

**FINE GAEL** 

**FINE GAEL  
GENERAL ELECTION  
MANIFESTO 2016**

**LET'S KEEP THE  
RECOVERY GOING**



# Contents

	<b>FOREWORD FROM AN TAOISEACH</b>	6
	<b>THE LONG TERM ECONOMIC PLAN- THREE STEPS TO KEEP THE RECOVERY GOING</b>	9
<b>1</b>	<b>AGRICULTURE AND FOOD</b>	13
	Generational Change - Farm Families	14
	Supporting All Sectors	14
	Realising our Ambition	16
	Robust Systems and Welfare	17
<b>2</b>	<b>ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE</b>	19
	Arts and Culture	19
	Heritage	21
<b>3</b>	<b>BANKING</b>	20
	Choice	20
	Credit	21
	Confidence	23
<b>4</b>	<b>BRINGING OUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY HOME</b>	25
	Bringing our Friends and Family Home	25
	The Irish Diaspora	26
<b>5</b>	<b>CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND THE ENVIRONMENT</b>	27
	Climate Change Policy	27
	Renewable Energy	28
	Price Competitiveness	30
	Environment	31
	Flooding	31
	Natural Resources	32
<b>6</b>	<b>A CONNECTED IRELAND</b>	33
	Communication Networks	33
	Bringing Ireland Up to Speed	34
	Broadcasting	35
<b>7</b>	<b>DEFENCE</b>	37
	Delivering on New Thinking	37
<b>8</b>	<b>DISABILITY</b>	39
	Making Work Pay	39
	Tailoring Services to Individual Needs	39
	Independence and Income Support	40
<b>9</b>	<b>DRUGS AND ALCOHOL</b>	41
	Public Health (Alcohol) Bill	41
<b>10</b>	<b>ECONOMY, PUBLIC FINANCES AND TAXATION</b>	43
	More and Better Jobs through Effective Tax Policy	43
	Making Work Pay through Tax Reform	44
	Sound Public Finances and Sensible Investments in Public Services and Infrastructure	45

<b>11</b>	<b>EDUCATION AND SKILLS</b>	47
	1. We Will Invest in Schools, Education and Teachers.	47
	2. We Will Strengthen Local Decision Making, Leadership, Innovation and Accountability.	49
	3. We Will Improve Parental Choice and School Diversity.	50
	4. We Will Expand the Range, Affordability and Quality of Higher Education Options.	51
<b>12</b>	<b>AN EQUAL, FAIR AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETY</b>	53
	More and Better Jobs	53
	Long-Term Thinking for Better Services	54
	Equality of Opportunity	55
<b>13</b>	<b>FAMILIES AND CHILDCARE</b>	56
	Making Work Pay for Families	56
	Family-Friendly Childcare	56
	Healthcare (see Health chapter for further detail)	58
	Education (see Education chapter for further detail)	59
	The Family Home	60
<b>14</b>	<b>AN GHAEILGE</b>	61
<b>15</b>	<b>HEALTH</b>	65
	1. More Resources and Staff and Better Infrastructure for Health Services	65
	2. Health Reform Programme	67
	3. A Decisive Shift Towards Primary and Community Care	69
	4. Improving the Health and Well-being of the Nation	71
<b>16</b>	<b>HOUSING</b>	73
	Home Ownership	73
	Sustainable Construction	73
	Social and Affordable Housing	74
	Protecting Renters	74
	Supporting High-Quality and Appropriate Housing	75
	Homelessness	75
<b>17</b>	<b>JOBS, ENTERPRISE AND REGIONAL GROWTH</b>	76
	A Leap Forward for Enterprise	76
	Building a Competitive Edge	78
	Revitalising the Main Street	80
	Promoting Entrepreneurship	81
	Workplace Relations	82
	Consumer Rights	82
<b>18</b>	<b>JUSTICE, CRIME AND LAW REFORM</b>	83
	An Garda Síochána	83
	Tackling Rural Crime	85
	Securing the State	85
	An Accessible and Efficient Legal System	86
	Sentencing and Repeat Offending	87
	Legislative Reform	87
	A Balanced Migration Policy	88
<b>19</b>	<b>LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES</b>	89
<b>20</b>	<b>NORTHERN IRELAND, EUROPEAN AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS</b>	92
	The Peace Process	92
	North South Cooperation	92
	Security and Crime Prevention	93
	Ireland in Europe	93

	Conflict Resolution and Multilateral Engagement	94
	Trade	94
	Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Humanitarian Aid	95
	Passport Security	95
<b>21</b>	<b>POLITICAL REFORM</b>	96
	A More Effective Oireachtas	96
	More Inclusive Politics	98
	Fiscal Responsibility and National Competitiveness	98
	Empowering Citizens and Driving Policy	99
<b>22</b>	<b>OLDER PEOPLE</b>	100
	Older Years, Better Years	100
	Enhanced Primary Care	100
	Promoting Independent and Active Living	102
	Carers	103
	Stronger Voice for Older People	103
<b>23</b>	<b>PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM AND PUBLIC PROCUREMENT</b>	104
	A Strong, Strategic Centre of Government that Drives New Ideas and Innovation	104
	Public Service Numbers, Pay and Pensions	106
	Devolving Power to Frontline Decision Makers	107
	Civil and Public Service Reform and Accountability	108
	More Diversity of Public Service Provision and More “Choice and Voice” for Service Users	108
	More Focus on Prevention and Early Intervention	109
	Public Procurement	109
<b>24</b>	<b>RURAL IRELAND</b>	111
<b>25</b>	<b>SEAFOOD AND THE MARINE</b>	115
	Food Wise 2025 – Seafood	115
	Investment and Leadership	115
	The New Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)	116
	Quotas – A National Asset	116
	Supporting Growth in the Seafood Sector	116
<b>26</b>	<b>SOCIAL WELFARE, MAKING WORK PAY AND PENSIONS</b>	119
	Making Work Pay	119
	Activation	121
	Welfare Reform	122
	Pensions Reform	122
<b>27</b>	<b>TRANSPORT</b>	125
	Public Transport	125
	Green Transport	126
	Roads	126
	Air and Sea Transport	127
<b>28</b>	<b>TOURISM AND SPORT</b>	128
	Tourism	128
	Sport	129
<b>29</b>	<b>YOUTH AFFAIRS</b>	131
	Ensuring our Young People Meet their Full Potential	131
	Ensuring our Young People’s Well-being	131
	Child Protection and Care	132
	Youth Justice	132
	<b>APPENDICES</b>	134



LET'S KEEP THE RECOVERY GOING



**LET'S KEEP THE RECOVERY GOING**

RECOVERY

LET'S  
KEEP THE  
RECOVERY  
GOING

IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD, OUR  
LONG TERM ECONOMIC PLAN  
WILL REINFORCE IRELAND'S  
POSITION AS A PRO-JOBS  
AND PRO-FAMILY COUNTRY  
OF STABILITY, GROWTH AND  
OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL.

*An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny*



## FOREWORD FROM **AN TAOISEACH**

**T**hanks to the hard work and resilience of the Irish people, our economy is now recovering. While the economic recovery remains fragile and cannot be taken for granted, we now have it in our grasp to make Ireland a country where our people can once again prosper, work, start a business, raise a family and grow old with dignity.

Fine Gael's promise is to give our people the solid foundation on which they can build their lives – no more boom and bust, no more reckless waste of taxpayers' money, no more sense of a crisis.

Our Long Term Economic Plan offers our people the stability and certainty needed to keep the recovery going. It has three steps:

- 1. More and Better Jobs**
- 2. Making Work Pay**
- 3. Investing in Better Services**

By keeping the recovery going, the aim of our Plan is that by 2022 – the 100th anniversary of the foundation of the State – Ireland will be a country which:

- Makes a job available to everyone who wants one
- Gives every family the supports needed to escape from poverty
- Has brought home at least 70,000 of our friends and family forced to leave because of the crisis
- Gives every child an equal opportunity in life by providing the health, education and family services they need

Fine Gael has learnt from the mistakes made by previous governments – we know that only a strong economy that supports people at work can pay for the services needed for a just society. We are determined not to let Ireland go back – not to those who wrecked our economy in the first place, and not to those who would kill jobs with new taxes on work.

In an uncertain world, our Long Term Economic Plan will reinforce Ireland's position as a pro-jobs and pro-family country of stability, growth and opportunity for all.

My commitment to you is to keep it that way.

Together with the Irish people, Fine Gael will keep the recovery going.

*Enda Kenny TD*

**Leader  
Fine Gael**

# RÉAMHRÁ ÓN TAOISEACH

Tá an geilleagar ag téarnamh a bhuíochas d'obair chrua agus d'athléimneacht mhuintir na hÉireann. Cé go bhfuil an téarnamh geilleagrach leochaileach i gcónaí agus cé nach féidir neamhshuim a dhéanamh de, tá deis anois ag muintir na hÉireann déanamh go maith, a bheith ag obair, gnó a thosú, clann a thógáil agus dul in aois le dínit.

Geallann Fine Gael go gcuirfimid bunchloch láidir ar fáil do mhuintir na tíre seo - ní bheidh aon chaint ar bhorradh agus cliseadh, ní chuirfear airgead na gcáiníocóirí amú, ní bheidh géarchéim le brath níos mó.

Cuireann ár bPlean Eacnamaíochta Fadtéarmach an chobhsaíocht agus an chinnteacht a bhfuil gá leo chun an téarnamh a choinneáil ag imeacht ar fáil. Tá trí chéim i gceist:

- 1. Níos Mó Postanna agus Postanna Níos Fearr**
- 2. Pá Níos Fearr**
- 3. Infheistíocht i Seirbhísí Níos Fearr**

Agus an téarnamh á choinneáil ag imeacht againn, is é aidhm ár bplean ná go mbainfeadh Éire an méid seo a leanas amach faoi 2022 - céad bliain i ndiaidh bhunú an Stáit:

- Post a chur ar fáil do gach duine is mian leis post a bheith aige
- Na tacaíochtaí riachtanacha a chur ar fáil do theaghlaigh ionas gur féidir leo éalú ón mbochtaineacht
- 70,000 duine dár dteaghlaigh agus dár gcairde a d'imigh mar gheall ar an ngéarchéim a thabhairt abhaile
- Deis chothrom sa saol a thabhairt do gach leanbh trí na seirbhísí sláinte, oideachais agus teaghlaigh a theastaíonn uathu a chur ar fáil dóibh

D'fhoghlaim Fine Gael ó na botúin a rinne rialtais a tháinig romhainn - tá a fhios againn nach féidir ach le geilleagar láidir a thacaíonn le daoine i bhfostaíocht íoc as na seirbhísí riachtanacha le haghaidh sochaí chóir.

Táimid tiomanta gan ligean d'Éire filleadh ar an aimsir a caitheadh – gan dul ar ais chucu siúd a scrios an geilleagar ar an gcéad dul síos, agus chucu siúd a scriosfadh fostaíocht le cánacha nua.

Cabhróidh ár bPlean Eacnamaíochta Fadtéarmach le seasamh na hÉireann a neartú ionas go mbeidh sí ina tír atá ar mhaithe le postanna agus le teaghlaigh agus ina tír ina mbeidh cobhsaíocht, comhdheiseanna agus fás.

Geallaim duit go gcoinneoidimid an tír ar an gcaoi sin.

I dteannta mhuintir na hÉireann, coinneoidh Fine Gael an téarnamh ag imeacht.

*Enda Kenny TD*

**Leader  
Fine Gael**



Thanks to the hard work and resilience of the Irish people, our economy is now recovering. There are more people back at work. Our roads and shops are busier.

# The Long Term Economic Plan - Three Steps to Keep the Recovery Going

Thanks to the hard work and resilience of the Irish people, our economy is now recovering. There are more people back at work. Our roads and shops are busier.

We all remember the depth of the crisis that gripped the country only 5 years ago. An economy in freefall; banks on the brink of collapse; 300,000 jobs destroyed; and Ireland's international reputation in shreds.

A country in a Troika bailout.

In 2011, Fine Gael promised to get Ireland working again. While every element of our 5-Point Plan hasn't yet been delivered, most of it has, with the rest on the way.

This Government, working with the people, implemented a recovery plan to bring us to where we are today.

Together, we ended the bailout and restored our international reputation.

Together, we supported the changes to help create 135,000 extra jobs since 2012.

There is, of course, a long way to go.

Families know that the recovery is fragile and incomplete. Many don't yet feel the benefits. All remain nervous about the risks ahead and the danger of slipping back.

Fine Gael's commitment to you is that we are never going back.

Underpinning our manifesto is Fine Gael's Long Term Economic Plan to keep the recovery going. It has three steps.

## 1. More and Better Jobs

The first step is to create even more job opportunities, spread across the country. Since 2012, businesses have delivered an extra 135,000 jobs - more than the 100,000 we promised.

But this is not enough. We will build on this during our second term of office by delivering Sustainable Full Employment. This will mean:

- An extra 200,000 jobs by 2020, leading to more people at work than ever before; and
- 70,000 Irish emigrants returning home to work

These targets are ambitious, but achievable with the right policies.

That's why our manifesto commits to more measures to support both Irish-owned businesses and foreign investment in this country, including:

- The establishment of a new €4bn "Future Jobs Investment Fund" to future-proof the economy and our jobs plan against rising global risks and challenges
- Sectoral growth strategies for food, agriculture, tourism, financial services, aviation and transport
- Doubling to 31,000 the number of apprenticeships for new and growing sectors of the economy, as part of a step change in the capacity of our higher level education system to educate, develop, deploy and retain talent
- A new 10% CGT rate on start-ups from 2017
- €42bn in infrastructure investments, shaped by clear

regional jobs strategies, to bring unemployment to below 7% in every region of the country

- Protecting our 12.5% rate of corporation tax and further enhancements to our corporate tax regime to encourage more investment, innovation and job creation

## 2. Making Work Pay

Fine Gael believes that work, rather than welfare, is the only sustainable route out of poverty. The second step in our Plan is to continue to make sure that, as more jobs are created, work pays more than welfare, and that hard work and entrepreneurship are better rewarded.

That's why our manifesto commits to:

- Completing the equalisation of the income tax system for the self-employed by 2018
- Completing the abolition of the USC over a 5-year period, as part of a wider income tax reform plan that broadens the tax base and limits the benefits for the highest earners
- Doubling housing output to 25,000 per year by 2020 to make housing more available and affordable for working families
- Sensible, affordable increases in the minimum wage to €10.50 over the 5-year period
- A Working Family Payment designed to ensure that every parent working 15 hours or more per week takes home at least €11.75 per hour
- The extension of free GP care to the children of all families by 2019
- A second free pre-school year, and a €2,000 childcare subsidy for working parents of children aged between 9 months and 36 months in formal childcare settings

Through these measures, our Plan aims to – by 2020 – move 70,000 long-term unemployed people into a job, cut the national unemployment rate to 6%, and reduce the numbers of people living in Jobless Households towards the European average.

## 3. Investing in Better Services

Only a strong economy that supports people at work can pay for the services needed for the type of just

society that is at the heart of Fine Gael's vision for Ireland.

With the boost to the public finances from increasing numbers back at work and a growing economy, the third step in our Plan is to continue to invest in better services that improve people's lives and protect the weakest and most vulnerable in our society from poverty and exclusion.

Our Plan will use the resources generated by the economic recovery to fund, by 2021:

- An additional 10,183 doctors, nurses, Gardaí, teachers, social workers and other frontline service professionals within a well-run and cost-effective public service
- A significant increase in investment in our health services, to meet the needs of our growing and ageing population, reduce waiting lists, and to fund better primary and community care
- A €20 increase in weekly social welfare payments to carers, the disabled and the sick
- A package of measures for the elderly, including a €25 per week increase in the State pension, a €30 per week increase including the Living Alone Allowance, more "Fair Deal" nursing home places, and 2 million more home help hours

We will also set up a "rainy day fund" to cope with unexpected events. Our Long Term Economic Plan will leave €2.5bn of the available fiscal space unallocated as a Contingency and Stability Reserve. This reserve will act as a buffer against unexpected shocks, both domestic and international, and will be allocated according to a set of conditions to be set out by Government in Budget 2017, with the advice of the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council. The money will either be saved (used for additional debt reduction) or injected into the economy, in line with the needs of economic and fiscal stability.

In this way, our Plan will eliminate new government borrowing by 2018, and will keep the public finances in surplus thereafter.

Together with our plan to sell at least half of the taxpayers' stakes in the bailed-out banks by 2021 (with the rest to be sold thereafter), our Long Term Economic Plan will bring government debt levels down to well below the EU average, providing the economy with a safety buffer against unexpected shocks.

**LET'S KEEP THE RECOVERY GOING**





The Agriculture and Food sector is a strategic priority for Fine Gael. We recognise that farm families are the heartbeat of the rural economy and our vision for the sector will inspire the next generation to continue the tradition of family farming.

# 1. Agriculture and Food

The Agriculture and Food sector is a strategic priority for Fine Gael. We recognise that farm families are the heartbeat of the rural economy and our vision for the sector will inspire the next generation to continue the tradition of family farming. Our ambition is to position Ireland as the highest quality food producing nation in the world, based on innovation, sustainability and family farming.

The Agriculture and Food sector is a strategic priority for Fine Gael. We recognise that farm families are the heartbeat of the rural economy and our vision for the sector will inspire the next generation to continue the tradition of family farming. Our ambition is to position Ireland as the highest quality food producing nation in the world, based on innovation, sustainability and family farming.

Food Wise 2025 is our strategic plan for continued growth in the agri-food sector. This cross-sectoral strategy has been developed in conjunction with industry stakeholders and maps the way forward for all sectors including dairy, meat, prepared consumer foods, seafood, whiskey and craft beer, horticulture, forestry and tillage. The implementation of the Food Wise 2025 strategy will be a fundamental priority for Fine Gael and will help inform decision making in terms of policy and taxation measures for future budgets.

Fine Gael is committed to ensuring that agri-food businesses are supported, from the largest operators in the sector to the smallest of artisan food businesses. Conscious that the number of artisan food businesses has increased substantially in recent years, we will build further on this growth and help small artisans scale their businesses.

## By 2025, we will deliver:

- An increase in value of exports by 85% to €19bn
- An increase in value added by 70% to €13bn
- An increase in value of primary production by 65% to almost €10bn
- The creation of a further 23,000 jobs in the agri-food sector

**Protecting Farming Incomes:** We successfully negotiated a reformed and fairly redistributed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), securing €12.5bn in CAP funds, and introduced a new tax credit and reduced USC rates, enhancing the viability of Irish farms. We also introduced new regulations under the Consumer and Competition Act to tackle unfair practices in the grocery trade and will pursue further actions at an EU and domestic level to deliver transparency and fairness in the food supply chain. During a second term we will:

- Continue to seek out new markets and promote sustainable farming practices to mitigate the difficulties which price volatility can create
- Fine Gael has delivered the first legal framework for Producer Organisations in the beef sector. We will encourage the use of this framework to develop a

more professional negotiating relationship between farmers and processors, ensuring farmers are not just price takers.

- Continue to use the tax system to encourage strategic change in agriculture to support farm incomes

**Farm Gate Investment:** Fine Gael has committed €4bn to on-farm investment through the Rural Development Programme (RDP). Schemes like GLAS, TAMS, the Beef Data and Genomics Programme, locally led environmental schemes, knowledge transfer programmes, horticulture, organics and Areas of Natural Constraint are being rolled out as a priority. Fine Gael will drive the implementation of the RDP in the interests of all farmers, big and small, across all sectors and will carry out a mid-term review to ensure the full draw down of all EU funds.

We have renegotiated a new Farmer's Charter and will deliver on the agreed targets for processing payments, schemes and services, to the benefit of all farmers.

## GENERATIONAL CHANGE – FARM FAMILIES

The level of ambition that Fine Gael has for agriculture will particularly encourage the next generation of farm families.

**Young Farmers:** Young farmers and new entrants are vital for the continued growth and success of the sector. We have consistently prioritised young farmers, establishing the Young Farmers Scheme, a fund of over €24m for each of the years 2015 to 2019. We have ensured that the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme was the first under the new TAMS II to be opened under the RDP. Fine Gael established priority for young farmers and new entrants under the National Reserve.

**Agricultural Colleges:** Irish agriculture is in a better place than ever before and this is particularly evident in our agricultural colleges, which are full with ambitious students. Fine Gael has increased the teacher allocation in agricultural colleges to meet this growing demand and will ensure that this sector continues to respond to the ambitions of these students and to the needs of the sector, while continuing to produce high-

calibre entrants to the workforce. We will also review the Green Cert to make sure it is fit for purpose.

**Agri-Taxation Measures:** We completed the first ever extensive agri-taxation review, resulting in a package worth €300m, leading to greater land mobility and increased productivity. We are committed to using the tax system strategically to modernise and support agriculture through land leasing, partnership and mobility measures.

**Farm Safety:** Farm safety continues to be a critical issue facing farming today. We have committed €12.2m, under the RDP, to support an increased range of safety items. We will continue to work with the farming community in promoting safe farm practices.

**Social Farming:** Fine Gael will build on the existing social farming initiative, which supports farming operations on family farms or in institutional settings, offering, on a voluntary basis, farming, horticultural and animal-related work experiences to people availing of a range of day support services.

## SUPPORTING ALL SECTORS

**Beef:** We are committed to the beef sector and to increasing profitability through greater efficiencies. The Beef Forum has demonstrated the effectiveness of bringing industry and farming organisations together in positive and open engagement. The Beef Data and Genomics Programme will spend over €300m on modernising and improving efficiency in the beef herd as well as supporting farm incomes. This, in tandem with the introduction of a framework for producer organisations and knowledge transfer schemes (discussion groups), will support farmers in increasing efficiency and profitability.

**Dairy:** The abolition of milk quotas continues to represent the biggest opportunity for the Irish dairy sector and, as markets stabilise, Fine Gael will ensure that Irish producers are best placed to benefit from this, on the back of prudent investment. We will continue to convene a dairy forum to manage growth, ensure sustainability and address challenges within the sector. Fine Gael has invested heavily in the future of this sector through supports for processors expanding their enterprises, and this is being matched

by on-farm capital investment through TAMS and knowledge transfer schemes. We have also supported farmers through the recent period of market volatility with a €25m compensation fund. We will also encourage the establishment of a futures market for dairy produce and encourage price stabilisation tools to combat price volatility.

**Sheepmeat:** Developing the sheep sector is a key focus of the Food Wise 2025 strategy. We will improve efficiency and profitability in the sector through the knowledge transfer programme (discussion groups). We will further support sheep farmers through GLAS, the Areas of Natural Constraint scheme and TAMS. Fine Gael is also committed to a specific new support programme for the sheep sector in the context of the mid-term review of the RDP, reflecting the priority that we attach to maintaining numbers in the sheep flock.

**Poultry:** We have established a dedicated scheme for investment in the poultry sector, assisting producers in modernising their facilities, increasing competitiveness and returns within the sector. Fine Gael will also continue to support the industry in addressing animal health issues like campylobacter through the established working group, involving all stakeholders across the sector.

**Pigmeat:** We are providing support for on-farm investment through TAMS II. The on-farm animal health and welfare scheme, provided through the RDP, will benefit the pig sector. We will work with the Pig Industry Stakeholder group to enhance areas such as food safety, quality, animal welfare and environmental sustainability. The development of a viable pigmeat sector is a priority for Fine Gael and we will continue to pursue new and alternative markets to provide opportunities for certainty and growth in the sector.

**Organic Sector:** Under Fine Gael, support for the Organic Farming Scheme has doubled, with €52m earmarked for the sector over the course of the RDP. As a further support, a dedicated Capital Investment Scheme for the organic sector has been included in TAMS II.

