil fuels. This leaves us vulnerable to external forces and means we have little domestic control over pricing. The agricultural sector deserves support for conversion to biofuel crops where this is viable – and to a viable extent – as well as the production of other biomass fuels either through pelletisation or mechanical-biological treatment and the reclaiming of energy produced through combined heat and power technology. Wind farms could provide important sources of cheap electricity and local income for rural, coastal and mountain communities. Wave energy technology remains in its infancy, but is being pioneered on Ireland's west coast. It is not hard to imagine the difference a renewable energy economy could make to hard-hit farming, coastal and other rural communities.

Renewable energy holds huge potential for future job creation. It can reduce energy costs for business and domestic consumers. Where generation comes from publicly-owned local projects, it represents a potential source of local public revenue. Of course, it can make a significant contribution to the fight against climate change.

Sinn Féin supports the development of a publicly-owned all-Ireland energy grid, converted as quickly as feasible to a range of renewable sources with a view to establishing energy independence and even export over time. There should be state-led investment in developing the renewable energy sector on an accelerated basis. We also support decentralised energy production. Communities should be encouraged to become self-sufficient in renewable energy production wherever possible. This will require a combination of increased energy efficiency in buildings and products, consumer use reduction and support for the development of local sources and distribution.

Local government has no formal powers over energy production, distribution and regulation, but it still has a role to play. It can investigate the potential for and invest in local provision by purchasing or providing public lands. It can set local energy efficiency requirements on planning applications, set local targets for conversion and provide preferential planning approvals for renewable energy projects where there is compliance with all

other standards. Sinn Féin will use positions on local councils and all existing powers to realise our vision of a renewable energy economy supporting our local communities.

- » Work with all relevant stakeholders to establish a local authority sponsored programme to train, network and advise individuals and groups starting up local renewable energy initiatives.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » A reorientation of state policy and a timetabled strategy to plan for total conversion to renewable energy and establish energy independence.
- » Significant public investment in state-led development of the renewable energy sector, including support for establishment of a publicly-owned all-Ireland grid, decentralisation of production, community ownership, agricultural conversion and conversion of other local rural and coastal economies.
- » A state education and training policy, research and development funding and planning appropriate to support rapid sectoral growth in renewable energy.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Ensure each council investigates the potential for local conversion to, generation of and public investment in renewable energy.
- » Ensure each council adopts a Local Renewable Energy Strategy for incorporation into the local Development Plan and regularly monitors and reviews its implementation
- » Ensure each council maximises use of indigenous renewable energy such as wind, biomass and biofuel, particularly for its own buildings and vehicles.
- » Propose preferential planning approval for energy efficient developments and conversions and for renewable energy projects where all other standards are also met.
- » Support energy efficiency requirements for planning permission in new builds.
- » Propose and seek granting support for conversion and retrofitting of all local authority-owned buildings, which could create significant new employment for building workers and others made redundant by the recession. Ensure the awarding of such public contracts to local small, medium or social enterprises where possible.
- » Propose and seek funding for subsidised conversion and retrofitting for low income home-owners.
- » Ensure the council sources funding for and pursues priority investment in local renewable energy projects.
- » Work with the local VEC to make free retraining opportunities available to unemployed tradespeople to qualify them as energy rating assessors, or in the installation of solar, wood-pellet, ground-heating and mini-wind turbine systems, as well as energy-saving and insulation systems.

Time for real leadership



Raising the Quality of Life

All public services, delivered well and delivered equally to all, can play a crucial role in raising the quality of life for whole communities, as well as the families and individuals within them. Where local authorities have powers in relation to these services, they must use them to meet communities' real needs. But even in those areas of public services over which local authorities have little power at present, this does not stop local elected representatives from using their influence to maximum effect to help improve delivery of essential services and thereby raise the quality of everyday life for all residents.

Despite a lack of local powers in the crucial areas of policing for community safety, healthcare delivery and provision of postal services, Sinn Féin elected representatives can be counted on to take every opportunity to campaign for fundamental reform, for local accountability, for retention of local access on an equal basis and for the peoples' rights that these services should uphold.

We are committed to doing whatever it takes to end the inequality in healthcare, policing and postal service provision within and between local areas and to ensure that these services are used to strengthen the fabric of our communities.

Moreover, we are committed to empowering local residents so that their own voices on these matters are heard by decision-makers.