**Tillage Sector:** We are committed to a growing and profitable tillage sector in Ireland. Fine Gael will continue to put in place supports and measures aimed

at improving the level of production, quality and viability of the Irish tillage sector. We will introduce a new TAMS scheme aimed specifically at the tillage area to improve efficiency and profitability. We are currently seeking EU approval for this scheme.

**Horticulture:** We recognise the importance of the horticulture sector and will continue to prioritise capital investment for development in this area. We recognise the potential to grow the output value of this sector to over €500m in the medium term and will deliver on the actions in the Food Wise Strategy to achieve this target. We are conscious of the need to safeguard this sector from potential unfair practices in the grocery sector and will monitor the impact of new legislation in this area in that context.

**Forestry:** The role of forestry in the effort to mitigate against climate change is very significant. Fine Gael will implement the Forestry Programme 2014-2020. The programme targets an increase in planting each year over the lifetime of the programme, commencing with 6,000 ha of new forests in year one, increasing to 8,290 ha in 2020. The programme will aim to build on research by COFORD on the eligible land considered suitable for forestry across the country.

**Island Farming:** In recognising the unique challenges of island farming under the new Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC) Scheme, we secured, for the first time, a special payment to assist island farmers in preserving traditional farming methods and preventing land abandonment. €15m will be invested in island communities during the course of the RDP.

**Commonage/Hill Farmers:** Fine Gael recognises that some farmers are working in challenging conditions. The ANC Scheme will invest €195m annually in areas of disadvantage. Fine Gael will also continue to prioritise access for farmers in commonage or restricted areas through agri-environment schemes like GLAS. We will continue to play a supportive role in sustainably managing farming on commonages.

**Locally Led Agri-Environment Schemes:** Fine Gael will roll out Locally Led Agri-Environment Schemes (LLAES), which will target habitats such as the hen harrier, pearl mussel, Burren, along with other locally led schemes which address specific environmental concerns.

**Horse and Greyhound Sectors:** Fine Gael has shown a determination to prioritise the Horse and Greyhound sectors, by significantly increasing funding over the last 5 years. We see these sectors as fundamentally important to rural Ireland and will continue to prioritise strategic investment, support and modernisation in this area. Committing to projects like the new Curragh racecourse is a sign of things to come in terms of capital investment in the sector.

In the greyhound sector, we have encouraged strategic reform and growth, and increased prize money by 25%. We will prioritise further reform, through the implementation of the Indecon Report recommendations and the introduction of new governance legislation.

Fine Gael recognises the contribution of the sport horse industry and will work with stakeholders to implement its 10-year strategy, which is designed to improve quality through improved breeding, education and training as well as welfare, marketing and sales expertise. We will explore new funding models for the sport horse sector, to provide the kind of finance needed to develop and maintain Ireland's position as a world leader in the breeding and training of sport horses.

## REALISING OUR AMBITION

**Growing our Exports:** Food Wise 2025 sets out a framework to harness the ambition of Irish producers for further growth across all subsectors of the Irish agri-food industry. Fine Gael's record in increasing returns to Irish farmers by delivering access to new markets is unrivalled. Through continued cooperation with Bord Bia and our network of Irish embassies, we will continue to drive trade missions and seek out new market opportunities for Irish goods. In this context we are committed to significantly increasing Bord Bia staff numbers in strategic new markets.

**Climate Change:** Fine Gael has made it very clear that agriculture has a significant role to play in meeting our climate change targets in the future. We are committed to protecting the environment and reducing the emissions intensity of our production systems. Ireland is, and will continue to be, a world leader in responding to the new challenges of climate change and global food security. We are committed

to designing and delivering a very ambitious climate change mitigation and adaptation strategy for Irish agriculture and the broader food industry. Our record is clear in the RDP and Origin Green programmes, where climate change strategies on farms and in food businesses are well underway.

### **Improving Competitiveness and Sustainability:**

Our ambition for the agri-food sector is based on growing the food industry sustainably. Ensuring our food is produced to high environmental standards will deliver enhanced profits for farmers through greater efficiency at the farm level and a better margin in the marketplace, as well as delivering for the environment.

We are committed to being the first country in the world to adopt a sustainability audit system, across producer, processor and manufacturing levels. The audit system will continue to be developed through the Origin Green programme and will be enhanced by measures under the RDP, climate change policy and the Food Wise 2025 strategy.

**Origin Labelling:** We will harness Ireland's reputation and avail of any competitive advantage generated by existing labelling rules.

**Live Exports:** We remain committed to live cattle exports, under a licensing system, while continuing to work with the World Organisation for Animal Health, to ensure animal welfare standards are met. We believe that live exports are an essential part of ensuring price competition for farmers.

**Research and Innovation:** Fine Gael believes Ireland can become a global centre for innovation in the food and drink sector. By promoting partnerships between the Department of Agriculture, Enterprise Ireland, Teagasc, Bord Bia, universities and the food and drink sector, we will develop new projects and increase the competitiveness of Irish goods.

**Maintaining Access to Credit:** We are now working with the European Investment Bank and the European Commission to deliver new and more affordable lines of credit for farmers and the agri-food sector generally. We are determined to see these new financial products in the market in 2016 and will continue to provide state-backed financing options for the sector.

**Trade Negotiations:** Fine Gael will safeguard Ireland's defensive and offensive interests in the context of

any future international trade negotiations. We will ensure that our national interests are protected in any future trade discussions, with particular focus on beef and food safety standards. We will work with the European Commission and our strong network of colleagues across the European People's Party to ensure the best possible outcome for Ireland in any future negotiations.

**Industry Innovation:** Fine Gael will continue to consider new industry development opportunities in areas such as energy crops and sugar beet. New opportunities will be assessed in conjunction with the relevant research organisations.

## ROBUST SYSTEMS AND WELFARE

**Animal Health and Welfare:** Fine Gael has overseen the most comprehensive reform and updating of standards to protect the health and welfare of animals in 100 years. Animal welfare laws have been strengthened and supports for welfare organisations have been enhanced, with almost €9m awarded to animal welfare organisations during the last 5 years.

Fine Gael introduced a new dedicated animal welfare helpline for reports of animal cruelty, a new inspection system for puppy farms, microchipping for dogs, a new code of practice and unannounced inspections for circuses, a ban on tail docking and a range of legislative changes under the Control of Horses Act. The further implementation of the Animal Welfare Act 2013 will continue to be prioritised by Fine Gael.

Fine Gael has also invested in an Urban Horse Project, to encourage greater care and welfare of horses in urban environments; we will roll out this project to additional locations.

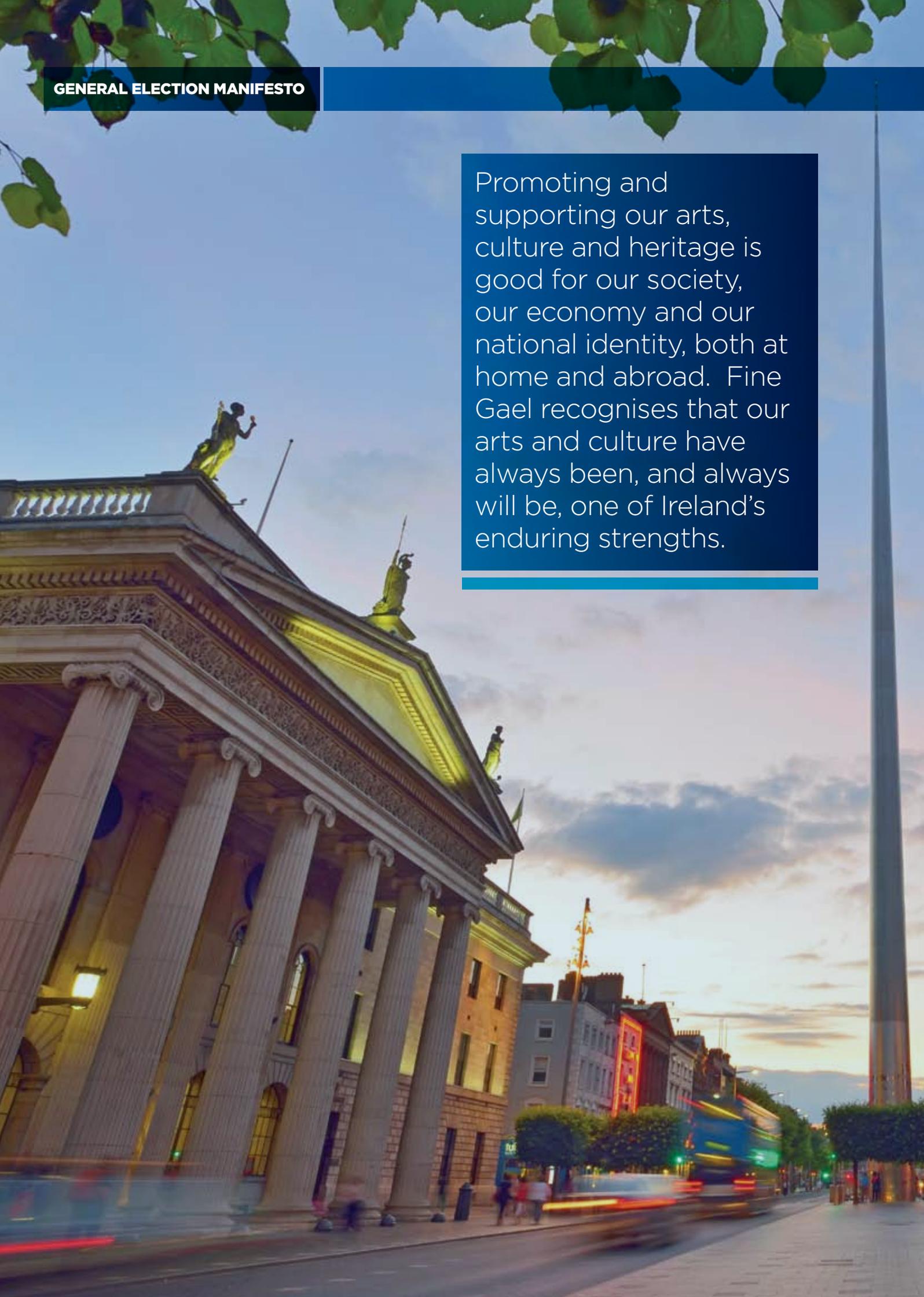
**Flooding:** Many farmers were adversely affected by recent flooding conditions. We prioritised the delivery of animal welfare assistance to farmers in flooded areas through the provision of emergency fodder, through a fodder aid scheme and a hardship scheme for farmers in very difficult circumstances. This is an essential component of the broader effort to help farmers in challenging circumstances while also investing in appropriate flood defences.

**Animal Health:** We will continue to develop a range of programmes across the animal health area to improve outcomes and quality across all sectors and will publish a new Animal Health Strategy to fundamentally underpin our agri-food sector quality assurance programmes.

**TB Eradication:** We are committed to fully eradicating TB by 2030. We have enhanced compensation arrangements for farmers to mitigate the losses experienced by those dealing with significant losses from an outbreak. We recognise the improvement in TB levels in some areas is still challenged by individual blackspots, such as in parts of Wicklow and we are committed to targeting these localised issues.

**Food Safety and Traceability:** Our success as an industry is fundamentally linked to food traceability and safety. Fine Gael will continue to build on our existing systems to ensure producers and consumers can be assured of quality from farm to fork.

Promoting and supporting our arts, culture and heritage is good for our society, our economy and our national identity, both at home and abroad. Fine Gael recognises that our arts and culture have always been, and always will be, one of Ireland's enduring strengths.



## 2. Arts, Culture and Heritage

Promoting and supporting our arts, culture and heritage is good for our society, our economy and our national identity, both at home and abroad. Fine Gael recognises that our arts and culture have always been, and always will be, one of Ireland's enduring strengths. The arts belong to everybody and Fine Gael is committed to increasing access to, and participation in, the arts, boosting our creative industries and preserving our heritage. Our approach is based on the belief that societies which invest in the arts and heritage are more prosperous, successful societies.

### ARTS AND CULTURE

**Ireland 2016:** The Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme is the national initiative to commemorate the events of the 1916 Rising, reflect on our achievements over the last 100 years, and look ambitiously to our future. Fine Gael will continue to implement the Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme throughout 2016, to ensure that this pivotal period in our history is commemorated in an inclusive, appropriate and respectful way. This will include an extensive education programme, a series of state commemorative events and more than 2,000 community events planned through the local authority network.

**Decade of Centenaries:** In the coming years we will commemorate the centenaries of some of the most significant events in the history of this State. Building on the success of Ireland 2016, we will ensure that these commemorations are inclusive, and enhance our understanding of our shared history, particularly among children and young people, so that they have a meaningful and lasting impact.

**National Cultural Policy:** We will publish the first ever national cultural policy – Culture 2025 – as part of our effort to recognise and promote our arts, culture and heritage, and to ensure they reach their full potential.

**Culture 2025 will consider a range of important issues including:** supporting artists and creative workers, improving access to culture, breaking down barriers in areas of social exclusion and disadvantage, and how culture is enriched by greater cultural diversity. The publication of Culture 2025 follows a widespread consultation process with relevant stakeholders. It is intended that this will be a living document, supported by an annual National Cultural Consultation Day.

**The Arts Council:** Fine Gael supports the important work of the Arts Council as the principal state agency for the promotion and development of the arts and will work with the Arts Council to ensure more artists, arts organisations and events are supported, while at the same time further increasing transparency in the Arts Council's decision-making processes and improving communication with arts officers and other relevant stakeholders.

**Regional Arts and Cultural Centres:** We will introduce a new small grants scheme to provide essential upgrades to existing regional arts and cultural centres around the country, including regional theatres. We will also introduce a new programme to increase the participation of young people, particularly in socially disadvantaged areas, in their local theatres.

**Regional Museums:** We will boost supports to regional museums and facilitate increased loans between our National Cultural Institutions and our network of regional museums.

**Inspiring Ireland:** Fine Gael will continue to support Inspiring Ireland, a project to make Ireland's rich cultural heritage available online. Collections from the National Cultural Institutions will be available to view free of charge, making Irish culture and heritage accessible to people worldwide.

**International Artistic Footprint:** Ireland is recognised worldwide as a country of immense cultural talent and artistic creativity. Through the work of Culture Ireland, Fine Gael will continue to support opportunities for Irish artists to present their work abroad, which has significant benefits for Irish artists, as well as attracting business and tourism to our shores.

**Creative Education:** Fine Gael acknowledges the benefits to children who engage in the arts and will continue to implement the Arts in Education Charter, which provides an unprecedented opportunity for children and young people to engage in a proactive and meaningful way with arts in education in Ireland.

**Culture Night:** Fine Gael recognises Culture Night as a unique occasion in the Irish cultural calendar, where the Irish public are given unrivalled access to arts and heritage venues. We will work to increase the regional spread of Culture Night through direct engagement with, and support for, local authority arts officers.

**National Musical Instrument Library:** Fine Gael will roll out a National Musical Instrument Library for children and young people, where a variety of instruments can be rented out for a nominal fee on a countrywide basis. We will also continue to support 'Music Generation' to ensure programmes are sustained on a long-term and lasting basis with Local Music Education Partnerships.

**Recognising Artists:** We will introduce a standalone award that recognises and rewards Irish-based artists for their work and seeks to promote them at domestic and international level.

**Public Art:** Fine Gael will work with the Arts Council and local authority arts officers to identify and promote public art spaces in our major towns and cities. These spaces will help to showcase the work of emerging artists and will help to drive economic regeneration in urban areas.

**Building Links with the Business Community:** We will further encourage strong, mutually beneficial links between the business community and arts organisations. This approach will be based on helping arts organisations to capitalise on sponsorship opportunities, and develop business partnerships and fundraising skills.

**Boosting Philanthropy:** Fine Gael believes philanthropy should be pursued as a positive complement to, rather than substitute for, state funding for the arts and our cultural institutions. We will build on the success of initiatives such as the New Stream initiative, which has helped to boost the fundraising capacity in the Irish arts sector. We will also establish a dedicated philanthropic fund to help drive philanthropic giving to our cultural institutions.

**Tax Relief on Donations:** We will extend the Section 1003 tax relief to important heritage items that are donated to regional museums, as well as cultural institutions.

**European Capital of Culture:** We will promote the European Capital of Culture, which Ireland will host in 2020, as a key driver of tourism and urban regeneration. It will be used as an opportunity to showcase the successful city and the entire country as a location for artistic expression.

**Arts and Heritage Officers:** We will encourage each local authority to strengthen the role of arts and heritage officers. We will establish stronger links between arts and heritage officers, the OPW, Fáilte Ireland, the Arts Council, as well as with the Local Enterprise Office, to develop and promote opportunities for arts and cultural tourism.

**Irish Film Board:** Fine Gael will work with the Irish Film Board/Screen Ireland to ensure that Ireland is maximised as a location for international film production. Having increased the cap from €50m to €70m in Budget 2016, Fine Gael will work to further improve the Section 481 Tax Relief. We will also increase the number of training courses available in Screen Training Ireland for graduates seeking to enter the audio-visual industry, including our thriving animation sector, and will introduce a new scheme aimed at increasing the number of women working in the film industry. Fine Gael will work with industry to set up an apprenticeship programme to address the skills needed in the audio-visual sector.

**Skills Database:** We will establish a new online portal which will act as a skills database for the audio-visual sector, for the benefit of both domestic and international employers, and prospective employees.

**Creative Sector Taskforce:** We will establish a Creative Sector Taskforce, which will draw up an Action Plan for Growth across the entire sector, including audio-visual, gaming, animation and music.

## HERITAGE

**Promoting our Cultural Heritage:** We will establish a strategic partnership between the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Department of Tourism, OPW, Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland and other relevant agencies to promote our unique and valuable culture and heritage assets in a unified way, in order to boost cultural tourism.

**National Heritage Plan:** Fine Gael will develop and publish an updated National Heritage Plan that sets out policies for the protection and promotion of our built and natural heritage and responds to challenges within the heritage sector.

**Protecting our Heritage:** We recently announced a €2m Built Heritage Investment Scheme for the repair and conservation of unique heritage structures across the country. This fund, which is based on the successful Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme, is jobs intensive and will help to regenerate urban and rural areas. We will continue this programme on an annual basis to support the conservation of heritage structures across the country.

**Historic Towns Initiative:** We will expand this initiative to include an additional 15 towns, following the successful pilot in 2013 and 2014. The scheme harnesses the cultural and natural heritage assets of Ireland's historic towns, to stimulate regeneration and to bring benefits in terms of the local economy, employment, and social, environmental and cultural factors.

**Living City Initiative:** We will review the Living City Initiative and the conditions that apply to the size of properties in order to boost the attractiveness of the scheme, which will contribute to both built heritage and urban regeneration.

**Historic Houses:** We will implement the recommendations of the recently published Historic House Action Plan to support a sustainable future for the historic Irish country houses.

**UNESCO Cultural Heritage:** Fine Gael will implement the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage so that Ireland's unique cultural heritage assets, such as hurling, uilleann piping and the Folklore Collection in UCD, are given UNESCO recognition and status.

**National Parks:** Fine Gael recognises our national parks as one of our most significant natural resources, as well as a major tourism and local recreational resource. We will work to improve existing trails in our national parks and examine how this network could be expanded further to offer improved heritage trails and related tours of local heritage sites. To further this goal, we will also work with the relevant tourism bodies to ensure our national parks are better promoted.

**Peatlands Management:** Fine Gael will implement the National Peatlands Strategy, which sets out a whole-of-government approach to managing our peatlands in a sustainable way, based on engagement with the local community. We will also work to develop our peatlands as tourist attractions and recreational resources for the local community.

**Inland Waterways:** We will continue to develop our blueways as a tourism and recreational resource, and as a suitable location for events, festivals and sporting activities. We will also enhance our waterways as important local amenities, by improving adjoining facilities, such as walkways and cycle paths.

**Ulster Canal:** Following the recent Fresh Start Agreement, we will ensure that the Irish Government undertakes a review, with the Northern Ireland Executive, to identify options for jointly developing future phases of the Ulster Canal restoration project, for consideration by the North South Ministerial Council in June 2016.

## 3. Banking

**Fine Gael is putting consumers at the heart of our plan for the banking sector over the next 5 years. We want to empower consumers with choice, credit and confidence.**

Fine Gael is putting consumers at the heart of our plan for the banking sector over the next 5 years. We want to empower consumers with choice, credit and confidence:

- Choice in competitive services and products, choice in how to manage your money and choice in how you spend your money
- Credit for consumers and businesses which is easily accessible and available in diverse forms
- Confidence that your money is secure and that you will be treated with fairness at every stage of your life

### CHOICE

**Increasing Take-up of Bank Accounts:** Approximately one-fifth (20%) of Irish households do not have a bank account and this problem disproportionately affects the poor, the disabled and the elderly. In an increasingly digital era, not having a current account can prevent people from accessing cheaper goods and services which are exclusively available online. Fine Gael will seek to promote the use of new enabler/standard bank accounts (such as the new An Post ePayment account). Empowering these households will unlock the benefits of epayments and complement the Pathways to Work Plan for Jobless Households. We are determined to include everyone in this recovery.

**New National Payments Plan:** Fine Gael will instigate a National Payments Plan, with particular focus on SMEs. A key priority will be encouraging SMEs to

switch from cheques to electronic payments, to reduce both red tape and costs. We want all consumers to have the option of paying electronically.

**Credit Unions:** Fine Gael recognises the vital role that credit unions play in their communities and the support they provide to the local economy in which they operate. We are committed to ensuring that credit unions do not just survive, but that they benefit from regulatory support, in order to respond to the needs of a changing economy and to increasingly sophisticated users. Specifically we will:

- Support the rollout and extension of the Personal Microcredit Scheme, which is providing simple microloans to members and helping to combat the use of moneylenders
- Assist credit unions in making successful applications to retain members' savings in excess of €100,000 (CP88), recognising the independence of the Registrar of Credit Unions
- Ask the Central Bank of Ireland to instigate a review of the continued appropriateness of the savings limit within a year of the formation of the next government
- Work with the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank to gradually lift current lending restrictions as appropriate, including for housing
- Support credit unions' move towards more electronic and online services, including the rollout of debit cards and enhanced online banking services
- Ask the Credit Union Advisory Committee (CUAC) to

conduct a review, and report by the end of June 2016, on the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the Report of the Commission on Credit Unions.

**A Competitive Banking Sector:** Fine Gael has stabilised the banking sector, with both AIB and Bank of Ireland functioning as strong universal banks, and Permanent TSB increasingly operating as a challenger bank. Fine Gael wants to see more entrants and a vibrant banking sector with real competition in order to support the recovering economy. We will actively support measures to increase competition in the market and achieve a fairer deal for consumers and SMEs.

**Standard Variable Rates:** We believe increased competition from outside and within the banking sector is the best way to drive down standard variable rates. We will:

- Establish a code of conduct for switching mortgage provider, administered by the Central Bank, which should inform and encourage mortgage holders to switch to more competitive banks
- Propose a standardised and dedicated switching form, which will be simple to use and quick to administer

## CREDIT

**Access to Finance:** Access to finance will be absolutely critical to realising our ambition that Ireland will become a leading country for start-ups and that our enterprises will more easily progress in capacity and scale. To achieve this, we need to deliver €1bn per year from new sources of finance to supplement normal bank offerings to SMEs.

Such an ambitious goal will require a mixture of sources and include:

- New forms of equity
- Mid-size investment rounds
- Development finance for manufacturing and international services
- New forms of export and trade finance
- Peer-to-peer lending

We will also ensure that there is careful monitoring of the performance of the institutions in this area (such as Microfinance Ireland and the SBCI) so that we continually update our knowledge on the needs of enterprise, as they emerge, as we move to deliver on this ambitious target.

**European Investment Bank (EIB):** Fine Gael recognises the valuable resource that the EIB represents, in funding projects of social value and delivering balanced regional development. We will work with the EIB to:

- Facilitate easier access to capital, especially for SMEs
- Streamline procedures to help businesses across Ireland to compete for EU-funded projects
- Focus on directing structural funds to the areas most in need

**International Financial Services:** Fine Gael prioritised international financial services by appointing a Minister of State with specific responsibility for the area. We are targeting 10,000 jobs in this sector through our IFS 2020 Strategy and we will seek to exploit emerging sub-sectors such as payments and financial technology (fintech).

**Payments Industry:** Fine Gael believes Ireland's payments industry has high growth potential. We will create a Payments Forum to coordinate the key players in the payments industry and ask the Forum to publish a national strategy for the industry, drawing on best international practice.

**Fintech:** Ireland is a world leader for fintech start-ups and Fine Gael will work with industry, Enterprise Ireland and the IDA to bolster funding for this sector.

**NAMA:** We will work with NAMA to repay all senior debt by 2018 and generate a surplus of €2bn by the time of its wind-down, in 2020. We will also seek to ensure that NAMA continues to deliver new residential and social housing units, agree rent reductions for SMEs and collaborate with the IDA to maximise new business investment opportunities from its portfolio.

**Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF) and Responsible Investment:** Fine Gael believes that environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues impact on long-term investment performance and we will direct the ISIF to continue to operate a Responsible

Investment Policy and remain a signatory of the UN Principles for Responsible Investment.

**Capital Acquisitions Tax:** We will improve the tax treatment of gifts and inheritances from parents to young adults, by increasing the capital acquisitions Group A threshold to €500,000.

## CONFIDENCE

**Selling Bank Assets:** We are committed to disposing of the State's investments in the banking sector when market conditions are right, and to recovering all the taxpayers' money invested by the current Government. In order to help undo the damage to Ireland's public finances from the banking crisis and to provide a buffer against future risks, all proceeds from the disposal of bank assets will be used to pay down government debt.

**Financial Regulation:** Fine Gael has played a key part in building a new EU regulatory framework for financial and banking stability. We will continue to support the establishment of a European Banking Union with a single rulebook to ensure the Eurozone crisis we have just experienced can never happen again.

We have radically overhauled and strengthened the powers of the Central Bank. We are determined to build on the structures and supervisory mechanisms in place to ensure the banking malpractice and light-touch regulation of the 2000s is never allowed to re-emerge in Ireland.

**Independence of the Central Bank:** We will protect the independence of the Central Bank as a guardian of financial stability. We support the introduction of the recently announced "Countercyclical Capital Buffers" as a way to ensure that never again is runaway credit growth allowed to destroy our financial stability and economic prosperity.

**European Banking Union:** Ireland will participate fully in the European Banking Union and support the introduction of a European-wide deposit insurance scheme. We believe this will help reduce interest rates, for SMEs and homeowners, to European norms.

**Central Credit Register:** We will work with the Central Bank to introduce a Central Credit Register within the first few months of the next Dáil term. This register will for the first time bring together comprehensive financial information on borrowers and should help prevent individuals over-indebting themselves, as happened in the lead up to the crisis.

**Framework to Support Mortgage Holders in Arrears:** Fine Gael established the Insolvency Service of Ireland, a strict set of mortgage arrears resolution targets for the banks and a mortgage-to-rent scheme. Fine Gael wants to keep people in their homes and, building on the progress which has seen the number in mortgage arrears decline for 9 consecutive quarters, we will continue to adapt and strengthen the existing mortgage arrears framework as necessary. In addition, the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) has been established as a "one-stop shop" point of information and guidance for homeowners in mortgage arrears, with a dedicated mortgage arrears service in key locations and with nationwide coverage.

We will also introduce a new scheme to help people who are insolvent, and in mortgage arrears on their home, to access independent expert financial and legal advice. This scheme will offer very important support and hope to people in genuine financial distress and anxiety, who can't afford the help they need. MABS will be the gateway to this scheme and will arrange for advice and representation from a personal insolvency practitioner, a specialised MABS adviser, or a solicitor, as needed.

## 4. Bringing our Friends and Family Home

By keeping the recovery going, our aim is that by 2020, Ireland will have brought home at least 70,000 of the emigrants forced to leave because of the crisis. Fine Gael believes that the lives of all of our citizens will be enriched by their return.

### BRINGING OUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY HOME

**#HomeToWork Campaign:** Our recovering economy has provided new employment opportunities for emigrants who wish to return home. We will continue the #HomeToWork campaign. We will build on the recommendations of the inaugural Global Irish Civic Forum to further identify and address the needs of emigrants wishing to return home to Ireland.

**More and Better Jobs:** Our Long Term Economic Plan aims to deliver sustainable full employment by 2020. We are replacing the unsustainable enterprise model left behind by Fianna Fáil with an export-led strategy to add a further 200,000 jobs. Our targets are ambitious but will be underpinned by a series of sectoral growth strategies and regional action plans for jobs across the country.

**USC Abolition:** As well as encouraging greater domestic labour market participation and entrepreneurship, we believe that USC abolition, as an integral part of our Long Term Economic Plan, will encourage at least 70,000 emigrants to return home, by increasing Ireland's attraction as a dynamic hub for talent.

**Investing in Better Services:** Our Long Term Economic Plan will provide for better-resourced public services and an additional 10,183 doctors, nurses, Gardaí,

teachers, social workers and other frontline service workers. We have also committed to a €42bn Capital Plan to provide for more schools, better roads and better health facilities.

**Supporting Families:** We will provide for an extension of free GP care to all children, a second free pre-school year, and a €2,000 childcare subsidy for working parents of children aged between 9 months and 36 months in formal childcare settings. To meet housing demand, Fine Gael will support an increase in annual housing output to a sustainable level of 25,000 by 2021.

**A More Inclusive, Diverse, Fair and Progressive Society:** Fine Gael will continue to promote a more inclusive, diverse, fair and progressive society. As the first country in the world to vote for marriage equality, Ireland should continue to lead by example. We will promote equal gender treatment in the workplace, recognise the diversity of our communities and assist those with a disability to fully participate in society. Fine Gael will also strengthen parental choice and diversity in our schools system, reflecting the need in modern Ireland for new forms of multi-denominational and non-denominational education.

**Opportunities in the Public Sector:** After years of blanket recruitment freezes across the public service, as a result of the economic crisis, we are committed

to allowing public service bodies to begin new hiring programmes that bring new skills, energy and vitality into the public service. Fine Gael will extend open recruitment across all grades of the civil service and wider public sector and we will offer more opportunity for staff development and promotion. As the economy recovers, public servants' pay will gradually recover in line with the Lansdowne Road Agreement.

## THE IRISH DIASPORA

Fine Gael has always cherished the Irish Diaspora and our commitment was underlined by the creation of a Minister for Diaspora Affairs, the publication of Ireland's first ever Diaspora Policy and the creation of the Global Irish Civic Forum.

**Support:** We will continue to support Irish communities overseas through the Emigrant Support Programme.

**Business Networks:** We will continue to work closely with Irish business networks around the world, providing important mentoring and networking opportunities for Irish people overseas.

**Global Irish Forum:** Following the successful fourth Global Irish Economic Forum, we will revitalise and restructure the Global Irish Network, recognising the changed economic circumstances since its establishment.

**U.S. Immigration Reform:** Advocating for immigration reform in the United States will remain a priority. We will continue to use all appropriate avenues to advance the case of undocumented Irish citizens and continue to support the undocumented through the Emigrant Support Programme.

**The Gathering:** We will have a successor to The Gathering in 2019, building on the successful year of The Gathering, which reached out to local communities and the Diaspora in a unique way.

**Local Diaspora Engagement:** Fine Gael will support local communities and counties in Ireland to reach out to their own Diaspora and build new relationships, recognising that Irish people around the world have a keen sense of attachment to their home place. In particular, we will fund the Local Diaspora Engagement Fund to support local Diaspora engagement projects and initiatives and the Local Diaspora Strategy Development Fund to assist local authorities to invest in developing strategies for Diaspora engagement at local and community level.

**Voting Rights:** We will fully explore the matter of voting rights for Irish citizens resident outside the State, with a view to holding a referendum on giving them the right to vote in presidential elections.

## 5. Climate Change, Energy and the Environment

Maintaining our natural environment and combatting climate change is an essential part of our plan to keep the recovery going. During our first term in office we have introduced a range of progressive policies to clean up our water and air. Fine Gael's priority is to build on this progress so that we can safeguard our environment for future generations.

### CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

We strongly supported the Paris Climate Conference (COP21) in December 2015, where Ireland, in partnership with 195 countries, adopted the first ever universal global climate deal, which sets out a global action plan to put the world on track to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2°C.

**Climate Change Act and Climate Change Vision:** We introduced the first ever climate change legislation in Ireland, which reinforced our international commitments to tackle climate change. Fine Gael believes that the transition to a low carbon society by 2050 is an achievable and realistic goal and one that will support a more sustainable economy.

**Climate Change Transition and Mitigation Plans:** The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act sets out how we will produce a National Low Carbon Transition and Mitigation Plan. The Plan will set out Ireland's first statutory low carbon strategy for the period to 2050. A primary objective of the mitigation plan will be to bring a clear and strong focus to both the challenges and the opportunities of transitioning to a low carbon future, and the importance of a positively

focused and cost-effective national transition agenda. The first National Mitigation Plan will focus on four key sectors:

- **Electricity gGeneration:** The Plan will examine specific measures to reduce emissions in electricity generation, and will outline how new technologies can be ready for incorporation into Ireland's electricity system and that the cost of existing renewable technologies can be lowered.
- **Built Environment:** The Plan will focus on the role of energy efficiency and use of renewable energies in both residential and non-residential buildings, with the aim of reducing emissions and making homes and businesses more comfortable, healthier and more efficient.
- **Transport:** The Plan will focus on the development of a cost-effective policy platform for reducing emissions and increasing energy efficiency across all transport modes. It will examine the role of technology, sustainable land use patterns, modal shift, travel demand, alternative fuel options and the impact of proposed measures on other national policy objectives.

- **Agriculture:** The Plan will focus on balancing the need to control emissions with the economic and social objective of promoting the sustainable development of a rural economy. It will examine how to improve the environmental impact of agriculture through measures in the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, improving the uptake of mitigation practices by farmers, increasing the level of forest cover and continuing to undertake relevant research.

**Sustainable Agriculture Industry:** Fine Gael believes that protecting our environment and growing our agri-food industry in an environmentally sustainable manner is essential. We have produced, with industry, the Food Wise 2025 strategy, which charts a course for strategic investment in environmentally sustainable approaches to agriculture, food and forestry production.

Innovation in agriculture can play an important role in tackling climate change and we want Ireland to remain as a world leader in the production and management of low carbon and high-quality sustainable food by:

- Further enhancing the Origin Green programme designed to establish Ireland as a world leader in sustainably produced food and drink
- Continuing to measure our environmental sustainability credentials, ensuring they are underpinned by best scientific practice
- Implementing environmental elements of National Programmes and the EU co-funded Rural Development Programme 2014-2020
- Prioritising research funding for sustainable food production

**Making Use of Carbon Sinks:** We will continue our very active afforestation programme during a second term of government. This programme has a significant carbon sink value and should contribute to the grass-based system of agriculture we enjoy in Ireland. This type of “joined-up thinking” will help us meet our emissions reduction targets while also ensuring that vital industries, such as agriculture, continue to thrive.

**International Climate Change Funding:** As part of our Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), we provide €34m per year to build resilience to climate extremes and integrate climate-smart agricultural solutions into the economic planning of some of the world’s least developed countries. This year we will

commence contributions to the United Nations Green Climate Fund, with an initial contribution of €2m that will rise in coming years. We will also continue to support former president Mary Robinson in her role as UN Special Envoy for Climate Change and the Mary Robinson Foundation in its work on Climate Justice.

**Electric Vehicles:** Fine Gael wants Ireland to become a leader in the take-up of electric vehicles. Within 6 months of government we will establish a dedicated taskforce to work on this goal, involving relevant government departments, agencies, industry and representative groups.

We will implement the recommendations contained in the Government’s energy White Paper, Ireland’s Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030, designed to increase the number of low carbon vehicles on the road.

## RENEWABLE ENERGY

Fine Gael believes that Ireland’s long-term interests are best supported by further decreasing our dependence on foreign fossil fuels through the continued development of indigenous renewable energy. We will support the development of a range of technologies and will put in place a planning framework that offers a balance between protecting the interests of local communities and the need to develop indigenous energy generation.

**Supporting Renewable Energy:** Fine Gael will comprehensively review price supports for renewable energy following the closure of the REFIT 2 scheme and will introduce a new competitive, technology neutral price support for renewable energy from 2016.

**Onshore Wind Planning Guidelines:** Fine Gael understands the concerns of local communities who feel that wind farms are imposed on them. The technology surrounding wind farms has evolved significantly since the last set of guidelines was introduced in 2006. Fine Gael will update the wind farm planning guidelines, within 6 months, to offer a better balance between the concerns of local communities and the need to invest in indigenous energy projects.

**Community Involvement in Energy Development:** Fine Gael supports community participation in renewable energy and energy efficiency projects as it is in both the national and local interest.



**LET'S KEEP THE RECOVERY GOING**

Maintaining our natural environment and combatting climate change is an essential part of our plan to keep the recovery going. Fine Gael's priority is to build on this progress so that we can safeguard our environment for future generations.

We will advance this by implementing the White Paper on Energy which, among other things, commits us to:

- Developing a framework for how communities can share in the benefits of substantial new energy infrastructure which is located in their area
- Providing support for community-led projects in the initial stages of development, planning and construction
- Establishing a register of community benefit payments, and examining shared-ownership opportunities for renewable energy projects in local communities supporting, in particular, the emerging energy cooperative movement as one means of facilitating community participation

**Wave, Tidal Energy and Offshore Wind:** Fine Gael believes that wave and tidal energy will have an important role in Ireland's future renewable energy mix. In the immediate term these technologies are still in the research and development stage and Fine Gael will continue to provide exchequer support to fund further research, development and demonstration of these technologies. This will include continued support of research and testing facilities such as Irish Marine and Energy Research Cluster (IMERC) and the Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site. Fine Gael will continue to implement the Offshore Renewable Energy Development Plan to develop the broader offshore energy sector.

**Bio-Energy:** Ireland has some of the best biomass growing conditions in the world and as such Fine Gael believes the development of a sustainable sector will play a big role in decarbonising our economy. We will continue to support the transition of peat power plants to greater amounts of biomass, and we will work with industry to develop a sustainable indigenous supply chain. We will also introduce a renewable heat incentive (RHI), targeted at larger heat users, subject to state aid clearance.

## PRICE COMPETITIVENESS

**Greater Competition and Lower Energy Prices:** Fine Gael will ask the Commission for Energy Regulation and NewERA (the statutory shareholder advisory body within the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA)) to examine the current level of competition in the energy market and to make recommendations to

Government, by the end of 2016, on structural reforms to encourage greater competition in the market.

**Competitive Networks:** To ensure that a competitive transmission market benefits consumers, we will separate ESB Networks from ESB's generation and supply activities to create two separate publicly owned companies within the ESB Group, as recommended by the European Commission, by the end of 2017.

**NewERA and Commercial Semi-States:** We will add the Dublin Airport Authority, the CIE companies, and the sea ports of national significance to the list of commercial semi-states under the NewERA portfolio. We will, subject to EU competition policy constraints, transfer shareholdings in all the commercial semi-states under the NewERA portfolio to either the Minister for Finance or the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. NewERA will provide both ministers with financial and commercial advisory services in relation to the activities of these commercial semi-states, including on the exercise of any ministerial consents required. This centralisation of the ownership functions will help address the conflicts that can arise from many ministers' current responsibilities, as both shareholder of a commercial semi-state and as a policy maker. Line ministers will remain responsible for policy matters in transport, water, energy, forestry etc.

NewERA will be asked to set out a new dividend policy for the commercial semi-states to increase overall dividend receipts. NewERA will also be mandated to prepare a new comprehensive 5-year strategy by March 2017 for the portfolio of commercial semi-states to ensure maximum coherence, cooperation and synergy in the delivery of renewable energy, broadband and infrastructure services. The cabinet handbook will be changed to require that every year when the annual report and financial statements of each semi-state are presented to cabinet, they will be accompanied by an analysis by NewERA of the financial statements and company strategy.

**Single Irish Electricity Market and Regional European Energy Markets:** In the interests of supporting lower prices for consumers, we will continue to support a fully functioning single electricity market for the island of Ireland and we will also work with our European neighbours to develop a regional European energy market. A competitive market is essential to underpin sustainable growth and keep the recovery going.

**Better Energy Programme:** Fine Gael will continue investment in the Better Energy Programme, which has already provided grants to 170,000 households.

**Smart Energy Management:** Fine Gael will continue to use the public sector (including schools and hospitals) as exemplars of Smart Energy Management, and we will set targets for achieving savings through energy efficiency, monitoring and control.

**Energy Efficiency:** Fine Gael will support the Action Plan for Jobs goal to expedite the achievement of the 33% Energy Efficiency target for the public sector by working with public sector organisations with an annual energy spend of €500,000+ to go to the market to identify solutions for the delivery of energy reduction services. We will launch another round of the successful Energy Efficiency Fund to assist investment in large-scale projects.

## ENVIRONMENT

**Air Quality:** To improve air quality nationwide, Fine Gael will extend the ban on the sale and use of smoky coal across the country.

**Forestry:** The role of forestry in the effort to mitigate against climate change is very significant. Fine Gael will implement the Forestry Programme 2014-2020. The programme targets an increase in planting each year over the lifetime of the programme, commencing with 6,000 ha of new forests in year one, increasing to 8,290 ha in 2020. The programme will aim to build on research by COFORD on the eligible land considered suitable for forestry across the country.

**Water Charges and Quality:** Through Irish Water, the quality of Irish natural and drinking water supplies and wastewater treatment will be improved through a €5.5bn investment programme to 2021. Water quality will be improved, boil water notices will be eliminated, and the scandal of raw sewage being pumped into our rivers and seas will be ended. We will also ensure that Irish Water is kept in public ownership.

We will keep water charges at their current level until 2018. Any rise in average charges after 2018 will be limited to, at most, the overall rate of consumer price inflation. We will also maintain a cap on maximum charges for the entire duration of Irish Water's Business Plan (2016-21).

**Recycling:** Fine Gael is committed to continuing to make the progress necessary for Ireland to become a recycling society. We will move towards eliminating landfilling of municipal waste, while also maximising the resources that can be recovered from this waste. We will also look to implement a practical and pragmatic Circular Economy package that will make Ireland a more competitive, resource-efficient economy, while also ensuring that any targets that are set for Ireland are fair and achievable.

**Haulbowline:** Fine Gael prioritised the remediation of the Haulbowline site in Cork, adjacent to the naval base. Work will continue in 2016 to deal with the environmental clean-up required and the remediation of the island for future use as a multi-amenity site.

**Green Public Procurement:** Given the scale of the Government's annual procurement budget, the State has the ability to significantly shape the environmental performance of activity in the Irish economy. Fine Gael will work to ensure that the Green Procurement Guidelines are applied across the public sector and we will amend those guidelines, if necessary, to ensure their implementation. This action complements our commitment to drive energy efficiencies in all state buildings such as schools and departments.

## FLOODING

Fine Gael understands that the recent flooding has been extremely difficult for many communities across our country. We have seen an unprecedented level of rain, with December 2015 recorded as the wettest month ever on record. Fine Gael is determined to act and we have a plan in place to mitigate against flooding, protect homes, businesses and livelihoods and to help those who have been impacted in recent weeks, months and years.

**National Flood Plan:** We will provide €430m, as part of the Capital Plan, for flood mitigation initiatives to protect threatened localities from river and coastal flood risk. This investment means we will spend more on flood relief over the next 5 years than we have in the last 20. The introduction of a new Flood Risk Management programme by the OPW will put in place a long-term plan of works to systematically identify and mitigate the risk of flooding across the country, providing a proactive plan for at-risk areas.

Our investment programme will also support the largest ever flood defence scheme undertaken by the OPW and will offer protection from flooding to thousands of residential and commercial properties across the country.

**Shannon Catchment Flood Risk Implementation and Coordination Group:** This new group involving all relevant agencies will oversee the implementation of flood management plans to respond to the 66 areas along the Shannon at risk of flooding.

**National Flood Forecasting:** We are establishing a new national flood forecasting system, staffed with additional personnel, to provide regular, detailed and localised information on flood forecasting.

**Pilot Scheme of Individual Home Protection Measures:** Fine Gael believes that in some cases the best flood protection measures may involve individual protection measures for homes, such as flood gates. We are rolling out pilot schemes in Crossmolina in Mayo and Graiguenamanagh and Thomastown in Co. Kilkenny and will monitor the pilots closely with a view to a full rollout.

**Flood Insurance:** We have established an interdepartmental group to examine the issue of households unable to access flood insurance. We have asked the Department of Finance to examine best international practice in other countries and report on the most effective way to ensure that all homes and businesses can access flood insurance.

**Coastal Erosion:** Coastal erosion poses a significant risk to communities around the country. Corrective measures are costly and it is simply impossible to provide protection to the entire coastline. It is primarily up to local authorities to identify and address priority areas, but Fine Gael will continue to invest in coastal protection when such expenditure is justified, drawing on the Irish Coastal Protection Strategy Study (ICPSS).

## NATURAL RESOURCES

**Oil and Gas Exploration:** Fine Gael supports the exploration and extraction of offshore oil and gas reserves in our marine territory to boost energy security, job creation and tax revenue. We will ensure that Ireland operates a “best in class” regulatory regime that encourages more industry exploration and drilling. While maintaining our current taxation model, we will seek an assessment, with industry, on whether the State should keep a minority equity stake in new exploration licences, with equivalent development costs, up to the point of on-site development. We will also continue to invest in ongoing seismic surveying of the Irish offshore area, to help industry and Government evaluate future licensing opportunities.

**Whitegate:** Fine Gael supports the continuation of oil refining at Whitegate, as a way of protecting our energy security.

**Hydraulic Fracturing (Fracking):** Fine Gael will not allow any fracking to take place before the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has published its comprehensive study on the new technology. There is an effective moratorium in place and that will remain in place until the EPA’s advice is received and considered.

**Geological Surveying:** Fine Gael will continue to support the Tellus project. This geological survey is generating invaluable data, which has the potential to lead to significant investment and a better understanding of our landscape. Fine Gael will work with local agencies to ensure local farmers will be aware of the increased presence of low-flying planes and in particular that horse owners can plan around the project.

## 6. A Connected Ireland

Fine Gael knows Ireland needs to stay ahead of the curve in the rapidly changing world of communications if we are to keep the recovery going. We want to build on our progress to date, in making Ireland a leading location for digital innovation. This will allow us to create jobs, help nurture the businesses of tomorrow, and keep Irish people connected.

### COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

**Broadband:** Within the next Dáil term, Fine Gael guarantees to deliver next-generation broadband to every household and business in the country. No town, village or parish will be left behind under the National Broadband Plan (NBP) through a combination of industry and State investment, we will ensure that 85% of premises in Ireland will have access to high speed broadband by 2018, with 100% access by 2020.

As part of the Capital Plan, the Government is providing an initial stimulus to provide for the early years of the State's support of the NBP. Fine Gael is fully committed to providing the resources necessary to underpin this Plan. We are acutely aware of the importance of high-speed broadband, especially to rural Ireland, and we will do everything we can to speed up this Plan.