Community Safety

People have the right to feel safe in their homes and communities. But between inundation with media reports and actual statistical increases in certain kinds of crimes, people genuinely feel less safe than they used to. Individuals and communities experience real insecurity due to violence – whether that is linked to the illegal drugs trade, domestic or sexual violence, alcohol-fuelled assaults and public disorder – or 'anti-social behaviour' which, although it may not be criminal, still has the power to instill fear. All of these sources of community and individual insecurity warrant effective and appropriate action.

Unfortunately Garda deployment does not always correspond to the actual safety and security needs of local communities and local Gardaí are not accountable to the communities they

serve. The rate at which criminal proceedings are brought and successfully completed remains very low. And indeed the Gardaí and the criminal court system cannot create safer communities on their own. Local authorities and communities themselves have a hugely important role to play in cooperation with and in addition to the Gardaí, in preventing criminal, anti-social and nuisance behaviour and in ensuring that local policing responds to actual community need.

With the right policies, prevention is possible. For example, most children at risk of involvement in crime and other anti-social behaviour are easily identifiable. A recent study by the Association for Criminal Research and Development found that children living in deprived urban settings are at significantly greater risk of becoming involved in crime and children from certain geographical locations are thirty times more likely to end up before the Children's Court. In the interests of long-term crime reduction and safer communities, local authorities must ensure that resources and family support services focus on these areas. Indeed, planning decisions – entirely within the powers of local authorities – can also have an important impact on children's and therefore whole communities' chances. (See the section on Planning for more detail.)

What is Community Restorative Justice? Real Justice for Victims, Real Justice for Communities

Community Restorative Justice (CRJ) contrasts with the 'punitive' prosecutorial justice system in that it involves victims and communities directly and ensures that the offender actually confronts their behaviour and its causes and takes steps to make up for the harm they have done. This 'restorative' dimension leads to much higher levels of victim satisfaction with the process.

CRJ is not an alternative to, but has the potential to complement, the prosecutorial justice system. CRJ is not appropriate for some crimes, particularly domestic violence, child abuse or sexual assault, but may be used effectively in response to lower level criminal behaviour.

Community Mediation Schemes (CMS) may also be employed to respond to non-criminal nuisance type behaviour and neighbour disputes. CMS can help avoid the delays and high costs that are inherent to the civil court system.

Local authorities have no power over local policing. However local councillors are represented on Joint Policing Committees (JPCs), a mechanism to provide for increased Garda accountability at a local level, recently introduced on foot of Sinn Féin demands. Though the JPCs lack the full extent of powers originally proposed by Sinn Féin, they nonetheless offer a new avenue for communities to influence policing in their area.

Sinn Féin representatives will work to maximise the potential of JPCs and to ensure that each one provides a real opportunity for the community to directly determine their local policing priorities including through the holding of public meetings and the establishment of fully inclusive neighbourhood policing fora at a more local level.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Change:

- » More resources for crime prevention, in particular investment in communities' social infrastructure, parenting support and programmes for children and young people at risk including juvenile diversion.
- » Strengthened civilian oversight to make local policing accountable to the communities served, including more powers to Joint Policing Committees, their establishment at District level and sufficient resources for the Garda Ombudsman Commission and Human Rights Commission to operate effectively.
- » More resources for community policing and civilianisation of Garda administrative services to make more Gardaí available on the beat.
- » More resources for rehabilitative services during custody and post-release, including probation services, to prevent reoffending and to allow alternatives to custody for non-violent offences, including restoration.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Fight to establish Joint Policing Committees (JPCs) in all Councils.
- » Use their membership of JPCs to influence local policing, with a view to increasing and ring-fencing the number of community Gardaí and juvenile liaison officers and to changing rostering and deployment arrangements so that Gardaí are on patrol in the locations and during the hours that they are most needed.
- » Work to ensure that JPCs are sufficiently funded and that all related monies available to local authorities are drawn down in full.
- » Use planning and recreation decisions to directly contribute to enhanced community safety.¹⁰

¹⁰ See proposals under relevant subsections on Planning and Recreational Services and Amenities.