**Mobile Phone Coverage:** Fine Gael will work with the telecommunications industry to improve mobile phone coverage by improving telecommunications infrastructure. This will require collaboration with local communities and a number of state bodies, but work is already underway and we are confident that together we can improve coverage.

**Roaming Charges within the EU:** Fine Gael strongly supports the principle that roaming charges should be harmonised across the EU and we will work in Europe

to speed up progress in this regard. We believe EU roaming charges should be scrapped altogether, consistent with the principle of a single market.

**Post Offices:** Post offices are a local institution in hundreds of towns and villages throughout the country. Fine Gael has endeavoured to halt the rapid decline in our post office network which took place during the 2000s under Fianna Fáil. We recognise that post offices face unprecedented challenges, in a climate of rapidly changing mail trends. We have just renewed the Department of Social Protection's contract for cash social welfare payments at post offices, which in 2015 was worth approximately €54m, with over 38 million social welfare payments being made in post offices throughout the country. We will swiftly act on the recommendations of the Post Office Business Development Group by supporting the introduction and rollout, by An Post, of an "ePayment Account" in 2016, to enhance post office activity in financial services and increase footfall. We will also support the establishment of a post office network renewal process, to report within 6 months, to build on An Post's existing 5-year strategy for the network.

**4G and 5G:** Fine Gael wants to see Ireland gain first-mover advantage in terms of releasing further spectrum and moving to new technologies. We will work with Comreg and commercial operators to help with this goal.

## BRINGING IRELAND UP TO SPEED

Making Ireland a European Centre of Data Innovation: Fine Gael will further enhance Ireland's reputation as a leading location for foreign direct investment (FDI), by operating a best in class regime for data regulation. We will develop a new overarching strategy in the next 12 months, to ensure we stay at the forefront of new digital innovation in Europe.

**Developing a European Digital Single Market:** During Ireland's Presidency of the European Council, Fine Gael prioritised the development of the European Digital Single Market, as it presented new opportunities for Irish businesses, FDI and Irish consumers. During a second term of government we will:

- Support Irish businesses to get online through continued investment in the Government's Online Trading Voucher Scheme
- Tackle the continued practice of "geo-blocking" – in a single market, all EU citizens should be able to access content freely across borders
- Support European efforts to modernise copyright law
- Support VAT simplification to eliminate red tape for business – without supporting any rate harmonisation

**Supporting the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner:** We have shown leadership in appointing a dedicated minister with responsibility for data protection and doubling the funding for the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner and we have established a Dublin office. We will continue to ensure that this Office is adequately supported, to ensure that citizens' privacy is protected and that businesses adhere to data protection obligations.

**Data Analytics in the Public Sector:** We will ensure government departments and agencies meet their obligations to protect personal data that is entrusted to them by citizens. We will also expand the remit of the recently established Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service, to include a centre of excellence in data analytics, in order to provide skills and services across all government departments and

agencies. Ireland is becoming a leading destination for data analytics and the public service will benefit from using innovative approaches to improve efficiency.

**Data Analytics in the Private Sector:** Under our Action Plan for Jobs we established a taskforce on big data, which led to the launch of Insight, the Science Foundation Ireland supported research centre for data analytics and the largest publicly funded data analytics R&D Centre in Europe. Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland also launched the CeADAR Technology Centre in data analytics. The next phase of Fine Gael's support of big data will be to create a supportive environment to develop the "Internet of Things".

**The Internet of Things (IoT):** Ireland is well placed to become a global leader in the development of the IoT, and we will support county councils in potential collaborations with industry partners on smart projects. We will invest through Science Foundation Ireland in strategically important infrastructure projects such as the development of "Pervasive Nation", a new wireless network testbed to support new concepts, business models and devices, and to develop new radio technologies for IoT. We acknowledge the privacy and security concerns surrounding the IoT and we will develop an appropriate regulatory environment that will support innovation while respecting privacy.

**The Sharing Economy:** The biggest change brought about by the Internet is that it allows people to connect. In particular, it developed a whole new way for sellers to connect with buyers. The Internet and the rapid evolution of mobile technology is allowing anyone to become a seller or a micro-entrepreneur, whether it be by renting an asset or providing a service. New platforms are being developed that allow everyone to earn extra income in this sharing economy.

This change is happening and it is our responsibility to ensure we establish a safe and reliable regulatory environment to protect people. The evolution of the sharing economy in Ireland will empower a new generation of micro-entrepreneurs and position us at the forefront of digital innovation. To this end we will publish a National Sharing Economy Statement to be developed by the Department of Jobs, Enterprise

and Innovation, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, the Department of Finance, and with input from the Revenue Commissioners, to ensure clarity of tax reporting obligations and to provide advice on easy methods of declaring earned income.

**Providing the Skills for a Digital Future:** As part of our Digital Strategy for Schools, we will upgrade school ICT and install robust wireless networks in all schools. This investment will provide the infrastructure to support ICT skills on the schools curricula and will encourage more computer coding clubs throughout national schools.

**eGovernment for the 21st Century:** Fine Gael will publish an eGovernment strategy with the goal of moving Ireland into the Top 5 internationally within a decade. This strategy will emphasise an “Agile IT” approach to both system design and implementation, and partnerships with other countries who have relevant experience in the delivery of effective eGovernment.

We will set a deadline of 2017, by which all significant government transactions with business will be available online. This is a significant step up in the reduction of the administrative burden, particularly for small Irish businesses.

**A 21st Century Response to Cyber-Crime and Cyber Bullying:** The increasing online presence of both young and old people presents many opportunities along with many challenges. Fine Gael has introduced increased penalties targeting the use of modern communication technologies in the grooming of children and online exploitation. We will continue to ensure that the most robust protections are in place to fully protect children while online. We will also develop and expand the capacity and skills of An Garda Síochána; other investigatory and regulatory bodies; and prosecutors to tackle cyber-crime and harassment such as introducing new models of civil orders to deal with disputes over online posting.

## BROADCASTING

**Scrapping the Broadcasting Levy:** We will improve the TV licence fee compliance rate. We will use the additional revenues to, among other things, fund the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and scrap the existing levy on broadcasters. This will help put Irish broadcasters on a more level playing field with foreign competitors, who do not have to pay the levy.

**Ensuring Quality and Diversity:** Fine Gael will ensure the continued support of public service broadcasting. Local radio stations, independent producers, and national broadcasters all play an important role in Irish society. We will improve the supports and regulatory environment of broadcasting to help deliver high-quality, diverse broadcasting. We are also committed to ensuring a competitive media landscape and we will monitor the new media merger guidelines to ensure they are effective. To support a fair and level playing field in broadcasting we will also:

- Accept and implement the recommendation from the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland that it set advertising limits for all broadcasters, including radio
- Request the Competition and Consumer Protection Authority to compile a report on competition within the broadcasting sector and to make recommendations to Government by end 2016

**Supporting Irish Broadcasting Content:** We will update existing laws to require satellite and cable operators to pay for the rights associated with the content provided by Irish broadcasters, as they currently enjoy this content free of charge. This free charge policy was put in place at a time to encourage the rollout of cable networks but is now no longer required.

## 7. Defence

**In a complex and changing security environment, Defence is critical. We are committed to ensuring our citizens live in a safe and secure environment. Fine Gael is proud of the Defence Forces and the patriotism and professionalism that the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps demonstrate both at home and abroad.**

The environment in which the Defence Forces operate is more complex now than ever before. Fine Gael recognises the challenges of the current security environment and has committed to building on the infrastructure and capability of the Defence Forces across the decade ahead through a series of actions outlined in the new White Paper on Defence. Fine Gael will continue to build on our international reputation for peacekeeping and ensure our Defence Forces are equipped to meet evolving operational challenges.

**Security Infrastructure:** Fine Gael will review Ireland's approach to the complex and multifaceted defence and security infrastructure needed to address evolving security challenges, working in close cooperation with An Garda Síochána and the Department of Justice, who have lead responsibility in this area.

**Increasing Investment in the Defence Forces:** Fine Gael is committed to delivering in full on the ambitions of the new White Paper for Defence, reinforced by reviews every 3 years. This means ensuring at least 9,500 permanent Defence Forces personnel and a full-strength reserve. Fine Gael recognises that there has been a historic underinvestment in Defence Forces infrastructure and is committed to providing the investment necessary to equip our Army, Naval Service and Air Corps to meet the complex challenges of a changing security environment.

**Equipping the Defence Forces:** Fine Gael will provide a significant boost in capital funding for Defence

across the 2016-2021 period, with €437m allocated to Defence, under the Capital Plan, within that time frame. The additional funds allocated will allow for expenditure in equipment and infrastructure across all areas of the Defence Forces:

- **Army:** The priority is to invest in armoured personnel carriers, armoured logistic vehicles, the modernisation of equipment and refurbishment of barracks.
- **Naval Service:** The ship replacement programme will continue and over the lifetime of the White Paper, Fine Gael will move from an 8- to a 9-ship naval flotilla, to provide for a multi-role vessel. This will allow for continued humanitarian assistance and will enhance Defence capability for maritime security operations.
- **Air Corps:** Fine Gael will ensure that existing aircraft will be replaced when necessary and invest in Casement Aerodrome Baldonnel.

**Maritime Security:** Over the past decade, the Irish maritime jurisdiction has effectively doubled. This sea area encompasses a rich ecosystem and renewable energy environment, with largely untapped hydrocarbon and mineral resources. Maritime security in Irish waters is a significant focus for the Defence Forces. Fine Gael will support the Naval Service and Air Corps in carrying out fisheries protection, drug interdiction operations and protection of our marine resources.

**Overseas Missions:** Ireland is strongly committed to supporting conditions for a safe and secure environment, critical to a civil society. We strongly support a robust EU contribution to UN peacekeeping and crisis management and will continue to support Ireland's contribution to a range of collaborative security arrangements within the EU, the UN, the OSCE and bilaterally with other states.

Fine Gael is committed to an increase in our Defence Forces presence in missions abroad and this will be reflected as soon as 2016. We are committed to the continuation of humanitarian missions like the recent operation in the Mediterranean, which has received much public support.

Fine Gael will seek to maximise opportunities for cooperation between government departments and agencies in the context of action on UN Development Goals, with a particular focus on Africa.

**Supporting our Veterans:** Fine Gael values the public service and outstanding contribution made by former servicemen and women to the State and will work with veterans to deliver on the recommendations outlined in the White Paper. Fine Gael will ensure Defence Forces personnel receive practical support and training when they leave the Defence Forces for other opportunities in society. We will recognise those who have made such a contribution to the State through the Annual Veteran's Day and participation of veterans in commemorative events.

**Reserve Defence Forces (RDF):** The RDF is a significant element of the State's defence capability. Fine Gael will ensure the strength, skills base and contribution of the RDF are maximised and will target full participation of the RDF at 4,000 personnel.

Fine Gael will seek opportunities to leverage specialist skill sets through the Reserve in areas such as cyber and medicine. Fine Gael will also seek to develop opportunities for overseas service for the Reserve in areas where specialist skills add value or augment permanent Defence Forces capabilities.

## DELIVERING ON NEW THINKING

**Peace and Leadership Institute:** Building on the history of the Irish State and the reputation of Ireland as a world-renowned contributor to international peacekeeping, Fine Gael will develop a new Institute for Peace Support and Leadership Training in the Curragh, starting in 2016. The Peace and Leadership Institute will leverage Ireland's unique international reputation and relationship with the UN. It will develop new national and international partnerships with universities and other reputable interested parties and institutions.

**Women in the Defence Forces:** Recognising the very strong contribution made by female personnel, we will prioritise the need to address the gap in female participation in the Defence Forces. Fine Gael will increase the level of female participation, with the goal of doubling the rate of participation from the current 6% to 12% in the next 5 years. We will ensure future UN peacekeeping missions incorporate a number of gender-focused measures and the work of the Peace and Leadership Institute provides an opportunity for the development of expertise in these areas.

**Workplace Culture:** Fine Gael is committed to ensuring that the Dignity Charter for the Defence Forces is upheld and all Defence Forces personnel enjoy a supportive workplace. Fine Gael will implement all of the recommendations of the Third Report of the Independent Monitoring Group (IMG).

Fine Gael will continue to work cooperatively with the Defence Forces representative bodies, RACO, PDFORRA and RDFRA. We strongly support the development of a diversity and inclusion strategy within the Defence Forces. Fine Gael will build on the Defence Forces' values and ethos, which commits to an environment in which people are valued and talent is encouraged and enabled to develop to its maximum.

**Employment Support Scheme:** Fine Gael believes the Defence Forces have a significant contribution to make to individuals and to broader society.

We will provide individuals who would otherwise struggle to break out of a cycle of disadvantage an opportunity to discover new skills and longer-term employment capacity. We will introduce a pilot employment support scheme in 2016, providing 30-40 participants with skills and training identifiable with the Defence Forces.

**Army Ranger Wing:** Fine Gael will increase the capacity of the Army Ranger Wing and of special operation forces to assist in meeting emerging challenges in all environments, including land, air, maritime and cyber.

**Aeromedical Support:** Recognising the contribution of the Emergency Aeromedical Support Service (EAS) in Athlone to rural areas, Fine Gael has placed the EAS on a permanent footing and is committed to a sustainable long-term service arrangement into the future.

**Aid to the Civil Power (ATCP):** The Defence Forces provide valuable assistance to other arms of the State in response to national emergencies and day-to-day operations, most recently in response to widespread flooding. Fine Gael will support the continued assistance of Army, Air Corps and Naval Service personnel to An Garda Síochána in ATCP duties and will facilitate the most appropriate governance structures between all state and other stakeholders with a view to ensuring the most effective delivery of service.

**Commemorating Our Past:** Fine Gael strongly supports the Defence Forces' participation in annual state commemorative ceremonies and the Defence Forces will play a significant role in many of the events being organised to commemorate the Decade of Centenaries 2012-2022, including the valuable work on the Military Service Pensions Collection. We will award a 1916 centenary medal to all members of the Permanent Defence Forces who are in service in 2016.

**Army Equitation:** Since its foundation in 1926, the Army Equitation School has promoted the Irish sport horse through international competitions on Irish-bred horses. We will prioritise investment in the Army Equitation School's facility in 2016 in recognition of the contribution it makes to the Irish sport horse sector.

We will seek to develop synergies between the Defence Forces and the sport horse industry. We will also seek to develop an innovation network that leverages the relationship between the Defence Forces, the sport horse industry and the horse racing industry.

**Innovation:** Fine Gael is very supportive of the possible opportunities for innovation, technology and enterprise links to the benefit of the Defence Forces and Irish enterprise, and will continue to support efforts to develop these links to build on our economic development and capabilities within the Defence Forces.

We will seek to replicate the success of the Irish Maritime and Energy Resource Cluster (IMERC) in the development of two further Innovation Partnerships. The first will be centred around the Defence Forces Training Centre in the Curragh and will seek to leverage the numerous technical corps and areas of specialisation in the Defence Forces, creating and enhancing innovative technologies that improve Defence Forces capabilities while also stimulating job creation.

The second cluster will develop an Innovation Partnership at Baldonnel that will include a privately funded aeronautical museum and a leading technological entrepreneurial innovation partnership which will seek to leverage the Air Corps' technical competence and complement Ireland's leading role in the aircraft and tech industries.

**Red Cross:** Fine Gael has initiated new legislation, revoking existing Red Cross legislation, providing for the State's commitments to the Red Cross under the Geneva Conventions and copper-fastening the independence of the Society. This will be enacted as a priority.

**Civil Defence:** Fine Gael is very committed to the ongoing support and development of Civil Defence. We will update legislation governing the Civil Defence area and establish a coordinated inter-agency guidance team, bringing together Principal Response Agencies involved in dealing with major emergency management issues.

## 8. Disability

Fine Gael will continue to work to improve equality of opportunity and quality of life for people with disabilities and ensure that resources are allocated effectively and transparently. Despite the economic crisis faced by the country in recent years, Fine Gael has maintained disability spending and sought to progress critical policy changes that will benefit people with disabilities.

In a second term, we will do more to empower and improve the lives of people with disabilities. Our Long Term Economic Plan will help provide for this, while also freeing up resources for enhanced and targeted public services.

### MAKING WORK PAY

**Reducing Barriers to Work:** Fine Gael will facilitate people with disabilities in finding a clear pathway into employment, training and education, by expanding the role of Intreo offices. We will also address concerns surrounding the loss of secondary benefits, so that work always pays more than welfare.

Working with Intreo, Fine Gael will support people with disabilities, and allow them to transition into employment, by ensuring a seamless return of their entitlements should a particular employment opportunity prove unsuitable.

**Inform and Engage Employers:** We will provide prospective employers and employer organisations with information on the supports available to hire and retain people with disabilities.

**Supported Employment:** We will continue to support and expand supported employment opportunities and will work with stakeholders on options to make

both more attractive to prospective employers and employees.

**Prepare School Leavers:** Fine Gael wants to equip school leavers with the skills required to move into further education, training or employment, if they so choose. This means earlier intervention and planning, in order to widen job opportunities. We will work with disability and education stakeholders to ensure that adequate and early post-primary transition planning takes place for all school leavers. Ensuring equality of opportunity in accessing further education is also crucial.

**Community Employment (CE) Schemes:** Fine Gael will continue to support Community Employment throughout the country and will review the referral procedure to ensure that an increased proportion of places are taken up by those with a disability.

### TAILORING SERVICES TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

**Personalised Budgets:** Fine Gael is committed to empowering people with disabilities through the introduction of personalised budgets. These budgets will provide more control and choice over the range of services an individual needs, thereby offering greater independence and transparency. Fine Gael will set out

an implementation plan and time frame for the rollout of personalised budgets within 12 months. This will be done in consultation with disability stakeholders.

**Brokerage Option:** As part of the move to individualised budgets, Fine Gael will also introduce a system of support brokers to assist clients with their budgets to work out the best way to meet their social care needs, should they so wish. These brokers may act as a support network and could be employees or volunteers of community organisations.

**Pre-School Year Supports:** Fine Gael introduced a new scheme to ensure access to the Early Childhood Care and Education programmes for young children with disabilities. We will continue to work with stakeholders on the further development of this initiative.

**Special Educational Needs:** For a young child, parent and teacher, it is crucial that early detection and intervention takes place so that each child can reach their full potential. Over €1.4bn is spent annually on special education, yet families still face anxiety in accessing services. We will examine the adequacy of current funding provision, with a view to ensuring children get the earliest and best support possible. Fine Gael increased the number of Special Needs Assistants from 10,575 to 12,040. We also increased the number of resource teachers from 5,175 to 7,452 in 2016. We will continue to do so. We will consult with stakeholders to see how best to progress sections of the EPSEN Act that were introduced on a non-statutory basis.

**Housing Adaptation Scheme:** Keeping people in their own homes as they grow older or if they have a disability is a goal we aspire to. The Housing Adaptation grants provided to local authorities are essential to this aim. Budget 2016 increased this scheme by 10% to €55m, which will see over 8,500 households benefit from the scheme. We will increase this scheme by a further 20% to €66m by 2021.

## INDEPENDENCE AND INCOME SUPPORT

**Income Support:** We will increase the Illness Benefit, Invalidity Pension, Disability Benefit and Allowance, Carer's Benefit and Allowance, and Blind Person's

Pension by €20 per week, by 2021 (a €4 increase every year).

**Mobility Allowance:** Fine Gael will introduce a new mobility scheme to assist those with a disability in meeting their increased mobility costs.

**UN Convention:** Fine Gael is committed to the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and has published a roadmap setting out the steps to ratification. We remain committed to delivering on this.

**Disability Inclusion Strategy:** We will mandate government departments and state bodies, including local authorities and the HSE, to work together to ensure people with disabilities are fully supported in their daily lives. This Strategy will ensure that people with disabilities are treated as equal citizens, provided with independence to live how they choose and enabled to reach their full potential.

**Congregated Settings:** Fine Gael is committed to a continuation of the policy of moving people with disabilities out of congregated settings to more appropriate smaller units and homes in the community. Currently 2,725 people live in congregated settings and our objective is to reduce this figure by at least one-third by 2021.

## CARERS

Family carers are the backbone of care provision in this country. Most of us will be carers – or cared for – at some point in our lives. And it is the family carer who will continue to play a key role in supporting family members to live independent lives.

**National Carers' Strategy:** Fine Gael published the first ever National Carers' Strategy and is committed to implementing it in full.

**Income Support for Carers:** We will increase Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit by at least €20 per week by 2021 (a €4 increase every year).

**Care Plans:** We will ensure there is greater involvement of family carers in the preparation of care plans and provision of care, together with more accessible training and respite to facilitate full support.

## 9. Drugs and Alcohol

Tackling the problem of drug and alcohol related crime and anti-social behaviour in our communities requires a comprehensive approach incorporating policing, treatment and demand reduction. It is only through a combination of these measures that we can address the underlying causes of this behaviour, reduce harm to the individual and better safeguard our communities.

Fine Gael will finalise an updated National Drugs Strategy, full implementation of which will be vital in achieving these goals and meeting the challenges of tackling the harm caused to individuals, families and communities. In addition Fine Gael will:

**Disrupt the Supply of Drugs:** In the last 3 years An Garda Síochána together with customs officials have made seizures of controlled drugs with an estimated street value in excess of €700m, including cocaine, heroin, herbal cannabis, cannabis resin and ecstasy. Fine Gael will put in place further laws and resources to disrupt the supply of illegal drugs, supporting the Gardaí and the Revenue Commissioners in the effective detection, interception and seizure of controlled drugs.

**Safeguard Urban Centres and the Night-Time Economy:** We will ensure effective resourcing of An Garda Síochána in targeting the sale and supply of illicit drugs on our streets. We will support the strategic deployment of highly visible uniformed Gardaí, and where appropriate undercover Gardaí, to reduce instances of anti-social behaviour and drug use, making our streets safer for all.

We will support Gardaí to work with local businesses, particularly those involved in the night-time economy, to enhance public order policing in our towns and city centres, and will enact a comprehensive and

consolidated Sale of Alcohol Bill to update our liquor licensing system.

As Garda numbers continue to increase we will ensure further resources are assigned to the new national Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau and to strengthen the local drug units. This response will be coupled with ongoing support for outreach programmes which work with vulnerable and at-risk individuals in addressing complicated addiction issues.

**Community Justice Intervention:** We will introduce a new Community Justice Intervention system to deal with low-level offenders to divert them from the court system. This approach will more effectively tackle reoffending through the use of community sanctions and appropriate misuse services, treatments and interventions.

**Review Addiction Services:** We will commence a review of addiction treatment services for offenders within prisons to evaluate services for prisoners with drug and alcohol problems and implement any recommendations arising from the review.

### PUBLIC HEALTH (ALCOHOL) BILL

Ireland has one of the highest consumption rates of alcohol, contributing to a wide range of health and

social harms, and placing a considerable burden on frontline resources.

Fine Gael will prioritise enactment of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill in seeking to reduce average alcohol consumption from 11 litres per annum to 9.1 litres of pure alcohol per annum by 2020. This legislation is the most far-reaching proposed by any government. It will target affordability, availability and attractiveness and ensure alcohol is addressed as a public health measure.

**Minimum Unit Pricing:** Fine Gael will introduce minimum unit pricing, making it an offence to sell or advertise alcohol at a price below a set minimum; we will review the minimum price at set intervals.

**Health Labelling:** We will introduce labelling requirements for alcohol products and notices in licensed premises providing consumers with health information and advice.

**Advertising of Alcohol:** We will require advertisements for alcohol products to incorporate health warnings, including in pregnancy, as well as providing details on accessing public health advice.

**Sponsorship:** We will prohibit alcohol sponsorship at events which are organised for children, and which involve driving or racing cars.