- » Continue to promote the expansion of local community restorative justice options and greater availability of community mediation services in the interests of community safety and greater quality of life.
- » Ensure all councils work with the Gardaí and local women's support services to conduct Women's Safety Audits of all city districts, towns and villages.
- » Campaign for a coherent strategy to maximise Garda visibility in rural areas.
- » Demand that all drug-related monies seized by Gardaí or by CAB are channelled into community development initiatives in the area from which they were seized, or whatever local area is most affected by the trade.
- » Work to ensure that local councils, in particular Local Authority Housing Units and Anti-Social Behaviour Units, work together with the Gardaí, the HSE, education providers and the community and voluntary sector to introduce real and lasting solutions to crime and anti-social behaviour with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention.
- » Campaign for a standardised council approach to anti-social behaviour and a positive council policy of immediate action against anti-social behaviour in parks and other public spaces including a commitment that all graffiti and other damage to play-grounds, vacant buildings etc. be responded to and remediated without delay by the responsible division (eg. Parks, Environment or Housing).
- » Promote the introduction of Good Community Agreements inclusive of all residents and other stakeholders, 12 month Local Authority Introductory Tenancy Agreements subject to appeal and robust eviction guidelines to ensure that where eviction is manifestly necessary in the interests of justice, proper procedures that comply with the European Convention on Human Rights are followed by the Council, thereby reducing the vulnerability of evictions to legal challenge.¹¹

Healthcare

Healthcare is one of the biggest issues of concern in our local communities. It is also the biggest single area of central government spending.

There is general agreement that most healthcare services can and should be delivered as near to where the patient lives as possible. The vast majority of healthcare is provided in local areas at primary level by general practitioners, pharmacists and other community-based services. Yet current central government health policy appears to ignore local needs.

¹¹ In May 2008 the High Court ruled that the law governing the current local authority evictions procedure is incompatible with the ECHR on the basis that it denies the evictee certain due process rights.

The GP to patient ratio remains at just over half the EU average and lower in disadvantaged communities, yet the Government has provided less than 100 of the 600 primary care centres promised. Cuts in HSE spending, including the recruitment ban, have hit local frontline services hard and moreover prevented essential and long overdue developments and improvements. The policy of over-centralising hospital services has slashed services in local hospitals throughout the state. Government privatisation of our health services has created a grossly inequitable health system which provides services on the basis of ability to pay or geography and not medical need alone. To compound the injustice we pay double and triple taxation for healthcare through private insurance and user fees.

Fundamental change is warranted and it must be based on the principles of excellence in care, equality of access for all based on need alone and full democratic accountability for the delivery of services.

Ninety years ago the First Dáil Éireann declared in its Democratic Programme that 'it shall be the duty of the Republic to take such measures as will safeguard the health of the people and ensure the physical as well as the moral well-being of the Nation.' In addition it declared that our aged and infirm 'shall not be regarded as a burden but rather entitled to the Nation's gratitude and consideration.'

We have yet to establish a healthcare system which applies those principles of equality and which safeguards the health of all the people, especially the most vulnerable. While standards of care have been transformed and life expectancy for the majority of people has improved, there are still major gaps, glaring inequality and widespread inefficiencies. For this reason Sinn Féin is campaigning for a new universal public health system for Ireland that provides care to all free at the point of delivery on the basis of need alone.¹²

Local planning and local democratic accountability are sorely needed. Local government should play a key role in managing healthcare delivery because the people have the right to a say, through their public representatives, in how best to deliver healthcare to them. Yet at present our communities have no part in planning how healthcare should be delivered and neither they nor their elected representatives can hold the Health Service Executive to account. The role of elected councils is confined to nominating members to powerless HSE Regional Health Fora.

Sinn Féin believes there are few issues of greater importance than the health of our people. The provision of healthcare of

the highest standard must be a key concern of our democracy, including at local government level. Regardless of the current lack of local powers over healthcare provision, we will use all our influence as local elected representatives to deliver the changes and the services required.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Change:

- » Replacement of our current two-tier inequitable and inefficient healthcare system with a new universal public health system for Ireland that provides care to all free at the point of delivery on the basis of need alone.
- » Establishment of new democratically accountable Community Health Partnerships (CHPs) responsible for the delivery of all healthcare within their geographically defined areas, irrespective of the border. CHPs to be managed by a cooperative of local public representatives, service users, advocates, health professionals and systems experts. They will oversee the strategic planning and management of community-based services and local hospital services. For the first time, local health needs will be at the centre of planning and delivering local health services. CHPs will develop comprehensive Community Health Improvement Plans that both make best use of the health resources available and also identify future needs.¹³
- » Independent Patient and Carer Advocacy Services within each CHP area, supplementary to a Health Ombudsperson operating as a regulatory body for service users and their families.
- » The retention and further development of the maximum feasible range of services at local hospitals and the provision of quality hospital care for all, regardless of income or geographic location. A halt to the over-centralisation of hospital facilities, reversal of cutbacks in services at local hospitals and a national plan for the provision and resourcing of hospital care, including clear access targets within an equality framework.
- » A network of modern and accessible fully public Primary Care Treatment Centres run by properly resourced multi-disciplinary and multi-agency Primary Care Teams. Kickstart this process by completing the rollout of the promised Primary Care Centres on an accelerated timetable. Appoint salaried GPs to work in the Primary Care Teams and negotiate to phase-in salaried contracts for all other GPs.
- » Pending establishment of fundamental reforms, establish a Health Strategic/Municipal Policy Committee for every local authority. Local and regional HSE management should be required to work directly with these SPCs, including

¹² Our proposals in the context of this local government election are based on our policy Healthcare in an Ireland of Equals.