**Regulation of Alcohol Marketing to Children:** Young people are particularly vulnerable to alcohol-related harm and are becoming increasingly exposed to online alcohol advertising. We will strengthen regulation of online alcohol advertising to children, limiting exposure at this impressionable age. We will introduce a ban on advertising near schools, playgrounds and public transport and require a 9pm broadcasting watershed for alcohol adverts.

# 10. Economy, Public Finances and Taxation

Fine Gael was elected to government in 2011 to fix our public finances and get our country working again. Since then we have added 135,000 jobs and cut the deficit from €18bn in 2010 to €4bn in 2015. We are at a crucial point in the economic recovery, and to keep it going requires continued vigilance in the management of the economy and the public finances – we have seen how populist parties in other countries have undone all the good work, destroying confidence and stability.

**Long Term Economic Plan:** Fine Gael's Long Term Economic Plan will keep the recovery going, end the cycle of boom and bust and deliver steady economic growth for the years ahead. Our plan is based on three steps: (1) more and better jobs; (2) making work pay; and (3) investing in better services.

## MORE AND BETTER JOBS THROUGH EFFECTIVE TAX POLICY

Fine Gael will continue to use tax policy to add a further 200,000 jobs to the economy and to bring the unemployment rate down below 6% by 2020.

**Corporation Tax:** Fine Gael defended our corporation tax regime throughout the financial crisis and we are committed to maintaining the 12.5% rate into the future. We will continue to work with our international partners in tackling aggressive international tax planning through the OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) initiative.

**Knowledge Development Box:** Fine Gael will closely monitor the introduction of the Knowledge Development Box (KDB), as set down in Finance

Bill 2015, with a special 6.25% rate of tax on income from qualifying patents and other innovations, to encourage both Irish and multi-national companies to develop their knowledge-based capital in Ireland.

**Employers' PRSI:** To mitigate the impact on jobs and small employers of further, sensible rises in the minimum wage to €10.50 per hour, we will cut the lower 8.5% rate of Employers' PRSI to 6.5% and increase the lower rate threshold to €426 per week (from €376). We will still be guided by the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission on the phasing in of these minimum wage changes during a term of office.

**Small Business Investment Trusts:** The introduction of Real Estate Investment Trusts has proven to be a successful vehicle for investment in the commercial and residential property market. We will explore the role that Small Business Investment Trusts could play in Ireland. Such a vehicle could be an alternative source of funding for Irish SMEs and provide small investors with the opportunity to invest in Irish SMEs.

**Capital Gains Tax Relief for Start-Up Companies:** We will introduce a new Capital Gains Tax Relief (Start-Up Relief) to support and encourage start-ups in Ireland.

Gains arising on chargeable business assets acquired from 2017 and held for 5 years will be charged at a rate of 10% on disposal, up to a maximum liability of €10m.

**Family Businesses:** Fine Gael will instruct the Department of Finance to review, in advance of Budget 2017, the tax barriers to the long-term growth of Irish-owned family businesses, with particular reference to the competitiveness of the Irish tax regime with that of the UK and other advanced economies.

**Microbreweries:** The expansion of microbreweries, along with Ireland's resurgent whiskey industry, is providing very positive spillovers to the agricultural sector and creating local jobs. Fine Gael increased the annual excise relief production ceiling for microbreweries and we will continue to support this sector in the coming years.

**Fuel Laundering and the Shadow Economy:** Fine Gael will actively support the new Joint Agency Taskforce, established under the new Stormont Agreement, to bolster North-South inter-agency cooperation in tackling cross-border crime. We will support the Revenue Commissioners' multi-faceted approach to combatting the shadow economy and initiate a public awareness campaign, encouraging people to comply and report, referencing Revenue's new Shadow Economy webpage, where one can report such activity.

**Tax Collection and Enforcement:** The Revenue Commissioners, in their Statement of Strategy 2015-2017, prioritise the identification and confrontation of non-compliance. In 2015, audit and compliance interventions yielded €642.5m in tax, interest and penalties. We will increase support and investment in the Revenue Commissioners to support them in this priority, with a view to improving tax enforcement by an additional €50m per year (0.1% of the tax yield). This will be net of the cost of an additional 200 Revenue Commissioners enforcement staff.

The biggest losers from tax evasion are the legitimate businesses that have to compete with illegitimate business for new customers, new business and skilled employees. Building upon the success of the Home

Renovation Incentive we will continue to introduce measures that reward legitimate and tax-compliant businesses, such as:

- Additional resources for the Revenue Commissioners to increase their tax enforcement efforts, particularly in the area of tobacco and fuel smuggling
- More investment in our systems to enable data sharing across government departments and agencies and between the Revenue Commissioners and Revenue authorities in other jurisdictions

## MAKING WORK PAY THROUGH TAX REFORM

**Rewarding Hard Work:** Since the introduction of the Universal Social Charge (USC) by Fianna Fáil, Ireland's personal tax system has discouraged work and effort and is a barrier to the economic recovery. As the UK and other countries seek to match Ireland's corporation tax rate, Fine Gael's tax priority is to keep the recovery going by reducing marginal tax rates on income.

**Abolishing the USC:** Building on the progress made in our last two budgets, Fine Gael will complete the abolition of the USC by 2021, as part of a wider income tax reform plan that broadens the tax base and limits the benefits for the highest earners. We will reduce the main 5.5% rate of USC by 1% in Budget 2017, among other measures.

**Attracting 70,000 Emigrants Home:** As well as encouraging greater domestic labour market participation and entrepreneurship, we believe that USC abolition, as an integral part of our Long Term Economic Plan, will encourage at least 70,000 emigrants to return home, by increasing Ireland's attraction as a dynamic hub for young talent.

**Levy on Higher Earners:** We will keep Ireland's income tax system as among the most progressive in the EU. As part of our broad reform of the tax system, which includes the abolition of the USC, we will introduce a levy of 5% on individual incomes over €100,000. The levy will apply to individual incomes above €100,000 (only on the excess over €100,000).

**Keeping Ireland's Tax System Fair:** In addition to the introduction of the 5% levy on Higher Earners, we will also remove the PAYE and new Earned Income Tax Credit from those earning over €100,000, tapered from €70,000.

**Keeping the Tax System Broad and Making Work Pay through PRSI Reform:** Our tax reforms are aimed at reducing tax rates for every worker, without removing anybody from the tax system. As we phase out the USC, we will reduce the entry point of PRSI to €13,000 (the current entry point into the USC). When combined with the weekly PRSI allowance introduced for lower-income employees this January, the net effect will be a boost to take-home pay for all workers, while ensuring that everybody earning above €13,000 continues to make some contribution.

In addition, the advantage of paying PRSI compared with the USC is that paying PRSI generates benefits for those working people who put in. This broadening of the PRSI base will help fund new benefits for working families, such as:

- €27 and €12 per week increases in Job Seekers' Benefit for the first 3 and 6 months respectively
- The restoration of the Dental Treatment Benefit
- A €25 per week increase in the Contributory State Pension by 2021
- The introduction of 2 weeks' paternity leave from September 2016 and an additional 8 weeks' paid leave for parents of infants (less than 1 year) by 2020.

**A Tax System to Support Entrepreneurs and the Self-Employed:** We will increase the Earned Income Tax Credit to €1,650 for the self-employed, to match the PAYE credit, by 2018. Together with the abolition of the USC, this will end tax inequality for the self-employed.

**Incentive for Rewarding Key Employees in SMEs:** We will explore the mechanisms through which SMEs can reward key employees with share options in a tax-efficient manner.

**Small Benefits Exemption:** We will increase the Small Benefits Exemption from €500 to €650, which is

equivalent to approximately one week's wages for those on the average industrial wage.

**Home Carer's Credit:** Fine Gael's tax reforms will support one-income families caring for a child or other dependent person. We will increase the Home Carer's Credit to €1,650, while also increasing to €10,500 the income exemption for the home carer.

**An Affordable Local Property Tax (LPT):** We will retain the LPT as a superior alternative to taxes on incomes and jobs and as a driver of local government accountability for service delivery. To reflect the strong recovery in house prices since the introduction of the LPT, and to better align the revaluations to the local government electoral cycle, we have deferred the next revaluation of house prices to 2019. We will increase local authority freedom to set the local rates. We will freeze equalisation contributions to the Local Government Fund at their current levels, allowing all councils to retain 100% of any additional LPT receipts following the revaluation. In line with the recommendations of the Thornill Report we will increase the thresholds for the deferral of LPT for low-income and mortgage-distressed homeowners.

**Tax Transparency:** To promote public awareness and transparency in the tax system we will send all taxpayers a breakdown of how their annual contribution has been proportionally spent by Government.

**Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT):** We will increase the Group A tax-free thresholds (including all gifts and inheritances from parents to their children) to €500,000, from €280,000 at present. We will ensure that parents can continue to support - tax-free - their children through education.

## SOUND PUBLIC FINANCES AND SENSIBLE INVESTMENTS IN PUBLIC SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

**Steady Growth, Not Boom and Bust:** Our Plan will target steady growth in 2016-21 - around 3.5% per year on average - not boom and bust. Steady growth of this order will generate 200,000 additional jobs by 2020, replacing all the jobs lost during the recession

with new jobs and ensuring that everybody who wants a job will be able to get one.

**Eliminating the Deficit:** Steady growth of this nature will also eliminate the remaining deficit and bring government debt down to below average European levels without any new taxes or charges. To reduce debt levels and protect the economy from external and domestic risks, our Long Term Economic Plan targets the elimination of new government borrowing by 2018, and keeping the public finances in balance thereafter.

**€4 Billion Future Jobs Investment Fund:** To match the scale of ambition in our Long Term Economic Plan to create an additional 200,000 sustainable jobs by 2020, and taking full advantage of the favourable treatment of capital investment under the fiscal rules, Fine Gael will use €1bn of the fiscal space available by 2021 to fund an additional €4bn in total capital investment over the 5-year period 2017-21. The funds will be ring-fenced for a new Future Jobs Investment Fund to future-proof the economy and our jobs plan against rising global risks and challenges.

**Selling Bank Assets:** We are committed to disposing of the State's investments in the banking sector when market conditions are right, and to recovering all the taxpayers' money invested by the current Government. In order to help undo the damage to Ireland's public finances from the banking crisis and to provide a buffer against future risks, all proceeds from the disposal of bank assets will be used to pay down government debt.

**Expenditure Rule:** At the heart of our Long Term Economic Plan is the Expenditure Rule, which will cap annual government spending growth (net of

discretionary tax changes) below the potential growth rate of the economy until the underlying government deficit is eliminated, and to, at most, the potential growth rate of the economy thereafter. This will ensure that we never again repeat Fianna Fáil's mistake of using temporary periods of strong growth to make reckless spending commitments that then have to be reversed, while ensuring there is adequate resources to deliver tax reform and sensible improvements in key services, notably health, policing, education and childcare. By honouring the Expenditure Rule, we will deliver on the obligation in domestic and EU law to eliminate the "structural deficit" in our public finances by 2018.

**Contingency and Stability Reserve:** We will also set up a "rainy day fund" to cope with unexpected events. Our Long Term Economic Plan will leave €2.5bn of the available fiscal space unallocated as a Contingency and Stability Reserve. This reserve will act as a buffer against unexpected shocks, both domestic and international, and will be allocated according to a set of conditions to be set out by Government in Budget 2017, with the advice of the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council. The money will either be saved (used for additional debt reduction) or injected into the economy, in line with the needs of economic and fiscal stability.

**Independence of the Central Bank:** We will protect the independence of the Central Bank as a guardian of financial stability. We support the introduction of the recently announced "Countercyclical Capital Buffers" as a way to ensure that never again is runaway credit growth allowed to destroy our financial stability and economic prosperity.

# 11. Education and Skills

Education is the key to giving every child an equal opportunity in life and a key driver of our economic recovery. Fine Gael's ambition is that no child is left behind in economic recovery and that we use the benefits of a strong economy to become a leader across all PISA rankings and in the provision of quality higher education and skills. We have the capacity to achieve this by 2022.

We have a well-trained and committed teaching profession and high and rising rates of school completion and participation in higher education. And yet, too many of our children still fall through the cracks, and are in danger of being left behind in a fast-changing world. The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy along with the Project Maths course will play a role in improving outcomes, but we want to go further, and to chart a course for Ireland's education system to become "best in class".

Fine Gael has a 4-point plan to invest in a reformed and well-managed education system that makes sure that the economic recovery leaves no child behind.

## 1. WE WILL INVEST IN SCHOOLS, EDUCATION AND TEACHERS.

Early childhood interventions have the greatest impact on long-term educational outcomes. By keeping the recovery going, we will create the resources needed to invest wisely in our teachers and education system.

**Reduce the Pupil-Teacher Ratio for Junior and Senior Infants:** Fine Gael will fund, by 2021, an additional 832 teaching posts and reduce the pupil-teacher ratio for junior and senior infants from 28:1 to 18:1, phased in from September 2017. Smaller classes have the greatest beneficial impact on younger pupils. Budget 2016 provided for 2,260 teachers, commencing this

September. In addition, we will fund an additional 2,392 teaching posts by 2021 to – at the very least – maintain the pupil-teacher ratio in all other levels of the primary and secondary schools.

**School Buildings:** We are committed to delivering an extensive school capital investment programme. We have already committed €2.8bn to deliver 310 major extensions/refurbishments, 62,000 additional school places and eliminate the use of prefabs by 2021.

**Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for Teachers:** We will invest an additional €10m by 2021 (bringing the total spend to €35m per year) to fund additional CPD provision for teachers, including mandatory modules in Maths, Special Needs, Irish Language, and ICT. Initial teacher training in these areas will be strengthened.

**More Support for Schools with General Operating Costs:** Fine Gael will provide an additional €50m in funding for primary and secondary schools by 2021 for general operating (capitation) costs, conditional on schools making their facilities available for after-school care where sufficient demand exists.

**Introduce In-School Speech and Language Therapy Service:** Fine Gael will invest €10m by 2021 to fund 217 additional therapists for a new model of In-School Speech and Language Therapy, involving collaboration between parents, schools and primary care services that has been proven to be effective internationally.



Education is the key to giving every child an equal opportunity in life and a key driver of our economic recovery. Fine Gael's ambition is that no child is left behind in economic recovery.

## **Expand the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS):**

We will invest an additional €3m to increase the number of NEPS psychologists from 167 to 209 so that the Service can provide enhanced early intervention strategies for staff and pupils, and offer immediate support to schools in cases of critical incidents.

**Special Educational Needs:** For a young child, parent and teacher, it is crucial that early detection and intervention takes place so that each child can reach their full potential. Over €1.4bn is spent annually on special education, yet families still face anxiety in accessing services. We will examine the adequacy of current funding provision, with a view to ensuring children get the earliest and best support possible. Fine Gael increased the number of Special Needs Assistants from 10,575 to 12,040. We also increased the number of resource teachers from 5,175 to 7,452 in 2016. We will continue to do so. We will consult with stakeholders to see how best to progress sections of the EPSEN Act that were introduced on a non-statutory basis.

**Action Plan for Educational Inclusion:** We will publish a new updated Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, within 12 months, aimed at narrowing the gap between DEIS and non DEIS schools, while also examining how students outside of DEIS can be supported. We will reform the funding models to reward schools that succeed in improving outcomes.

**Curriculum Modernisation:** We will mandate the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to publicly consult on how schools could introduce new subject choices. This includes:

- **Literacy and Numeracy:** A key priority since 2011, we have ensured that Maths and literacy performance have improved. We must drive this further and also look at new approaches to improve our PISA results, including exploring game-based learning and STEM opportunities.
- **Mental Health and Well-being:** An increasing concern in schools, we need to promote awareness and prevention rather than simply reacting to incidents. Consultation on how best to teach resilience and coping mechanisms for pupils must take place.
- **Entrepreneurial Education:** We will open up opportunities for industry and local leaders to share their skills and experience at primary and post primary level.

- **Computer Science:** We will roll out a pilot scheme of computer science in our secondary schools to build on existing skills not only for coding but also to lay the foundations for skills in computer architecture and the business application of IT.

- **Physical Education:** We support the introduction of more PE in primary schools and its introduction as a Leaving Cert subject. We will look at various ways in which organisations with experience in children's sports and fitness might provide schools with support.

**ePortfolios:** In partnership with industry, we will pilot a cloud-based ePortfolio system at primary level which will act as a storage and private reference system that allows pupils, along with their parents, to track their own academic achievements. A similar initiative used by 85% of schools in Estonia allows for better communication and involvement between parents and teachers.

**Extend Mandatory Schooling Age:** We will increase mandatory schooling to age 17.

## **2. WE WILL STRENGTHEN LOCAL DECISION MAKING, LEADERSHIP, INNOVATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY.**

School principals, teachers and parents are in the best position to drive reforms that improve educational outcomes and to prioritise resources. Central Government already micro manages too many decisions in our schools, from curriculum design and timetabling to minor capital works. Our Plan will give more decision-making power, responsibility and flexibility to schools and their communities.

**Local Decision Making:** We will extend, until May 2016, the period of consultation with parents, schools and other stakeholders on the "Advancing School Autonomy in the Irish School System" research paper published by the Department of Education and Skills in December 2015. On foot of this consultation, we will transform the School Admissions Bill agreed by the current Government, but not yet passed by the Oireachtas, into a new School Admissions and Excellence Bill.

This Bill, alongside a revised admissions framework, will give new freedoms to schools on staff deployment, performance management, curriculum design and other matters. As part of this consultation, we will

examine the structure of boards of management, with a view to ensuring accountability and transparency as well as support mechanisms for these voluntary boards and parents. The role and power of an Ombudsman for Education, to whom a parent could complain and appeal on foot of a decision by a board of management, will be examined by the Oireachtas Committee to ensure its consistency with the need to ensure better local decision making and accountability to parents.

**Local Education Clusters:** Fine Gael will incentivise voluntary school participation in new “Local Education Clusters” that encourage schools to improve student outcomes by sharing best practice and school improvement experiences, foster collaborative in and out-of-hours initiatives, staff peer mentoring and leadership, and that allow for cost reductions through economies of scale.

**Schools Excellence Fund:** We will establish a new €50m Schools Excellence Fund, which rewards collaborative approaches driven by schools and by parents themselves, aimed at improving school outcomes through the teaching of subjects such as Maths, Science and Technology, key life skills programmes, and pupil retention initiatives. Applications that seek to tackle educational disadvantage will be prioritised. Outside bodies, such as business and higher education institutions, may collaborate with second level schools as part of this initiative.

**School Leadership:** School principals will have the support of Fine Gael to introduce reforms that drive up educational standards. Budget 2016 increased the number of release days provided to teaching principals. Teaching principals within Education Clusters will be resourced to spend one day per week focusing on improving school outcomes. We will also establish a pool of experts (educators, employers, accountants, business leaders, IT specialists etc.) to assist school initiatives that drive better outcomes in schools. Newly appointed school principals will take a preparation course in advance of taking up their role, and will be expected to take regular leadership courses under CPD.

**Financial Certainty:** We will set out capitation rates to schools on a rolling 3-year basis allowing for forward planning. School management will have the decision-making power to allocate these resources as they deem appropriate, including to posts of responsibility.

**More School Accountability for Performance:** With more autonomy will come more school accountability, to both parents and taxpayers. Parents have a right to information about their children’s educational performance. Fine Gael will, within 12 months, complete a review of options for standardised testing in our schools, with a view to implementing a single model by 2018, aimed at delivering clear performance information for teachers, parents and students.

In the interim, we will require schools to publish annual reports, taking into account test results, facilities, extra-curricular activities, ICT resources, and special education resources. Schools, together with parents, will set targets against which they will be reviewed. Self-evaluation will be strengthened and will be the basis on which schools are inspected. Fine Gael will also make available – at the request of school parents and patrons – “School Support Teams” with special powers to turn around failing schools.

**More Effective Complaints Procedures for Parents:** Real accountability for performance also requires a credible complaints procedure for parents, within a stronger regulatory framework for teaching. We will commence, the “Fitness to Teach” provisions of the Teaching Council Act and – a decade after its enactment – complete a review of the Teaching Council Act with a view to strengthening the independence and effectiveness of the Teaching Council.

### 3. WE WILL IMPROVE PARENTAL CHOICE AND SCHOOL DIVERSITY.

Uniformity is the enemy of innovation, change and ongoing improvement. Resources go further when users of public services choose and shape their delivery, and are well informed about quality. Fine Gael supports real parental choice within a more diverse system of school patronage.

**More Multi-Denominational and Non-Denominational Schools:** Fine Gael will strengthen parental choice and diversity in our schools system, reflecting the need in modern Ireland for new forms of multi-denominational and non-denominational education. A road map has been agreed for a phased transfer of Catholic schools to new patrons, where the support of communities exists. Fine Gael will work with all stakeholders to facilitate this process. Since 2011, 49 new multi-denominational primary and post primary

schools have been established. Fine Gael will continue to increase the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 300 by 2030.

**Protecting the Denominational Ethos of Schools:**

Consistent with expanding the choices available to parents, we will safeguard the right of parents to send their children to denominational schools that offer a distinct religious ethos.

**Taxpayer Support for Fee-Charging Schools:** There will be no further discrimination in taxpayer support for fee-charging schools. The reduction in the pupil-teacher ratio in September 2016 will benefit all schools.

**Small Schools:** We will not close any school against the wishes of parents. Fine Gael will, however, provide positive incentives for small schools amalgamation, such as additional capital works. Within 3 months, we will commence a review of the teacher appointment thresholds for 3 and 4-teacher schools.

#### 4. WE WILL EXPAND THE RANGE, AFFORDABILITY AND QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION OPTIONS.

Fine Gael is determined to deliver a step change in our higher level education system's capacity to educate, develop, deploy and retain talent.

**More Taxpayer Support for Higher Education:** Fine Gael is committed to addressing the funding gap for the higher education sector. Just to stand still, the sector requires €100m of additional funding to provide for the growing number of students going on to higher level education and Fine Gael is committed to providing this out of exchequer resources. In addition, we are committed to providing €150m in additional capital resources for facilities, as outlined in the 2016-2021 Capital Plan, including the €40m that has been committed to the Grangegorman DIT project. Following the publication of the Expert Group report, Fine Gael will outline a complete funding plan for the higher education sector.

**A More Efficient Higher Education Sector:** Fine Gael will ensure that additional funding for the higher level education sector will be conditional on continued reforms of the sector that cut out waste and unnecessary costs, encourage more income generation by the sector in collaboration with

the private sector and address identified national challenges and skills shortages.

**Online Higher Education:** Online learning can open up higher education opportunities to more students and reduce costs. Fine Gael will commence an extensive consultation exercise to consider how this can be accomplished in a way which does not compromise standards.

**“Earned Autonomy” for Universities:** We will give universities new freedoms – within strict budgets and new accountability systems – to set their own staffing needs, hire the best lecturers, automate routine processes and adapt work practices to local staff and student needs. The Government will, within 6 months, publish a substantially revised Universities Bill that will free from Central Government human resource controls those universities that demonstrate a sustained commitment to cost efficiency, performance accountability and pay transparency.

**Flexible Learning:** Some third level institutions do not offer part-time courses to learners as part of their full-time day provision. We want to address this anomaly and offer learners the opportunity to attend courses part time, evening, summer and weekends.

**Preparing Students for the Workforce:** We support the introduction of mid-degree “sandwich year” courses, whereby students spend their third year of university working for an Irish business. Such courses have been shown to significantly increase a student's job prospects, post-graduation.

**Student Accommodation:** We will amend the planning guidelines to support the construction of on-campus or near-campus, high-quality, purpose-built student accommodation that can help contain the growth in rents.