¹³ This proposal is part of our overall fundamental structural reform package and is not intended to merely resuscitate the former Health Boards, nor to rehabilitate the fundamentally flawed HSE.

accountability to regular meetings held in public. These Health SPCs should replace the current Regional Health Fora.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Use the forum of local councils and where appropriate our seats on the HSE Fora, to promote equity and efficiency in healthcare provision and to vindicate the healthcare rights of our communities.
- » Work with communities and healthcare workers to campaign for delivery of the best possible local healthcare services.
- » Campaign against health cutbacks, including the HSE recruitment embargo and against centralisation and privatisation of hospital services.
- » Work as effective advocates for individuals seeking their rights to access health services.
- » Call for routine mapping and publication of local health statistics, including death rates from diseases, at county, city and town or borough level.
- » Propose local public information campaigns to enhance awareness of local mental health and suicide prevention services, campaign for necessary improvements and additional resources to increase local service access while reducing caseloads on individual healthcare workers and support more training in community-based prevention programmes such as ASSIST.

Addiction Services

Problems with addiction – to alcohol, to prescription drugs and to illegal drugs – have become widespread in modern Ireland, blighting the lives of individuals, their families and our communities.

Many effective interventions are available to assist people to overcome addiction, or at least to minimise its most harmful effects. Yet many of these crucial services are not available in our local communities. This means people who desperately need help sit on waiting lists, or must travel long distances for treatment, or simply never get access at all. Often the only service available locally is not the right one for the individual, so people continue to go without. This is wrong. When appropriate addiction services are not available it makes these people even more vulnerable to the predatory drinks and drugs industries, locking them, their families and communities into addiction-related harm.

Sinn Féin has a long history of confronting the causes and consequences of addiction. We will continue to campaign

for a more effective and holistic response to the drugs and alcohol crisis in this state, of which the provision of full spectrum addiction services is a crucial part. Local authorities can play an important role in supporting the provision of addiction and other harm reduction services. Our councillors will continue to use all their influence as public representatives – including their positions on Local/Regional/Rural Drugs Task Forces – to fight for delivery of these necessary supports to local communities.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Changes:

- » Provision of full spectrum addiction services (for alcohol, prescription drugs, illegal drugs and solvents) for all who need them.
- » No more addiction treatment waiting lists. Treatment made available as soon as the addicted person is ready for help.
- » An immediate increase in the provision of residential treatment beds.
- » Extra resources to combat the growing problem of cocaine and crack cocaine use and addiction.
- » Restriction on the number and type of outlets where alcohol is sold, the number of licenses granted and the hours and days of sale.
- » Involvement of local authorities and local communities in the liquor licensing control process. Local Licensing Fora should include elected representatives, statutory authorities, licensed trade representatives, community representatives and other stakeholders such as those involved in addiction services. Licenses should be awarded individually and on the basis of good practice and subject to annual review for compliance history. Group licensing should end.
- » A Local/Regional/Rural Drugs Task Force for every area where need is identified, to include representation of local elected representatives.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Work with addiction service providers to identify local service gaps and lobby for necessary resources. Oppose funding cuts for services or for Local/Regional/Rural Drugs Task Forces.
- » Call for provision of local residential treatment such that users need not face unnecessary isolation from their children, family or other social supports as they recover.
- » Promote communication, coordination and cooperation between service providers and local communities.
- » Promote and support establishment of local alcohol and drug-free social environments including late opening cafés in all villages, towns and city districts.
- » Ensure local sports and cultural facilities which can support

people avoiding or overcoming addiction are affordable and accessible to all.

- » Advocate to ensure that no person attempting to overcome addiction is denied accommodation, healthcare, or education and training on this basis alone.
- » Engage with, support and lobby for adequate funding for their Local/Regional/Rural Drugs Task Force.
- » Work directly with communities worst-affected by alcohol-related public disorder and the illegal drugs trade. Lobby for increased RAPID and CLÁR funding for proven effective prevention resources to disadvantaged areas hardest hit and where individuals are most at risk.
- » Promote awareness programmes and harm reduction education and services to reduce unnecessary deaths by alcohol poisoning/solvent use/overdose, HIV or Hepatitis C.

Postal Services

Hundreds of local post offices have disappeared from rural Ireland, mostly in the West. In the past ten years, more than one in four post offices in the state have closed and this trend is accelerating, with few full-time offices remaining. These closures are hitting those in rural areas hardest, especially older people who have to travel longer and longer distances to receive their pensions.

For many people, the local post office has acted as a meeting and contact point for neighbours they might rarely see otherwise. Not only do these closures deprive local communities of an essential service but they exacerbate problems of isolation and the general decline of rural areas.

All residents have the right to the same level of provision of public services. If the state presides over the destruction of rural post offices, alongside the downgrading of hospitals and transport and the closure of schools and Garda stations, then it is failing in its obligation to ensure that this is the case.

Without a national strategy backed by local leadership, the local post office as we know it is in grave danger of becoming extinct.

Sinn Féin is totally opposed to the full or partial privatisation of An Post, as it provides a vital public service and we are on record as strongly rejecting the deregulation of the postal service. Public assets such as An Post should be kept in public ownership and under democratic control, with universal service provision guaranteed. Big business is the only winner from privatisation and liberalisation while society as a whole suffers through lack of universal postal services and job losses.

There are many options for keeping An Post and rural post offices viable, through the diversification of its services. For example: providing door-to-door delivery of parcels and welfare payments such as pensions to people with impaired mobility; providing a daily necessities ordering service for elderly people; combining postal services with council services to provide an insurance and taxation one-stop shop; combining postal services with Business Points; developing post offices as centres of community service information for example on local transport and childcare; and providing space for community activities such as community meetings.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Campaign with local communities to end the closure of post offices throughout the country.
- » Campaign to keep An Post as a public asset under public control.
- » Support the diversification of An Post to keep the service viable.
- » Propose a Public Service Intervention Order to enable the subvention of post offices in rural areas along the Western Seaboard region to ensure post masters' incomes are brought to the minimum wage as a matter of priority.
- » Call for special funding to county councils as matter of priority, to roll out the subvention and prevent post offices from closing. Such an intervention should be a companion to an overall reform package to enable postal services scheduled for closure to deliver more social services.

Time for real leadership



Strengthening Equality and Diversity

The diversity of our communities is their strength. But local decisions and services do not always meet everyone's different needs. Such services and local power structures usually favour the majority, while ignoring or excluding minorities such as Irish language speakers, people with disabilities, people from New Communities, or Travelling people. In the case of women, children and older people, they may not be 'minorities' but the disempowerment they also experience is no less real. This inequality does not just affect the individuals and groups who experience a lower quality of life as a consequence of discrimination. By ensuring these people cannot reach their full potential or make their full contribution, it weakens the social fabric for everyone.

Sinn Féin is committed to building an inclusive Ireland of Equals. This must start at local community level. We will use our powers and influence within local authorities to ensure that all decisions are taken with a view to their impact on equality. All policy decisions, all spending decisions, all planning decisions, all service decisions should contribute to making our communities more equal, not less.

Sinn Féin Will Fight for the Following Fundamental Change:

- » All decisions taken by local authorities in the 26 Counties to become subject to an 'equality-proofing' mechanism such as that applying to all public policy and spending decisions in the 6 Counties – as required under the Good Friday Agreement.
- » Local authorities to actively seek the regular input of local women, children, older people, people with disabilities, Irish language speakers, New Communities and Travelling communities on matters affecting them to better inform public decision-making and to ensure delivery of services that respond to the needs of all.
- » Adoption by all councils of affirmative action policies to redress underrepresentation of groups experiencing discrimination in public employment and in the award of council contracts.

Platform for the Irish Language

An Ghaeilge, the first language of the nation, one of two official languages in the state, still does not enjoy an equal place in our communities. Irish speakers cannot access the same spectrum of local services in Irish as in English. This fact and other economic incentives and realities continue to favour English and put the use of Irish under pressure even in na Gaeltachtaí. Despite the efforts of under-resourced Irish language advocacy groups, there is still not enough support for those Gaeilgeoirí who want to use Irish in daily life, those with cúpla focail who want to improve their Irish, or members of New Communities who want to embrace the language in their adopted home.