**Technological Universities:** Fine Gael continues to support the creation of Technological Universities, which will be linked to industry and will have an enormous impact on our capacity to create and retain jobs in regions. We will prioritise those institutions with clear ambitions and plans for the furthering of industry-relevant technological research and education.

**Further Education and Training Centres:** Fine Gael will work with further education institutions to utilise facilities and during summer months offer more

flexible, frequent courses, including conversion courses. We will also work with industry to ensure courses are designed with in-demand skills need in mind.

**Enterprise Engagement:** We will internationally benchmark entrepreneurial activity in Irish higher education and work with the HEA to ensure an ambitious and implementable plan to identify and address skills gaps and ICT and STEM needs.

**Apprenticeships for the 21st Century:** Fine Gael in partnership with the Apprenticeship Council and industry will double the number of apprenticeships to provide a total of 31,000 places by 2020 through an annual call for new proposals. We are targeting over 100 different apprenticeship schemes spread across sectors of the economy.

**Local Industry and Career Traineeships:** Fine Gael replaced FÁS and 33 VECs with 16 new Further Education and Training Boards (ETBs) to strengthen local training capacity and ability. With student outcomes in mind, we will reform the ETB funding model to reward ETBs that partner with

local enterprises to develop career traineeships that combine classroom education with on-the-job training. We will benchmark progress. As part of our National Skills Strategy, we will also provide 19,000 traineeship places by 2020.

**Springboard:** We will review the successful Springboard programme to determine if new 2-year courses are merited for sectors with complex skill requirements.

**Momentum:** We will continue to provide quality upskilling and training opportunities to long-term job seekers under the Momentum programme. We will also keep the opportunities provided under review, to ensure that we target the needs of jobseekers and employers in a recovering economy.

**Adult Literacy:** Fine Gael recognises that low levels of proficiency in literacy, numeracy and problem solving can have a negative impact upon a person's social and health outcomes. We will improve access routes to learning to ensure that those with low qualifications or skills are not left behind.

## 12. An Equal, Fair and Inclusive Society

100 years on from the signing of the 1916 Proclamation, we have an opportunity to reassess the progress we have made as a society and to redefine who we are, and who we wish to become, as a nation.

Action on equality is required by all groups in our society, but the State must play a role in mobilising the resources for change and enabling citizens to overcome the barriers they face. Fine Gael's intense focus on early years and early intervention means we will be tackling these barriers at the earliest possible opportunity. No child should have to live in poverty and no family should have to face homelessness. Our Long Term Economic Plan will provide the resources to invest in services that protect the weakest and most vulnerable in our society from poverty and exclusion.

Fine Gael believes that a fair and inclusive society must be built on a strong economy. The three pillars of this are:

- **More and Better Jobs:** Unemployment is the greatest source of unfairness in society, with its economic, social and health effects.
- **Long Term Thinking for Better Services:** Only a sustainable economy can deliver the resources needed to provide public services which enable and protect our citizens, especially the most vulnerable.
- **Equality of Opportunity:** Specific policies are needed alongside a strong economy to ensure that everyone has a fair and equal opportunity to participate in society, regardless of their circumstances.

### MORE AND BETTER JOBS

**Integrated Framework for Social Inclusion:** In a new term, we will develop a new Integrated Framework for Social Inclusion, built on our three pillars, which will tackle inequality and poverty. Our Integrated Framework will outline measures to help eliminate any persisting discrimination on grounds of gender, age, family status, marital status, sexual orientation, race, disability, religion or membership of the Traveller Community. It will draw on existing as well as new strategies, in particular the (i) New Pathways to Work Plan for Jobless Households, (ii) New National Women's Strategy, (iii) New National Disability Inclusion Strategy, (iv) Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, (v) National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, and (vi) New Action Plan for Educational Inclusion.

**Pathways to Work Plan for Jobless Households (see Social Welfare, Making Work Pay and Pensions chapter for further detail):** We will publish a specific Pathways to Work Plan for Jobless Households. It will have targets for individuals within jobless households and updates to the Plan will be published on a regular basis. Supporting jobless households into the workforce is the most effective way to reduce child poverty. In particular, our new Working Family Payment is specifically designed to promote work

over welfare, targeting low-income families. Fine Gael is determined to eradicate all remaining welfare traps.

**Pay Equality and Transparency:** Households headed by women are at a higher risk of poverty than those headed by men, and while advances have been made, gender pay inequalities persist. We will increase wage transparency by requiring companies of 50 and more employees to participate in pay surveys, to strengthen the principle of equal pay for equal work.

**Equality in State Pension Entitlements:** We will require the Department of Social Protection to review, within 6 months, the calculation of the State pension, and the costs and benefits associated with giving parents (mostly women) credits for years spent “home making” outside the paid workforce.

**A More Equal Workplace:** The ongoing creation of sustainable employment is critical to keeping the recovery going, and equity at work is essential to attracting and retaining motivated employees and building a positive working environment. Similar to public bodies, we will encourage employers to implement equality plans so as to ensure all workplaces are welcoming to all existing and potential employees.

**Female Entrepreneurship:** Fine Gael has sought to increase female entrepreneurship through a number of targeted initiatives, such as the ACORN programme, which supports early stage female entrepreneurs in rural Ireland. We are determined to build on the latest Enterprise Ireland (EI) figures, which show a significant increase in female participation in entrepreneurship. As part of this, one of the key actions of Action Plan for Jobs (APJ) 2016 will be to fund locally delivered courses for women which will comprise a series of training opportunities on self-development and work-related skills to assist a return to the labour market and promote entrepreneurship.

**Women in the Defence Forces:** Recognising the very strong contribution made by female personnel, we will prioritise the need to address the gap in female participation in the Defence Forces. Fine Gael will increase the level of female participation, with the goal of doubling the rate of participation from the current 6% to 12% in the next 5 years. We will ensure future UN peacekeeping missions incorporate a number of gender-focused measures and the work of the Peace and Leadership Institute provides an opportunity for the development of expertise in these areas.

**Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities:** Work has commenced already on the implementation of this strategy. It seeks to support people with disabilities into employment and provide bridges and supports into jobs as well as offering certainty of income support if a job does not work out.

It is also important that the needs of young adults with disabilities are supported at school and that they are helped to make the transition to further training or the workforce.

## LONG-TERM THINKING FOR BETTER SERVICES

**Early Years Investment:** One of the most consistent findings from modern social research is that by investing in a child’s early years, society reaps large dividends. Early years investment is associated with a host of positive outcomes, including higher secondary school completion and employment rates, higher lifetime earnings, and reduced crime rates. It is also one of the single most effective ways of tackling intergenerational cycles of joblessness and poverty.

**Better Start in Life:** We are targeting investment in children’s early years and in early intervention and prevention, so that all children benefit from equality of opportunity. Fine Gael has made childcare more affordable, and we will introduce 2 weeks’ parental leave each year to further support parental care, which is particularly beneficial in a child’s first year. As part of our intense investment in early years, we are reducing the pupil-teacher ratio for junior and senior infants to 18:1. We will also build on the key successes of the School Completion Programme and seek to increase school retention.

We have introduced a range of additional supports to enable children with disabilities to fully participate in, and reap the benefits of, pre-school care and education. We will overhaul current funding provision to ensure early intervention and continue to seek ways to overcome obstacles for all children.

**Disability Inclusion Strategy:** We will mandate government departments and state bodies, including local authorities and the HSE, to work together to ensure people with disabilities are fully supported in their daily lives. This Strategy will ensure that people

with disabilities are treated as equal citizens, provided with independence to live how they choose and enabled to reach their full potential.

**Social Innovation Fund:** Fine Gael believes that social innovation has an important role to play in shaping the future of Ireland; to shape Ireland as a country that is not only economically prosperous but a more inclusive and fairer society in which to live. Due to the winding down of major philanthropic organisations, such as Atlantic Philanthropies and One Foundation. A potential gap has opened up in the funding of social projects. To close this gap, Fine Gael propose to drive social innovation policy in the Department of the Taoiseach and establish Social Innovation Fund Ireland with a view to raising a minimum of €50 million to provide growth capital to Ireland's best social innovations. This money will be raised through philanthropy, along with a previously announced commitment of €5 million matched by philanthropists, and will strengthen and foster social innovation.

## EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

**Supporting the LGBT Community:** While the Marriage Equality Referendum was a major step forward in recognising the LGBT community, we must continue to ensure that all aspects of our society are safe and supportive of LGBT people. In particular, we will:

- Build upon the Department of Education and Skills Anti-Bullying Plan, and focus on ensuring our schools are safe and supportive places in which LGBT young people can discover their sexual orientation or gender identity
- Ensure that, within all workplaces, LGBT people are not inhibited from achieving their fullest potential
- Work with An Garda Síochána to provide services and training to assist members of the LGBT community in seeking support should they experience homophobic or transphobic incidents

- Continue to resource adult and child mental health services in the community, ensuring timely access to services for all vulnerable groups, including LGBT people

Fine Gael is committed to increasing female participation at local and national level and is committed to gender equality in politics. It was Fine Gael that introduced gender quota legislation and we have reached the 30% quota for the 2016 general election. To make our parliament a more attractive working environment for all Oireachtas members with young families, Fine Gael will ask the Ceann Comhairle and the Oireachtas to consider the introduction of family friendly hours for the Dáil following a review of how other parliaments address this issue and a consultation process with all members as to how it would work in our parliament.

**National Women's Strategy:** Fine Gael is committed to publishing an updated National Women's Strategy that promotes gender equality, women's participation in decision making and the empowerment of women. This Strategy will be published following public consultation and will be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure progress in its implementation.

**National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy:** We will publish a revised National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, aimed at improving the lives of members of the Traveller and Roma communities.

**A Referendum to Reflect a Changing Society:** While recognising that women still undertake a high proportion of unpaid tasks in the home, there is now a wider diversity in the caring situations of many Irish families, which should be reflected in our Constitution. We will hold a referendum on Article 41.2.1 of Bunreacht na hEireann regarding a "woman's life within the home".

**Offence of Blasphemy:** We will hold a referendum on the question of amending Article 40.6.1(i) of the Constitution to remove the offence of blasphemy.

# 13. Families and Childcare

Throughout this manifesto, Fine Gael's focus is to keep the recovery going so that families across Ireland can plan for their future. Ireland can never go back to where we were in 2011. That is why Fine Gael has set out solid steps in our Long Term Economic Plan to provide families with confidence that the next 5 years will not be like the last 5. In an uncertain world, our Plan will reinforce Ireland's position as a jobs and family-focused country of stability and opportunity.

## MAKING WORK PAY FOR FAMILIES

**Abolishing the USC:** Building on the progress made in our last two budgets, Fine Gael will complete the abolition of the USC by end 2020. We will reduce the main 5.5% rate of USC by 1% in Budget 2017, among other measures.

**Minimum Wage:** We will increase the minimum wage to €10.50 per hour during a second term, while cutting the lower rate of Employers' PRSI to mitigate the cost of minimum wage increases.

**The "Working Family Payment" (see the Social Welfare, Making Work Pay and Pensions chapter for further detail):** We will roll out a new Working Family Payment that promotes work over welfare. Targeted at low-income families, it will supplement, on a graduated basis, the income of a household, while at the same time incentivising more hours and full-time work. It will ensure that parents working more than 15 hours a week will receive at least €11.75 an hour.

## FAMILY-FRIENDLY CHILDCARE

As we work to keep the recovery going, parents need affordable childcare that makes work pay for their family. The provision of quality and affordable care and education for all children is a priority for Fine

Gael. We understand that at each stage of a child's development their needs change and we must provide choice and flexible options for families to avail of.

**Paid Leave in the First Year:** Research shows that children benefit most from parental care in their first year. Current maternity leave entitlement is for 24 weeks after birth (and 2 weeks prior). Budget 2016 has introduced 2 weeks' paternity leave from this September (which can be taken concurrently or when maternity leave has ended). Building on this, Fine Gael is committed to an additional 8 weeks' paid leave entitlement to be availed of by either parent within the first year of a child's birth. Starting in 2018, this will be implemented on a phased basis of 2 additional weeks per year. When fully implemented, paid leave entitlements will be up to 34 weeks after a baby is born, with additional unpaid maternity leave if a family choose to avail of it.

**Free Pre-School:** Fine Gael has extended the free pre-school year for children age 3 until they start school. Commencing in September, this will reduce pre-school costs by €1,500 on average for a family.

**Home Carer's Credit:** We will support parents that choose to stay at home to care for their children. As part of this, Fine Gael's tax reforms will support one-income families caring for a child or other dependent

**LET'S KEEP THE RECOVERY GOING**



Fine Gael's focus is to keep the recovery going so that families across Ireland can plan for their future. Ireland can never go back to where we were in 2011.

person. We will increase the Home Carer's Credit to €1,650, while also increasing from €7,200 to €10,500 the income exemption for the home carer.

**Affordable Childcare from 9-36 Months:** As part of our plan for more affordable and quality childcare, Fine Gael will reduce the parental bill by €2,000 per annum by providing a direct annual subsidy to centre-based providers caring full time for children aged 9 months to 36 months. Parents working part-time or in training or education will be entitled to a pro-rata reduction.

**Making Use of School Buildings for After-School Care:** School buildings must be utilised to offer more choice and convenience to parents in after-school care for their 5-12 year olds. Fine Gael will provide an additional €50m in funding for primary and secondary schools by 2021 for general operating (capitation) costs, conditional on schools making their facilities available for after-school care where sufficient demand exists. Community groups and private providers will be invited to tender to use school facilities. Some schools in Cork already provide this service to parents, and in return schools receive a financial contribution from the childcare provider.

**Informal Childcare:** Fine Gael recognises the value of informal childcare for families. We also support the development of a phased programme of reforms for childminders which will make it easier to support and assist both families and childminders.

**Targeted Childcare Support:** We will continue to expand targeted supports that provide affordable childcare to low-income families. Additional low-cost childcare places increased from 35,000 in 2015 to 48,000 in 2016.

**Quality and Sustainable Childcare:** Fine Gael will ensure regular quality audits to measure the impact of investment in higher quality childcare. Budget 2016 provided funding for the Better Start Initiative, Síolta Quality Assurance Programme (QAP) and a Learner Fund, which are key tools in ensuring improved quality. We will work to ensure the sustainability of the sector.

**Inspections:** Fine Gael inherited a system of childcare regulation and inspection that was not fit for purpose. In government we have worked to put in place the

building blocks to rectify this, such as ensuring that all inspection reports are now available to parents online, along with significantly expanding Tusla's Childcare Inspectorate.

We are committed to continuing to strengthen regulations, and to ensuring that every service is inspected and compliant before it opens. We will further develop the Better Start initiative, supporting childcare services to enhance quality. We will continue to expand inspectorates, increasing the number of unannounced inspections.

## HEALTHCARE (SEE HEALTH CHAPTER FOR FURTHER DETAIL)

Fine Gael's Long Term Economic Plan will allow us to proactively support families from the birth of a child to adulthood, and move to focus on prevention rather than intervention.

**Free GP Care for Under 18s:** Free GP Care for Under 18s: Building on the provision of free GP care to senior citizens and young children, we will extend GP care without fees to children under 18 years by 2019, subject to negotiations with GPs. Just over 400,000 children whose parents currently have to pay for access to a GP will benefit from this change. Budget 2016 has provided for the introduction of free GP care for under 12s. Subject to negotiations with GPs, the following phase of our plan will be to provide free GP care to 12-17 year olds.

**Free Dental Care for Under 6s:** Building on the provision of GP care without fees for children under 6, Fine Gael will introduce a dental health package for this cohort. Together with existing dental checks at 6, 9 and 12 years, every child under 12 will be entitled to a comprehensive preventive dental health programme.

**Dental Treatment Benefit:** We will extend the Dental Treatment Benefit under the Social Insurance Fund to reimburse the cost of some routine dental treatments.

**Preventive Dental Health Package for Medical Card Holders:** We will introduce a preventive dental health package providing examination, cancer screening, scaling and polishing, any necessary preventive treatment, radiographs and prescription.

**Significantly Reducing the Maximum Annual Cost of Medicines:**

We will significantly reduce the level of co-payment which families/individuals have to pay for medicines under the Drug Payment Scheme. Currently a family/individual has to pay a maximum of €1,728 per year and this will be reduced to €950, helping families/individuals with significant ongoing medical bills. Currently a family or individual with a medical card has to pay up to €25 a month in prescription charges, this cap will also be reduced to a maximum of €17.50 a month.

**Enhanced Primary Care:** We have committed funding for at least 80 additional primary care centres. Subject to negotiations, we will fund GPs to expand to services like minor surgery and cardiac monitoring. We will ensure GPs have access to X-ray, ultrasound and other investigations for their patients, keeping people in the community and out of hospital.

**EDUCATION (SEE EDUCATION AND SKILLS CHAPTER FOR FURTHER DETAIL)**

As we work to keep the recovery going, we know that it is only in an Education Nation, where talent and potential is nurtured, that our economic progress can be maintained and built on. Fine Gael has set out, in detail, its vision for education as part of our Long Term Economic Plan.

**Reduce the Pupil-Teacher Ratio for Junior and Senior Infants:**

Fine Gael will fund, by 2021, an additional 832 teaching posts and reduce the pupil-teacher ratio for junior and senior infants from 28:1 to 18:1, phased in from September 2017. Smaller classes have the greatest beneficial impact on younger pupils. Budget 2016 provided for 2,260 teachers, commencing this September. In addition, we will fund an additional 2,392 teaching posts by 2021 to – at the very least – maintain the pupil-teacher ratio in all other levels of the primary and secondary schools.

**More Multi-Denominational and Non-Denominational Schools:**

Fine Gael will strengthen parental choice and diversity in our schools system, reflecting the need in modern Ireland for new forms of multi-denominational and non-denominational education. A road map has been agreed for a phased transfer of

Catholic schools to new patrons, where the support of communities exists. Fine Gael will work with all stakeholders to facilitate this process. Since 2011, 49 new multi-denominational primary and post primary schools have been established. Fine Gael will continue to increase the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 300 by 2030.

**Extend Mandatory Schooling Age:** We will increase the mandatory schooling age to 17.

**Special Educational Needs:** For a young child, parent and teacher, it is crucial that early detection and intervention takes place so that each child can reach their full potential. Over €1.4bn is spent annually on special education, yet families still face anxiety in accessing services. We will maintain and examine current funding provision, with a view to ensuring children get the earliest and best support possible. Fine Gael increased the number of Special Needs Assistants from 10,575 to 12,040. We also increased the number of resource teachers from 5,175 to 7,452 in 2016. We will continue to do so. We will consult with stakeholders to see how best to progress sections of the EPSEN Act that were introduced on a non-statutory basis.

**Introduce In-School Speech and Language Therapy Service:**

Fine Gael will invest €10m by 2021 to fund 217 additional therapists for a new model of In-School Speech and Language Therapy, involving collaboration between parents, schools and primary care services that has been proven to be effective internationally.

**Expand the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS):**

We will invest an additional €3m to increase the number of NEPS psychologists from 167 to 209 so that the Service can provide enhanced early intervention strategies for staff and pupils, and offer immediate support to schools in cases of critical incidents.

**A More Efficient and Responsive Higher Education Sector:**

Fine Gael will ensure that additional funding for the higher education sector – whether from the taxpayer or students – will be conditional on continued reform, to cut out waste and unnecessary costs and to encourage more income generation, in collaboration with the private sector.

## THE FAMILY HOME

An affordable supply of quality housing is necessary for maintaining our economic competitiveness and keeping the recovery going. We are committed to supporting a sustainable increase in the annual housing output, while ensuring that we never repeat Fianna Fáil's previous mistakes in this area.

**Increasing Home Building:** To meet housing demand Fine Gael will support an increase in the annual housing output to a sustainable level of 25,000 by 2021. As part of this goal, we will support NAMA to deliver on their target of 20,000 residential units before the end of 2020.

**A Fair Social Housing System:** Fine Gael will provide over 110,000 social housing units by 2020, through the delivery of 35,000 new units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). These measures will address the needs of households on the housing waiting list, while also providing some flexibility for increased demand.

**Mortgage Switching:** We will establish a code of conduct for switching mortgage provider, administered by the Central Bank, which should inform and encourage mortgage holders to switch to more competitive banks. We will also introduce a standardised and dedicated switching form, which will be simple to use and quick to administer.

**New Mortgage Rules:** We support the Central Bank review of the new rules, including a public consultation, to assess their impact and to propose recommendations on foot of its findings. We will also examine the role of mortgage insurance schemes, both state and private-sector funded.

**Home Renovation Scheme:** Fine Gael has extended the attractive and successful Home Renovation Scheme to the end of 2016.

**Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT):** We will increase the Group A tax-free thresholds (including all gifts and inheritances from parents to their children) to €500,000, from €280,000 at present. We will ensure that parents can continue to support - tax-free - their children through education.

## 14. An Ghaeilge

Fine Gael recognises the crucial importance of the Irish language to our heritage and culture and is committed to its reinvigoration. To this end, we are committed to systematically implementing the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish language. This strategy will increase the number of people using Irish in their daily lives, while also ensuring that Irish becomes a more visible language in today's society, both as a spoken language and also in areas such as signage and literature.

As part of this reinvigoration, we will pay particular attention to the Gaeltacht and the education system. Currently there are fewer than 1,000 native speakers in primary schools in the strongest Gaeltacht areas. Less than 10% of 15-18 year olds in Gaeltacht areas currently speak Irish on a daily basis. This stark figure is a call to action to sustain and revive Irish as a spoken language in our local communities. Ireland needs to work harder to promote the range of opportunities that exist to strengthen the position of our native language. To achieve this, we also need to place an extra emphasis on Gaeltacht education, to ensure that we continue to have vibrant Irish-speaking communities in Gaeltacht areas, and a greater focus on language standards for initial teacher training.

**Job Creation in the Gaeltacht:** As part of the Government's Action Plan for Jobs, we will continue to focus on job creation in the Gaeltacht, through Údarás na Gaeltachta. The additional €1m that was made available to Údarás' capital budget in Budget 2016 is indicative of this commitment. Gaeltacht towns and villages will also benefit from the regional enterprise strategies, which we will continue to implement across all areas of the country. Through these strategies, the various agencies and companies will be encouraged to work together to build on the unique strengths of each Gaeltacht area.

**Gaeltacht Act 2012:** Under the Gaeltacht Act 2012, we will implement the language planning process in the Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, Gaeltacht Service Towns and Irish Language Networks.

**Language Planning Process:** We will engage with the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Údarás na Gaeltachta to clarify the role that education will play in complementing the language planning processes taking place in accordance with the Gaeltacht Act 2012.

**Naíonraí:** The recent Gaeltacht review by the Department of Education and Skills indicates that attendance by children in Irish-medium pre-schools or naíonraí in Gaeltacht areas has a positive impact on children's language development in Irish and on parents' own use of the language in the home. Fine Gael supports the strengthening of this provision and will explore the possibility of accommodating naíonraí on the site of primary schools.

**Language Focus on Infant Cycle:** We believe that primary schools recognised as Gaeltacht schools should be allowed to practise total early immersion through Irish for a period of up to 2 years (junior and senior infants).

**Language Supports:** Fine Gael supports the introduction of measures to support both the

language development of native speakers and the learners of Irish in Gaeltacht schools.

**Community Links:** We will promote the use of Irish outside of the school setting by increasing engagement with cultural, sporting and social activities conducted in Irish.

**Irish Language Assistants Scheme:** We will review the effectiveness of the Irish Language Assistants Scheme (Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga) and look to provide an enhanced service.

**Initial Teacher Training:** Fine Gael will examine initial teacher education, induction and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) provision for both teachers in Gaeltacht schools and at primary and post primary level.

**Summer Colleges:** We will introduce a scholarship scheme for students from disadvantaged areas to attend Irish-language summer colleges.

**Gaelbhratach Scheme:** We will expand the Gaelbhratach Scheme, where schools are recognised and rewarded for their efforts in supporting and promoting the Irish language.

**Irish in the EU:** Fine Gael recognises the importance of the status of Irish as a full working language of the EU institutions and we are committed to ending the derogation, as circumstances allow. In the interim, we will take an incremental approach to the provision of additional services, while also making targeted reforms to ensure that there are a sufficient number of qualified graduates for the positions available.

**Irish Language and the Diaspora:** In order to support the Irish language among the Diaspora, we will continue to fund Irish-language programmes in universities overseas, which will also help to encourage cultural tourism to Ireland.

# 14. An Ghaeilge

Aithníonn Fine Gael an tábhacht mhór a bhaineann leis an nGaeilge ó thaobh ár n-oidhreacht agus ár gcultúr agus táimid tiomanta í a athbheochan. Chun na críche sin, táimid tiomanta ár Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge a chur i bhfeidhm go córasach. Méadóidh an straitéis sin líon na ndaoine a úsáideann an Ghaeilge ina saol laethúil, agus cinnteoidh sí go mbeidh an Ghaeilge níos feiceálaí i sochaí na linne seo, mar theanga labhartha agus i réimsí mar chomharthaíocht agus litríocht araon.

Mar chuid den athbheochan sin, díreoimid ár n-aird ar an nGaeltacht agus ar an gcóras oideachas. Tá níos lú na 1,000 cainteoir dúchais i mbunscoileanna sna limistéir Ghaeltachta is láidre i láthair na huaire. Labhraíonn níos lú ná 10% de dhéagóirí idir 15-18 bliain d'aois sa Ghaeltacht an Ghaeilge ar bhonn laethúil. Glaoch chun gnímh é an figiúr follasach sin nach mór an Ghaeilge a chothú agus a athbheochan mar theanga labhartha inár bpobail áitiúla. Ní mór d'Éirinn a bheith ag obair níos déine chun an raon deiseanna atá ann a chur chun cinn d'fhonn seasamh ár dteanga dúchais a neartú. Chun é sin a bhaint amach, caithfear chomh maith níos mó béime a leagan ar oideachas sa Ghaeltacht, lena chinntiú go mbeidh pobail bhríomhara Ghaeilge againn i limistéir Ghaeltachta, agus béim níos mó ar chaighdeán teanga maidir le hoiliúint tosaigh do múinteoirí.

**An Straitéis 20 Bliain:** Tá an Rialtas tiomanta leanúint ar aghaidh le cur i bhfeidhm na Straitéise 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge 2010-2030 chun todhchaí ár gcéad teanga oifigiúil a chosaint.

**Cruthú Postanna sa Ghaeltacht:** Mar chuid de Phlean Gnímh do Phoist an Rialtais, leanfaimid ar aghaidh ag leagan béime ar chruthú postanna sa Ghaeltacht, trí Údarás na Gaeltachta. Is léiriú an €1 milliún breise

a cuireadh ar fáil do bhuiséad caipitil an Údaráis i mBuiséad 2016 ar an tiomantas sin. Bainfidh bailte agus sráidbhailte na Gaeltachta leas as na straitéisí fiontraíochta réigiúnacha, a leanfaimid orainn á gcur i bhfeidhm i ngach limistéar sa tír. Tabharfar spreagadh trí na straitéisí sin do ghníomhaireachtaí agus gnólachtaí éagsúla oibriú lena chéile chun tógáil ar láidreachtaí uathúla gach limistéar Gaeltachta.

Acht na Gaeltachta 2012: Faoi Acht na Gaeltachta 2012, cuirfimid próiseas pleanála na teanga i bhfeidhm sna Limistéir Phleanála Teanga Ghaeltachta, Bailte Seirbhíse Gaeltachta agus Líonraí Gaeilge.

**An Próiseas Pleanála Teanga:** Rachaimid i mbun idirbheartaíochta leis an Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta agus le hÚdarás na Gaeltachta le go mbeidh an ról a bheidh ag an oideachas, maidir le cur leis na próisis phleanála teanga a bheidh i bhfeidhm, ag teacht le hAcht na Gaeltachta 2012.

**Naíonraí:** Léiríonn an t-athbhreithniú ar an nGaeltacht a rinne an Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna le déanaí go mbíonn tionchar dearfach ag freastal leanaí ar réamhscoileanna nó naíonraí i limistéir Ghaeltachta ar fhorbairt teanga na leanaí maidir leis an nGaeilge agus ar úsáid na teanga ag tuismitheoirí sa mbaile. Tacaíonn Fine Gael le neartú na forála sin agus féachfar

ar na féidearthachtaí a bhaineann le naíonraí a chur ar shuíomh na mbunscoileanna.

**Fócas Teanga ar an tSraith Naíonán:** Creidimid gur chóir go mbeadh cead ag bunscoileanna a aithnítear mar scoileanna Gaeltachta luath-thumoideachas a chleachtadh trí Ghaeilge ar feadh tréimhse suas le 2 bhliain (naíonáin bheaga agus mhóra).

**Tacaíochtaí Teanga:** Tacaíonn Fine Gael le tabhairt isteach bearta chun tacú le forbairt teanga na gcainteoirí dúchais agus na bhfoghlaimeoirí Gaeilge sna scoileanna Gaeltachta.

**Naisc Phobail:** Tabharfaimid spreagadh d'úsáid na Gaeilge taobh amuigh den scoil trí rannpháirtíocht in imeachtaí cultúir, spóirt agus sóisialta arna réachtáil i nGaeilge a mhéadú.

**Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga:** Déanfaimid athbhreithniú ar Scéim na gCúntóirí Teanga agus féachfar le seirbhís feabhsaithe a chur ar fáil.

**Oiliúint Tosaigh do Mhúinteoirí:** Déanfaidh Fine Gael iniúchadh ar oideachas tosaigh do mhúinteoirí, ionduchtú agus soláthar Forbartha Gairmiúla Leanúnaí (CPD) do mhúinteoirí i scoileanna Gaeltachta agus ag an leibhéal bunscoile agus iarbhunscoile.

**Coláistí Samhraidh:** Tabharfaimid isteach scéim scoláireachta do dhaltaí ó limistéir faoi mhíbhuntáiste le go mbeidh siad in ann freastal ar choláistí samhraidh Gaeilge.

**An scéim Gaelbhhratach:** Leathnóimid an scéim Gaelbhhratach ina dtugtar aitheantas agus cúiteamh do scoileanna as a gcuid iarrachtaí i gcur chun cinn na Gaeilge agus as an tacaíocht a thugann siad di.

**Gaeilge san AE:** Aithníonn Fine Gael an tábhacht a bhaineann le stádas na Gaeilge mar theanga iomlán oibre d'institiúidí an AE agus táimid tiomanta deireadh a chur le maolú, de réir mar is indéanta. Idir an dá linn, glacfaimid cur chuige incriminteach maidir le soláthar seirbhísí breise, agus muid ag déanamh athchóirithe spíodhírithe lena chinntiú go bhfuil líon dóthanach céimithe oilte ann chun na postanna atá ann a líonadh.

**An Ghaeilge agus an Diaspóra:** D'fhonn tacú leis an nGaeilge i measc an Diaspóra, leanfaimid ar aghaidh le cláracha Gaeilge a mhaoiniú in ollscoileanna thar lear, rud a chabhróidh linn turasóireacht chultúrtha chun na hÉireann a spreagadh chomh maith.

# 15. Health

Fine Gael inherited a badly organised and underfunded health service. While Fianna Fáil cut health spending during its final years in government, Fine Gael has used the economic recovery to start rebuilding our health services, with increases in funding for more doctors, nurses and other frontline staff, for additional services such as the extension of Breastcheck, for access to new treatments such as for cancer and Hepatitis C, and for free GP care for the under 6s and over 70s.

Our health services employ dedicated and highly skilled professionals, but need more investment and reform – more healthcare staff, more empowered local management, more investment in technology and a decisive shift towards care outside of hospitals and in the community. Fine Gael is committed to delivering a strong and efficient publicly funded health service. It is only a strong economy that will provide our country with the foundation needed for better health services.

Our plan for Universal Healthcare – for access to quality preventative, primary, curative, rehabilitative and end-of-life healthcare that is timely and affordable for everyone – will not be possible unless we keep the economic recovery going, and will be based on four key pillars.

## 1. MORE RESOURCES AND STAFF AND BETTER INFRASTRUCTURE FOR HEALTH SERVICES

**Sensible Increases in Exchequer Funding for Health Services:** By keeping the recovery going, our Long Term Economic Plan will be able to significantly increase funding for our health services. This will cover the projected costs of hiring extra frontline staff, other non-payroll service pressures from a growing and

ageing population, pay increases, as well as service developments.

**Medium-Term Budget Certainty:** In Budget 2017, we will set out a detailed 5-year budget for the health service, allowing our health service managers to plan service developments with the benefit of much greater financial certainty, and to be more accountable for results.

**Increased Frontline Staff:** Irish publicly funded hospitals are under-staffed in comparison with OECD norms when it comes to certain specialities. We will implement a workforce plan that adds 4,400 frontline service staff to our health services by 2021, including 600 hospital consultants, doctors and dentists, 2,800 nurses and an extra 1,000 health and social care professionals.

**21st Century Health:** We will mandate the HSE to engage strategic partners from the private sector to help with the planning, financing and rollout of a 21st century IT health infrastructure, including the individual health identifier, e-referral, the electronic health or patient record and an online booking system.

**Improved Infrastructure:** We will open the new Children's Hospital at St. James's and satellite centres in Blanchardstown and Tallaght, the new National

A photograph of a hospital hallway. In the foreground, two women in white and blue scrubs walk towards the camera. In the background, a doctor in a white coat is talking to an elderly patient sitting in a wheelchair. To the left, there is a hospital bed with blue linens. The hallway has large windows and recessed ceiling lights.

Fine Gael has used the economic recovery to start rebuilding our health services, with increases in funding for more doctors, nurses and other frontline staff and for additional services.

Forensic Medicine Campus in Portrane and the new National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dun Laoghaire. We will complete the development of a new National Maternity Hospital, a new home for Holles Street, and progress as fast as possible the move of the Coombe, St Munchin's and the Rotunda to the campuses of adult hospitals. We will continue to invest in new hospital buildings, including a 75-bed ward block at Galway University Hospital and a new Emergency Department in Limerick University Hospital. We will review the Capital Plan in 2018.

**Hospital Bed Capacity:** Fianna Fáil reduced our acute hospital bed capacity by 1,245 (10.3%). In the last year, we have started to reverse this policy, providing over 300 additional beds. A hospital bed capacity review will be carried out and completed by 2017 to provide a strong evidence base on which to plan for increasing bed capacity further, particularly in the context of the capital review in 2018.

**Emergency Department (ED) Overcrowding:** In 2015, €117m additional funding was provided for more staff and more beds in hospital and community settings to help alleviate ED overcrowding. This has resulted in improvement, though more is required. Fine Gael will make a decisive shift towards care in the community (minor surgeries, X-rays, chronic illness care), along with additional frontline staff to alleviate pressure on EDs.

As per international best practice, we will measure, monitor and reduce Patient Experience Times (PET), which measure the length of time from a patient presenting at an ED to their discharge home or admission to a ward. Currently 68% of patients spend less than 6 hours in the ED. We will increase the number of patients dealt with within this time frame by 5% per annum until it reaches 93%. These figures will be published for each hospital on a monthly basis.

**Waiting Lists:** Waiting lists have been reduced due to a €50m target investment in 2015. We must sustain this progress and are committing to set aside €50m each year to reduce waiting lists further. This funding will target in particular those who have been long waiting and will utilise both spare public capacity and private capacity as necessary.

**Health Insurance:** We will maintain a tax and regulatory environment that supports increased coverage by a competitive and cost-effective health insurance market.

**Funding Universal Healthcare:** Crucial to the long-term sustainability of Universal Healthcare is the development of a new funding model for the health services. Considerable work has been conducted by this Government on the costs and implications of the introduction of universal health insurance. Further work needs to be conducted on the costs of various models, how to meet those costs and on how best to deal with unmet need for health services prior to the move to a new system. The delivery of the reform programme outlined below must be completed first so that the foundations are in place to change the funding model. This will allow the next government to make a final decision on the best way forward to finance Universal Healthcare.

## 2. HEALTH REFORM PROGRAMME

**Dismantling the HSE:** The Health Service Executive (HSE) is too large and remote from the front line. Its centralised "command and control" model is not conducive to effective management of hospitals or community services. Its dual responsibility for both the purchasing and provision of healthcare services undermines lines of accountability for delivery. Fine Gael will continue its health reform programme, centred around dismantling the HSE, and embedding Hospital Groups and Community Health Organisations (CHOs) with devolved decision making coupled with greater accountability.

**Hospital Trusts and Community Healthcare Organisations:** We will evolve Hospital Groups into standalone statutory Trusts (outside of the HSE) and put CHOs on a statutory footing, with their own boards and management teams. These boards will have local representation from the counties they cover. The Hospital Trust boards will be assisted by representation from their academic partners. We will commit €25m per year by 2021 for the establishment of Hospital Trusts and the implementation of Activity Based Funding, starting at €5m in 2017, and increasing by €5m per year until 2021.

**Health Commission:** The HSE will evolve into a Health Commission, focused on purchasing services and care for patients from Hospital Trusts and CHOs. The National Ambulance Service, Health and Wellbeing, shared services like HSE Estates and Business Services and the National Clinical Programmes will

remain under its remit for the duration of the next government's term of office.

**Autonomy and Accountability:** Hospital Trusts will own their assets, manage their own recruitment, agree individual contracts with key staff and make collective agreements with their employees. Each CEO of the Hospital Trusts and CHOs will be accountable for their budget.

**Service Re-Organisation:** Hospital Groups / Trusts will be required to develop strategic plans to re-organise services within their group of hospitals. This is key to minimising risks to patient safety and maximising favourable outcomes for patients. Re-organisation of national services will be led by the Department and the HSE / Health Commission.

**Activity Based Funding (ABF):** Linking budgets with activity has the greatest capacity to deliver more efficient hospital services and gain timely quality care for patients. We will replace block budgets, funding hospitals and other healthcare providers for the work they do rather than on the basis of historical budgets. The individual health identifier and Health Pricing Office will become key enablers of this reform.

**Achieving Better Performance:** The HSE, and its successor the Health Commission, will agree annual performance targets with each Hospital Group / Trust and CHO on waiting times for inpatients, outpatients and ED attendees. These targets will be built into all ABF budgets as they are rolled out.

**Performance Management Unit:** A new Performance Management Unit, with its own ring-fenced budget of €10m per annum, will be established within the Health Commission, with a reporting line directly to the Director General. It will supply hospitals and other service providers with expert assistance and targeted financial investment to assist them in reaching their targets. Service providers who fail to meet their targets, and who do not fully engage with the Performance Management Unit, will be obliged to use their own budgets to ensure that targets are met with the assistance of private sector providers.

**Investing in Management:** We will upgrade the standard of hospital management by ensuring that all hospital managers and CEOs are educated to Master's in Business Administration (MBA) level or equivalent and are funded to do so.

**New Management for Underperforming Hospitals:**

Where hospitals consistently under perform in terms of clinical outcomes, patient experience and/or financial management, it will be open to the board of the Hospital Group / Trust to temporarily transfer management of the hospital to another provider by means of a concession or management contract, without changing in any way the ownership of the hospitals.

**Voluntary Hospitals:** Fine Gael respects the contribution made by voluntary hospitals to the development of our health services. We value their ethos and history and where their financial affairs are in order, it is our intention to retain their boards and governance structures. Where contracts or service level agreements are fulfilled within their Hospital Group / Trust, their autonomy will be expanded.

**New Consultants' Contract:** We will negotiate a new consultants' contract, to include performance-related pay similar to the model adopted by the UK's National Health Service.

**Reviewing Roles and Responsibilities:** We will review the roles and responsibilities of various healthcare professionals working in our hospitals. This will include the introduction of the transfer of tasks between doctors and nurses, a greater role and extended scope of practice, including the authority to order and report on scans, for radiographers and radiation therapists.

**Making Medicines Available at Affordable Prices:** Building on a 30% reduction in the cost of medicines and €210m of savings invested in the provision of new and innovative drugs, we will continue to drive down costs to provide new treatments. We will work with our EU counterparts in procuring medicines on a European-wide basis, improving purchasing power and further reducing the cost of medicines to the health service.

**Significantly Reducing the Maximum Annual Cost of Medicines:** We will significantly reduce the level of co-payment which families/individuals have to pay for medicines under the Drug Payment Scheme. Currently a family/individual has to pay a maximum of €1,728 per year and this will be reduced to €950, helping families/individuals with significant ongoing medical bills. Currently a family or individual with a medical card has to pay up to €25 a month in prescription charges, this cap will also be reduced to a maximum of €17.50 a month.

**Ambulance Services:** We have enhanced the ambulance services, provided better coordination of services, and prioritised accessibility; we will continue to deliver safer pre-hospital care.

**First Responders:** We will expand the National First Responders Network, training local people in basic life-saving skills and the use of defibrillators, creating further additional avenues for early medical intervention.

**Emergency Aeromedical Support Service (EAS):** We are committed to the continued operation of the EAS, recognising the vital support this dedicated service provides, particularly in rural areas. We will explore the possible extension of this service to other parts of the country.

**Organ Donation:** We will legislate for family consent and an opt-out register in organ donation.

**Tackling the Rising Costs of Claims:** We will establish an Expert Group to report within 6 months on options for reforming the law of torts and the current claims process, particularly when it comes to birth injuries and catastrophic injuries.

**Strengthening Patient Safety and Oversight:** Fine Gael is committed to the establishment of an independent patient advocacy service. In addition, we will strengthen the Department of Health's patient safety functions under the Chief Medical Officer's leadership.

**Open Disclosure:** Fine Gael considers Open Disclosure as an essential component of patient safety and, in line with the recommendations of the Madden Commission on Patient Safety and Quality Assurance (2008), will progress a number of measures to support it. These will include legislation to ensure that all open disclosures will be protected when made, in line with national standards to be set by HIQA and the Mental Health Commission, and that offering an apology or giving full information up front cannot be seen as an admission of liability. It will be made mandatory to report specified patient safety incidents or serious reportable events to the authorities and to the patient harmed, and it will be an offence not to do so.

**Improving Patient Experience:** We will expand the annual publication, by the Department, of statistics relating to patient experience, outcomes and safety, on a hospital and CHO level.

**Increased Inspections:** We will expand the inspection functions of HIQA to include home care and private hospitals. We will introduce a licensing regime for hospitals allowing HIQA to endorse or revoke a license for a particular service.

**New Technologies for Community and Homecare:** Fine Gael will build on the success of the Health Innovation Hub by developing new technologies and solutions that help people remain independent in their home.

### 3. A DECISIVE SHIFT TOWARDS PRIMARY AND COMMUNITY CARE

As part of our Long Term Economic Plan to keep the recovery going we are committed to significantly increasing investment in primary and community care, which will include additional doctors, nurses, and therapists, keeping care in the community.

**Expanding Primary Care:** We will provide at least 80 additional primary care centres, as part of the Capital Plan.

**Keeping GPs Independent:** We will protect the status of GPs as independent, autonomous professionals outside of the public service. We will examine the use of tax instruments and other incentives to encourage more investment by GPs in primary care centres, technology and service developments.

**GP Training:** To achieve our goal of more care in the community, we must invest in training for GPs. We will increase the number of GP training places by 100 over the next 5 years to 259 places annually.

**Rural General Practice:** Fine Gael recognises the importance of maintaining and sustaining a GP in rural communities. Therefore we support proposals aimed at incentivising rural general practice, with the first measures commencing in 2016. We also recognise that there is a need to provide additional support for GP practices in disadvantaged urban areas and will bring forward proposals in this regard following discussions with doctors' representatives.

**Expanding GP Services:** Subject to negotiations, we will fund GPs in expanding services like minor surgery, venesection and first-line investigations such as blood pressure and cardiac monitoring. We will ensure that GPs have access to X-ray, ultrasound and other investigations for their patients.

**Chronic Disease Management:** We will expand chronic disease management in general practice, taking into account advice from the Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP). Over 63,000 patients have signed up for the diabetes cycle of care in general practice, which was initiated in 2015. In addition to diabetes, which is already covered, we will seek to cover chronic pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, heart failure and atrial fibrillation, so that patients can keep their care in their community, close to home.

**Multi-Disciplinary Teams:** To underpin the expansion of services we will increase the number of physiotherapists, occupational therapists, mental health professionals, public health and community nurses, advanced nurse practitioners, nurse/midwife specialists and social workers in our primary care centres.

**Free GP Care for Under 18s:** Building on the provision of free GP care to senior citizens and young children, we will extend GP care without fees to children under 18 years by 2019, subject to negotiations with GPs. Just over 400,000 children whose parents currently have to pay for access to a GP will benefit from this change. Budget 2016 has provided for the introduction of free GP care for under 12s. Subject to negotiations with GPs, the following phase of our plan will be to provide free GP care to 12-17 year olds.

**Medical Cards for Domiciliary Care Recipients:** In recognition of the additional medical costs and needs that are often associated with a severe disability, Fine Gael will legislate in our first year in government to extend the entitlement to a medical card to all children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance. Approximately 10,000 children will benefit from this initiative.

**Community Pharmacists:** We will expand the role of community pharmacists, beyond dispensing prescriptions, to managing the health of their patients, within 2 years. This may include a minor ailments scheme, a new medicines and medication review service, vaccines, warfarin clinics, smoking cessation and chronic disease management. We will extend a limited authority to pharmacists to prescribe medicines.

**Services for Older People in the Community:** We are committed to significantly enhancing older peoples' services over the next 5 years. This will include 2.2

million additional hours for home help, bringing it to 12.6 million hours annually, and additional home care packages, keeping older people in their homes.

**Uniformity of Home Care Services:** We know that home help and homecare provision across the country ranges from excellent to irregular. Fine Gael will put a new structure in place that will provide a consistent, high-quality level of home care, to those who need it.

**Fair Deal:** We will fund additional beds for the Nursing Home Support Scheme to keep the waiting time for the Fair Deal scheme at approximately 4 weeks and ensure support for those unable to remain at home.

**Children's Dental Health:** We will introduce a dental health package for the under 6s including dental health advice for those under 18 months, dental wellness checks and appropriate treatment between 3 and 6 years.

**Dental Treatment Benefit:** We will extend the Dental Treatment Benefit under the Social Insurance Fund to reimburse the cost of some routine dental treatments.

**Preventive Dental Health Package for Medical Card Holders:** We will introduce a preventive dental health package providing examination, cancer screening, scaling and polishing, any necessary preventive treatment, radiographs and prescription.

**Mental Health:** Despite the economic crisis we inherited, Fine Gael increased the budget for mental health by €160m between 2012-2016, a total increase of 20%. We will continue to provide further resources to ensure services reach people directly. We will publish a plan for the achievement of faster access to comprehensive and appropriate mental health services, building upon A Vision for Change, with an emphasis on:

- Preventive medicine and early detection, based around primary care services in the community, making full use of multi-disciplinary primary care teams
- Extending youth mental health services, such as Jigsaw, which is free to access and does not require GP referral
- Extending the Counselling in Primary Care service to more people
- Greater access to counselling and psychological services, including to charities who offer free counselling for families

- Greater access to interventions, which use evidence-based practice to help combat depression and anxiety
- Integration of psychotherapy, counselling and social care services with primary care teams
- Supporting mental health recovery by offering follow-up training and booster self-help courses
- Investment in innovative models of care and service modernisation, such as projects advanced by Genio
- Appropriate amendments to the Mental Health Act 2001 to address concerns regarding involuntary committals and procedures
- Building on reduced waiting times for child and adolescent services
- Reduced admission rates to acute units
- Progressing the transfer of the Central Mental Hospital to a new site
- New capital developments for mental health, using funds from the sale of older assets
- Improved interagency cooperation
- Supporting mental health recovery through accessing appropriate social housing with tenancy sustainment services.