There is plenty of scope for local authorities to play their part in the advancement of the Irish language in their area. Sinn Féin will work with all interested others to help grow an Ghaeilge in each and every one of our communities.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Work with local Irish language sectoral organisations to identify priorities and make local councils more responsive to their needs.
- » Support full implementation of the Official Languages Act at local level.
- » Propose that each council adopt an Irish Language Promotion Strategy and appoint an Irish Language Development Officer responsible for its implementation.
- » Support the interests of local Gaelscoileanna and stand with parents and teachers in demanding the retention of Irish language immersion education.
- » Propose and insist on Irish names for new roads and estates.
- » Ensure development of distinct Local Area Plans for na Gaeltachtaí, in consultation with socio-linguistic experts, to both protect the Irish language as a community language and increase the viability of these areas.
- » Ensure councils use local arts and sports funding to promote Irish language arts and other activities.
- » Make efforts to improve their own level of Irish and to use it regularly in public business.

Platform for Women

More than a century after the birth of Irish suffragism, women have come a long way, but still do not enjoy equal status in our communities. They are still more likely to carry principal childrearing duties and thus earn less and have lower incomes at all stages of life. They are still likely to live in fear of domestic or sexual violence. They face ongoing barriers to higher education, to better employment and women continue to be underrepresented in leadership, management and public life.

It's not just that women can lead. In our local communities, women do lead. With more effective support from local authorities, women could do even better. Sinn Féin is committed to ensuring that all councils take more seriously their duty to promote women's equality for the benefit of all.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Work with local women's organisations to identify priorities, make local councils more responsive to women's needs and to promote the status of women in all our communities.
- » Support the adoption and ensure the monitoring of affirmative action policies to increase hiring and promotion of equally able women in council employment and in the award of council contracts. Highlight gender imbalance where it occurs on all councils, Committees and Boards.
- » Ensure each council adopts official policies and guidelines on domestic violence, in consultation with local women's support services.
- » Ensure all councils work with the Gardaí and local women's support services to conduct Women's Safety Audits of all city districts, towns and villages.
- » Call for a review of the social housing points systems to ensure fair allocations for single women with children, with priority for women fleeing domestic violence and advocate for the provision of at least one refuge in each county.
- » Support equal access for all to good quality childcare, oppose the fundamentally flawed Community Childcare Subvention Scheme and support provision or restoration of core funding to all local community-based crèches.
- » Use positions on Development Boards to support initiatives promoting women's entrepreneurship, including expansion of Women Enterprise Networks, more aggressive promotion of women in rural enterprise and the sourcing and granting of micro-finance start-up funds.
- » Ensure councils use local arts, sports and community funding to promote inclusion of women and also support the funding of specific local women's groups and women's services.

Platform for Children and Young People

Children and young people are the backbone of our communities' future. Yet so many of our local services don't meet their real needs. So many of our communities are planned in a way that interferes with their best interests and best chances for optimal development. So much of daily life at local level fails them and in doing so fails us all.

Local authorities must bring the needs and best interests of children and young people – an investment in our future – to the centre of all decisions and plans. Sinn Féin will use our powers and influence at council level to ensure that local government cherishes all the children of the nation equally by paying special attention to the needs of children from low income families and doing everything possible to ensure they get the best start.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Work with local children's advocacy and service organisations to identify priorities and make local councils more responsive to children's needs.
- » Support emerging leadership among young people through the establishment of Youth Councils, to provide a forum for structured consultation and advice to local authorities.
- » Ensure local development plans adequately provide for schools and childcare facilities and frontload building of community facilities relevant to children, with onus on the developer.
- » Ensure all development plans include child and youth amenities to build safer communities (ie. green areas, playgrounds/skateboard parks, sports and recreation centres, libraries and culture and arts spaces).
- » Ensure that all development plans for towns with a population of 1,000 or more include the provision of one-stop recreational centres (including facilities such as a cinema, bowling alley, swimming pool and youth café).
- » Ensure that all councils focus on the provision of age appropriate sports and recreational facilities:
 - » For children: a centrally located playground in each population centre (village, pre-village/low order settlement and urban development).
 - » For young people: sports and recreation facilities including skateboard parks and tennis/basketball courts, to be provided in existing open spaces under local authority ownership.
- » Ensure that children and young people from low income families are not excluded from participation in arts, sports and recreation due to cost considerations.

- » Initiate Child Safety Audits (including pedestrian and cyclist safety) of all cities, towns and villages.
- » Use membership of Joint Policing Committees with a view to ensuring sufficient support for high risk children and children from high risk areas and increasing the number of juvenile liaison officers and local diversion programmes.
- » See also all commitments under the subsections on Education and Childcare.

Platform for Older People

After a lifetime's contribution to building our communities, it is unjust that in their older years many people find themselves isolated and excluded from community life. Our villages, towns and cities, our public buildings, transportation and thoroughfares – often even their very own homes – are not generally designed to help older people cope with decreasing mobility. Though their needs may be greater, many pensioners still cannot access needed services or amenities because of lack of available or affordable transportation.

Local authorities don't always extend older people 'the Nation's gratitude and consideration' as they should. Sinn Féin will use our influence on local councils to ensure that our communities continue to respect, include and make provision for people at all ages and stages of life.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Work with local organisations representing older people to identify priorities and make local councils more responsive to their needs.
- » Ensure local authorities age-proof mainstream services (such as Assisted Bin Collection schemes) and adapt or provide specific services for older peoples' needs (such as Falls Prevention schemes, sufficient seating provision in public areas, etc), in consultation with older people themselves.
- » Ensure all new builds meet universal design standards to prevent the need for later adaptation by older residents experiencing a decline in mobility.
- » Lobby the Minister for the Environment, Housing and Local Government to demand that funding for housing adaptations keeps pace with actual local need.
- » Support a requirement that all local public transport be made accessible to those with impaired mobility.
- » Take action to secure the provision of more public buses in rural areas and also support community-based rural transport initiatives.
- » Initiate pedestrian safety audits of all cities, towns and villages, with a view to ensuring safe provision for older pedestrians.

- » Campaign with local communities to end the closure of post offices throughout the country, particularly in rural areas, to ensure older people can access their pensions without difficulty and to combat their social isolation.
- » Propose provision of outdoor gyms such as that recently developed in Dunshaughlin, Co. Meath (facilities including various pieces of equipment designed to improve joint mobility, muscle strength and increase overall activity levels in older people) and hydrotherapy facilities at all swimming pool complexes owned or part-owned by councils.
- » Use membership of Joint Policing Committees to ensure policing better meets the security needs of vulnerable older people. Support community-based voluntary schemes that provide vigilance on behalf of and other supports for, older people living alone.
- » Ensure local nursing homes are regularly inspected to guard against abuse and neglect of older people in such facilities. Oppose staff cutbacks in public nursing homes, which undermines quality of care.

Platform for People With Disabilities

People with disabilities have come a long way in raising Irish consciousness about and campaigning for their equal rights. But there is still so far to go. Our communities still discriminate against and exclude people with disabilities. In every local area without exception, buildings, housing, transport, thoroughfares, education, employment, cultural life – are all still generally designed for people without disabilities. It is long past time for change.

Local authorities must do everything in their power to end discrimination against people with disabilities and to make our communities and local services accessible to people of all abilities. Indeed, most local authorities have committed to do so by endorsing the Barcelona Declaration on disability awareness, access, policy-proofing and impact assessment. Sinn Féin will use our seats on local councils to make sure this happens.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Work with local disabled peoples' organisations and advocacy groups to identify priorities, make local councils more responsive to their needs and make communities and all services more inclusive and accessible.
- » Initiate accessibility audits of all cities, towns and villages as well as local Development Plans, service plans and other strategies and ensure planning decisions and expenditure concentrated on making all public buildings, thoroughfares, services and amenities accessible for people with disabilities.
- » Ensure each council has a Disability Access Officer to inspect planning applications.

- » Ensure provision for independent living within mixed tenure estates.
- » Review the social housing points systems to ensure fair allocations with a priority on equal access for people with disabilities.
- » Ensure new builds meet universal design standards and require planning applications to include a specific certification to this effect from the Association of Building Engineers or the Royal Institute of Architects.
- » Lobby the Minister for the Environment, Housing and Local Government to demand that funding under the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability and the Mobility Aids Grant Scheme keeps pace with actual local need.
- » Support a requirement that all local public transport be made accessible to those with impaired mobility.
- » Ensure councils use local arts and sports funding to promote inclusion of people with disabilities.
- » Support the adoption and ensure the monitoring of affirmative action policies to increase hiring and promotion of people with disabilities in council employment.

Platform for New Communities

People from New Communities have much to contribute to our villages, towns and cities – socially, culturally and economically – and are now a significant percentage of the local population. Whether they have come to study, to work or to seek refuge from persecution in their home country, their arrival has breathed new life into many areas and the best of Irish people have made them welcome and treated them as equals. However, some have had negative experiences such as racist abuse – from verbal assaults to violence. Some face discrimination or racism by landlords or employers who seek to exploit their vulnerable status. Others have difficulties due to a lack of planning in public services or in targeted programmes that address their specific needs. For still others, government policy puts up barriers to their equality. For example, people seeking protection are not allowed by the state to work or pay taxes and have no choice where they live while they wait for a decision on their application, which can take years. During this time they receive only a very reduced social welfare payment of €19.10 per week. They and their children are consigned to living on the margins of our society and in poverty, often under degrading conditions shown to put their mental health at risk.

Local authorities must do all in their power to make people from New Communities welcome and to ensure that local services address their needs too. Sinn Féin will show leadership on councils and in our communities by promoting interculturalism,

integration, equality and meaningful social inclusion of New Communities and strongly opposing racism in every form.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Work with local New Community led-organisations, intercultural advocacy groups and residents' groups in refugee hostels to identify priorities and make local councils more responsive to their needs.
- » Promote the inclusion of New Communities in local consultation and planning processes, ensuring the representation of these communities on local bodies and inclusion in decision-making.
- » Promote interculturalism and integration in design and delivery of all local services and plans, including necessary outreach and consultation.
- » Ensure all council contractors comply with labour laws and treat all workers equally regardless of status or country of origin.
- » Review the social housing points systems to ensure fair and non-discriminatory allocations based on need and ensure the council targets outreach information at New Communities to increase awareness of their rights to social and affordable housing.
- » Campaign to end the unjust Direct Provision System. In the meantime, ensure local direct provision refugee hostels are regularly inspected for human rights violations and full compliance with applicable standards and their management held to account.
- » Oppose segregated schooling. Promote local education and childcare provision more responsive to the needs of New Community children and their families, including targeted programmes where appropriate.
- » Ensure councils use local arts, sports and community funding to promote interculturalism, integration and development of New Communities. Support funding of local community projects either representing or specifically outreaching to New Communities.
- » Use our positions on Joint Policing Committees to ensure that all racist incidents are taken seriously and those responsible for racist attacks are brought to justice.
- » Challenge racism whenever and wherever it occurs. Promote the implementation of Anti-Racism and Integration Development Plans at local level.

Platform for Travellers

Travellers remain the most marginalised group in Irish society. Many still live at the side of the road or in informal unserviced halting sites without electricity, water, sewerage or waste disposal. In general, they have significantly lower educational attainment

than settled people. Consequently, their incomes are lower and unemployment levels higher. Poor diet and sanitary conditions means they get sick and die earlier. Settled people generally feel freer to make derogatory comments about Travellers than any other group, to bar them from hotels, pubs and shops, or to refuse them employment or school places. Gardaí are known to treat Travellers, as individuals and groups, with a heavy hand. Hostility from settled residents often brings Travelling communities into local conflicts and hate crime against them is not uncommon.

Local authorities have an obligation to uphold Travellers' rights as equal citizens. Many social problems could be solved if local councils met Traveller needs for accommodation in particular. Sinn Féin will use our council positions to make this so and to ensure that all local services also consider and meet Traveller needs.

Sinn Féin Councillors Will:

- » Work with local Traveller organisations to identify priorities and to make local councils more responsive to their needs.
- » Promote the inclusion of Travellers in local consultation and planning processes, ensuring their representation on local bodies and inclusion in decision-making. Ensure interculturalism and integration in design and delivery of all local services and plans, including necessary outreach to and consultation with Travellers.
- » Visit and report on conditions in unserviced halting sites.
- » Ensure full and timely delivery of local Traveller Accommodation Plans that include a range of accommodation options including Traveller-specific sites, mainstream social housing, Traveller affordable housing, extension of the tenant purchase scheme and clustering in new developments.
- » Review the social housing points systems to ensure fair allocations to Travellers.
- » Oppose segregated schooling. Promote local education and childcare provision more responsive to the needs of Traveller children and their families, including targeted programmes where appropriate.
- » Ensure councils use local arts, sports and community funding to promote interculturalism, integration and development of Travelling Communities. Support funding of local community projects either representing or specifically outreaching to Travellers.
- » Promote ongoing and constructive dialogue between local Traveller and settled communities on matters of shared concern.
- » Use our positions on Joint Policing Committees to open dialogue between local Traveller and Garda leadership, to ensure that racist attacks and other incidents are taken

seriously and those responsible are brought to justice and to develop appropriate Garda response plans to ensure Travellers have an equal right to protection from violence internal to their own community.

- » Challenge anti-Traveller racism whenever and wherever it occurs. Promote the implementation of Anti-Racism and Integration Development Plans at local level.



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