## 4. IMPROVING THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF THE NATION

**Healthy Ireland:** We will pursue the Healthy Ireland and HSE Health and Well-being programmes, supported by increased annual budgets.

**Alcohol Misuse:** We will enact the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill, with a full review 3 years post implementation to consider additional measures to further tackle excess alcohol consumption and misuse.

**Reducing the Prevalence of Smoking:** Fine Gael remains committed to making Ireland Tobacco Free by 2025. We will vigorously defend plain packaging of tobacco products against litigation by the tobacco industry. We will invest in public awareness campaigns to encourage more people to give up smoking. We will prohibit smoking within the campuses of primary and secondary schools and child care facilities. We will increase the excise duty on a pack of 20 cigarettes by 45 cent per year, with a pro-rata increase on other tobacco products.

**Health Levy on Sugar-Sweetened Drinks:** Fine Gael in government established a Special Action Group on Obesity. As part of our comprehensive plan to address levels of obesity and encourage healthy diets and lifestyles, we will publish an Obesity Action Plan for Ireland. As part of this, we will include the introduction of a €24.64 Tax per Hectolitre of Sugar Sweetened Drinks (CN Code 2202), which will raise the average price of a can of soda by 10c. We will introduce the new levy from 2018, following extensive consultation with industry, the Revenue Commissioners and other stakeholders.

**Healthy Nation:** We will implement the National Physical Activity Plan, the National Obesity Action Plan and the Sexual Health Strategy.

**Improved Vaccination Programme:** We will expand the childhood vaccination programme to include meningitis B and rotavirus vaccines from the latter part of 2016.

**Screening:** We will complete the extension of Breastcheck to all women aged 65 to 69 in 2016, and pursue the introduction of new screening programmes which are evidence-based and cost-effective.

**Maternity Care Strategy:** We will implement the recently published National Maternity Strategy, which sets out a clear direction for maternity services, with choice for expectant mothers all over the country at its centre. We will fund an additional 114 midwives annually from 2017 for 4 years as recommended in the Strategy.

**Surrogacy and Assisted Human Reproduction:** We will bring forward legislation to regulate surrogacy and assisted human reproduction services. In conjunction with the legislation we intend to provide public funding for assisted reproductive treatments.

**Cancer Care:** Fine Gael wants to bring Ireland to the top tier of countries when it comes to cancer care and ensure the structures are in place to tackle cancer across all regions of the country. Through the implementation of the new National Cancer Strategy 2016-2025, we will ensure that we have the appropriate care pathways to meet this objective. We will continue the implementation of the National Radiation Oncology Project.

**The 8th Amendment:** This is a complex and sensitive issue, about which many people have deeply held views. In the past, the various debates on this issue

have been very bitter and divisive. The outgoing Government was the first to face up to its responsibilities to legislate for the constitutional position, as defined by the Supreme Court. The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act provides balanced legal clarity, with appropriate protections and safeguards.

Some parents find themselves in very tragic situations that are not referred to in the existing legislation. If re-elected to Government, Fine Gael will, within six months, establish a new Citizens' Assembly. This Assembly will provide an open and inclusive process to examine these issues in detail, and to establish if a broad consensus can be reached on future change.

Any proposals emerging from the Citizens' Assembly would then be examined in detail by the Oireachtas, through an all-party committee with access to the appropriate medical and legal expertise. This responsible approach will facilitate a respectful and rational debate on these highly sensitive, and often, very emotive issues.

**Speech and Language Therapy:** We will examine and, if necessary, reform these services, with a view to ensuring earlier intervention and access for families to the HSE. In addition to this, Fine Gael will invest €10m by 2021 to fund 217 additional therapists for a new model of In-School Speech and Language Therapy, involving collaboration between parents, schools and primary care services that has been proven to be effective internationally.

**Rare Diseases:** We will advance the quality of care for all patients with rare diseases through improved programmes of care and new pathways to European Centres.

**End of Life Care:** We will work with non-governmental organisations to improve information and awareness of end of life services, particularly those which provide people with palliative care in the location they choose. We will bring into operation further hospices, construction of which local communities have funded, including in Wicklow, Waterford, Mayo and Kerry. We will encourage the development of a hospice in the Midlands and North-East.

**Fit for Work Programme:** Working together, the Departments of Health and Social Protection will pursue a "Fit for Work Programme" to support more people to get back to work if they have an illness or disability.

**Dementia Care:** Fine Gael published the first ever National Dementia Strategy to plan for the future care needs of people, provide access to timely diagnosis, and increase awareness and care supports at local and national level for families. Fine Gael will fully implement this strategy.

**Rehabilitation:** We will publish an implementation plan for the Neuro-Rehabilitation Strategy and move towards the provision of increased rehabilitation and support services in the community.

**VAT on Defibrillators:** As was introduced in the UK in 2015, we will set aside a special fund to help buy defibrillators for public places, including schools. EU rules tie our hands in relation to VAT treatment of defibrillators but this fund will help to cover those costs.

# 16. Housing

Fine Gael understands that an increased supply of quality housing is essential for a growing population and for maintaining our economic competitiveness. During a second term of government we will support a sustainable increase in the annual housing output, while ensuring that we never repeat Fianna Fáil's previous mistakes in this area.

## HOME OWNERSHIP

**Supporting Home Ownership:** Fine Gael supports the dreams and aspirations of families to own their own home. Home ownership promotes strong connections to the community and supports local jobs through upkeep and renovation work.

**Supporting the Transition to Home Ownership:** Since the start of 2016 we have been rolling out a tenant purchase scheme to social housing tenants. We will promote this scheme to all eligible tenants as we believe that home ownership supports stable communities and local job creation.

**Standard Variable Rates:** We believe increased competition from outside and within the banking sector is the best way to drive down standard variable rates. We will:

- Establish a code of conduct for switching mortgage provider, administered by the Central Bank, which should inform and encourage mortgage holders to switch to more competitive banks
- Propose a standardised and dedicated switching form, which will be simple to use and quick to administer

**Framework to Support Mortgage Holders in Arrears:** Fine Gael established the Insolvency Service of Ireland, a strict set of mortgage arrears resolution

targets for the banks and a mortgage-to-rent scheme. Fine Gael wants to keep people in their homes and, building on the progress which has seen the number in mortgage arrears decline for 9 consecutive quarters, we will continue to adapt and strengthen the existing mortgage arrears framework as necessary. In addition, the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) has been established as a "one-stop shop" point of information and guidance for homeowners in mortgage arrears, with a dedicated mortgage arrears service in key locations and with nationwide coverage.

We will also introduce a new scheme to help people who are insolvent, and in mortgage arrears on their home, to access independent expert financial and legal advice. This scheme will offer very important support and hope to people in genuine financial distress and anxiety, who can't afford the help they need. MABS will be the gateway to this scheme and will arrange for advice and representation from a personal insolvency practitioner, a specialised MABS adviser, or a solicitor, as needed.

## SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION

**Never Repeating Fianna Fáil's Mistakes:** The lessons of the boom and bust have been painfully learnt. There will be no return to Fianna Fáil's light-touch regulation which has trapped thousands of families

in negative equity in substandard homes. Fine Gael will support a balanced recovery in the construction of new homes which maintains new high standards while encouraging new development.

**Increasing Home Building:** To meet housing demand Fine Gael will support an increase in the annual housing output to a sustainable level of 25,000 by 2021. As part of this goal, we will support NAMA to deliver on their target of 20,000 residential units before the end of 2020.

**Investing Strategically:** Fine Gael will improve the availability of finance for new home construction, with a €500m joint venture to finance the building of 11,000 new homes through the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund (ISIF). We will support the ISIF to encourage the delivery of housing-related enabling infrastructure in large-scale priority development areas. We will also examine the possibility of introducing new competitive funding, where local authorities can bid to deliver advanced local infrastructural projects.

**Improving Planning and Development:** Fine Gael will encourage immediate development through a targeted development contribution rebate scheme in Dublin and Cork. At the same time, we will tackle the hoarding of land by developers by introducing a vacant site levy on serviced land in urban areas. We will also streamline the local planning process with “use it or lose it” planning permissions, and the introduction of greater flexibility in the Strategic Development Zones.

**Student Accommodation:** We will amend the planning guidelines to support the construction of on-campus or near-campus, high-quality, purpose-built student accommodation that can help contain the growth in rents.

**New Jobs in Construction:** In May 2014, Fine Gael set a target of creating 60,000 new construction jobs. To date approximately 20,000 new construction jobs have been created and we are confident that the target of 40,000 will be delivered in the next government term.

**Ghost Estates:** One of the worst legacies of Fianna Fáil’s time in government was the huge number of unfinished or “ghost” estates left dotted around the country as a result of the property bubble that their policies fuelled. Since coming to power, we have reduced the number of such estates from nearly 3,000 in 2010 to 668 by the end of 2015. During a

second term, Fine Gael will continue to deal with the remaining unfinished housing developments.

## SOCIAL AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

**A Fair Social Housing System:** Fine Gael will provide over 110,000 social housing units by 2020, through the delivery of 35,000 new units and meeting the housing needs of some 75,000 households through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). These measures will address the needs of households on the housing waiting list, while also providing some flexibility for increased demand.

We will also review, in 2016, the disparate system of differentiated rents nationally to ensure that housing supports, including the HAP, are fair and sustainable, and prioritise those on the lowest incomes.

**Affordable Housing:** Fine Gael will work with housing associations to develop a cost rental option for low-income families. Cost rental will help to keep rental costs manageable for tenants and avoid future rental increase shocks. The cost rental model will also allow the State to avoid the level of exposure to increasing market rents that has driven up the cost of rent supplement and other similar supports for low-income tenants in private rented accommodation.

**Tax Relief for Landlords:** Fine Gael has reintroduced enhanced tax relief for landlords who accept rent supplement and HAP tenants and will maintain this in a second term of government, in order to incentivise landlords to take rent supplement and HAP tenants.

## PROTECTING RENTERS

Expanding the Range of Protections for Renters: Fine Gael will promote a better balance of rights and protections for tenants and landlords, in recognition that the rules governing the sector have not kept pace with developments in housing. We will achieve this by fully implementing a number of reforms in the private rented sector. These include:

- Introducing a Deposit Retention Scheme, which will become operational by 2017
- An increase in the relevant notice period to compliant tenants in the event of a rent increase or a lease termination

- The introduction of a time-limited measure that changes the provisions around rent reviews so that instead of taking place every 12 months, they occur every 24 months, until the 4th anniversary of the measure's introduction
- Streamlining the powers of the Private Residential Tenancies Board (PRTB) to aid faster decision making in the dispute resolution process to aid both compliant tenants and landlords

## SUPPORTING HIGH-QUALITY AND APPROPRIATE HOUSING

**Housing Adaptation Scheme:** Keeping people in their own home as they grow older or if they have a disability is a goal we aspire to. The Housing Adaptation grants provided to local authorities are essential to this aim. Budget 2016 increased this scheme by 10% to €56m, which will see over 8,500 households benefit from the scheme. We will increase this scheme by a further 20% to €66m by 2021.

**Pyrite Remediation Scheme:** Fine Gael is cleaning up the mess of Fianna Fáil's building regulatory failures that destroyed the dreams of many young families. Fine Gael is supporting those affected by pyrite. We are implementing improved communication and reporting systems for residents in affected estates. We have substantially enhanced funding to expedite remediation progress and we will continue to work with those in pyrite-affected homes until the issue is resolved. In a second term we are committed to funding and supporting the Pyrite Remediation Scheme.

**Home Renovation Scheme:** Fine Gael has extended the attractive and successful Home Renovation Scheme to the end of 2016.

**Enhancing Local Authority Building Inspections:** We will review existing building regulations and local authority inspection powers in order to enhance compliance with planning permissions.

## HOMELESSNESS

**Ending Homelessness:** Fine Gael will end the need for rough sleeping. In addition we will implement a housing-focused strategy to end involuntary long-term homelessness. The current housing situation is challenging, but progress is being made with people exiting emergency accommodation into sustained tenancy arrangements.

**Tackling Homelessness:** One human cost of the legacy of boom and bust housing development is the number of people without a home. It is not acceptable that in 2016 we have families living in emergency accommodation. A key priority for Fine Gael is to boost affordable housing supply that will stem the tide of homelessness for low-income families. To achieve this we will:

- Ensure that there is no need for rough sleeping by providing emergency beds and accommodation options and by supporting the Merchants Quay Night Café, which provides spaces on a night-to-night basis for persons that do not enter existing supported accommodation programmes
- Deliver 35,000 new social houses
- Provide 500 modular housing units, as emergency accommodation, for homeless families
- Return unnecessarily vacant social housing units to use (almost 5,000 void units were returned to productive use in the past 2 years)
- Maintain a high level of support for homeless services, which is up 56% since 2014
- Maintain and promote the Tenancy Sustainment Protocol, operating in conjunction with Threshold in the Dublin and Cork City areas, which continues to provide support to persons in urban areas where supply pressures are most acute. This flexible approach has already assisted almost 6,000 rent supplement households throughout the country to retain their rented accommodation
- Maintain the rent limits available under the HAP Homeless Pilot to 50% above the rent supplement levels

# 17. Jobs, Enterprise and Regional Growth

Jobs will remain Fine Gael's top priority. Our Long Term Economic Plan sets out our overriding target of sustainable full employment, with the aim of adding 200,000 extra jobs between 2016 and 2020. It also sets crucial targets across the enterprise sector for improved performance across all key dimensions.

The last 4 years have proven that with the right policy mix behind it, Irish enterprise can deliver performance to match these ambitions. The key now is to take those policies to the next level and keep this recovery going. Fine Gael is determined to do so, by implementing a range of strategies across three broad fronts. We will:

- Support a leap forward in the capacity and performance of our enterprise sector
- Build a competitive edge, both nationally and regionally, that will drive our export-led restructuring of the economy
- Excel in getting the basics right, and deliver a job-fit business environment which ranks in the top tier globally

## A LEAP FORWARD FOR ENTERPRISE

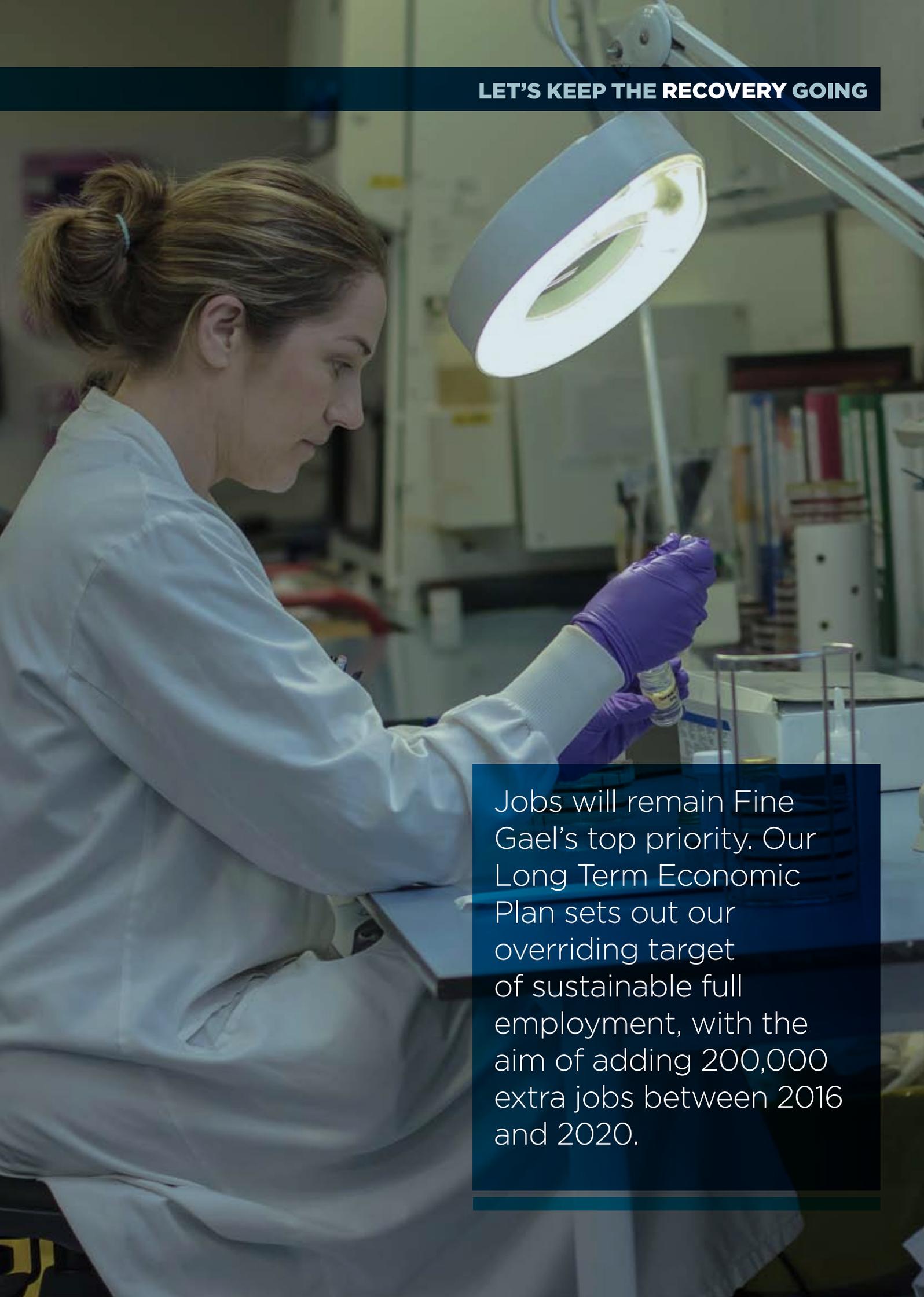
Enterprise will be at the heart of our economic strategy. Global leading export-oriented sectors will be a prerequisite, but vibrant and innovative domestic sectors will be essential to sustain our ambitions. Fine Gael will drive forward the delivery of the strategies of the IDA, EI, SFI and LEOs to grow Ireland's export market share in diverse markets, sectors and technologies. At the same time we will develop

and implement a strategy to build sectoral clusters nationally and regionally which embed a sustainable competitive advantage.

**€4 Billion Future Jobs Investment Fund:** To match the scale of ambition in our Long Term Economic Plan to create an additional 200,000 sustainable jobs by 2020, and taking full advantage of the favourable treatment of capital investment under the fiscal rules, Fine Gael will use €1bn of the fiscal space available by 2021 to fund an additional €4bn in total capital investment over the 5-year period 2017-21. The funds will be ring-fenced for a new Future Jobs Investment Fund to future-proof the economy and our jobs plan against rising global risks and challenges.

As part of the annual Action Plan for Jobs (APJ), the additional capital funding will be allocated by Government on a competitive basis to public bodies and public / private collaborations with credible initiatives that best address these national challenges. That means that the Fund will be used each year in support of the APJ to help deliver on specific, high-impact measures in each Plan so that the target of sustainable full employment by 2020 can be achieved.

**Action Plan for Jobs:** Fine Gael will continue to implement the APJ, which has been strongly

A female scientist with her hair in a bun, wearing a white lab coat and purple gloves, is focused on a task in a laboratory. She is holding a small vial. A bright, circular overhead lamp illuminates her workspace. The background shows various laboratory equipment and shelves.

**LET'S KEEP THE RECOVERY GOING**

Jobs will remain Fine Gael's top priority. Our Long Term Economic Plan sets out our overriding target of sustainable full employment, with the aim of adding 200,000 extra jobs between 2016 and 2020.

welcomed by industry and international organisations and has been described by the OECD as “an important innovation in Irish governance.” We will broaden and further embed it, in a second term, by:

- Focusing the APJ process on the delivery of the ambitions of our Long Term Economic Plan
- Ensuring that the implementation of regional strategies is backed up by integration into wider national decision-making processes and infrastructural priorities
- Bringing leaders of enterprise into the key national implementation group to act as catalysts for continuing innovation
- Inviting the National Competitiveness Council to evaluate the impact of key national strategies – on talent, on innovation, on entrepreneurship, on Pathways to Work and on regional implementation
- Establishing a Long Term Economic Plan Delivery Unit within the Department of An Taoiseach that will coordinate the APJ across Government

**Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs):** Enterprise Ireland (EI) will support the LEO network to develop their own capacity and their range of policy tools, to grow their base of start-ups and small businesses. It will encourage greater scope for local innovation and the build-out of a supporting enterprise network in every county. We want to see Ireland become a European leader in the number of start-ups and in their survival and growth – facilitated by better mentoring, funding models, accelerators and business space. To this end we will ensure that the standard of service delivered is consistent across the country and that any SME or prospective SME that visits its LEO will receive high-quality mentoring, support and seamless access to the wider range of EI supports for high-potential enterprises.

**Equalising Tax:** We will continue to improve the tax offer to small business and reduce and ultimately eliminate the historical income tax discrepancy that exists between PAYE workers and the self-employed by 2018.

**Training and Development:** We will ensure that existing enterprises get the opportunity to improve their capability and to step up to a new level – facilitated by training in the areas of management, new lean processes, innovation, and accessing new markets. We will also commit extra resources to mentoring, in order to help SMEs to maximise their

potential. As part of this commitment, we will ensure that small businesses can access the National Training Fund for management training.

**Productivity and Performance:** We will initiate a strategy to systematically improve productivity and performance in critical sectors of the non-trading sectors of the economy, including construction, logistics, security and digital markets. Our actions would address barriers to entry, weaknesses in capacity skills or management, and examine the adoption of new technologies and processes

**Succession:** As part of our commitment to supporting development and mentoring in the SME sector, we will increase awareness of the implications of succession and of the benefits of succession planning for their business.

**A Multi-Sectoral Jobs Plan:** Our Long Term Economic Plan will focus on job creation across the economy. As part of this plan, we have identified specific jobs targets across a range of sectors. These include agri-food, international financial services, construction, tourism, and the various maritime sectors. Further detail is provided in each of the relevant manifesto chapters.

## BUILDING A COMPETITIVE EDGE

We want to see Ireland consistently feature in the top 3 small countries in the world in the relevant competitiveness rankings and to do so by delivering measurable improvements against international benchmarks in respect of:

- Efficient resource use (e.g. power, airports, fuel, and broadband)
- Market access (e.g. ports and airports)
- Finance (e.g. seed and venture capital, equity, and new forms of non-bank credit)
- Taxation (e.g. on work, entrepreneurship and innovation)
- Ease of doing business (e.g. permits and waiting times)

**Export-Led Growth:** The previous Fianna Fáil led government destroyed Ireland’s international competitiveness, and instead built up an economy around an unsustainable property bubble to try and paper over the cracks. This is why our jobs crash was so swift and so violent.

In contrast, Fine Gael's plan to achieve full employment by 2020, and to sustain it, is based on growing employment broadly, across all sectors of our economy. Of the additional jobs our Plan will deliver by 2020, approximately 50% will be in export sectors.

As part of this, government-supported, Irish-owned companies will grow exports by 40%, or €10bn, by 2020, by driving client companies to target new markets, and by increasing the value of sales in existing markets. This will help grow employment in EI companies by 32,000 by 2020. Over the same period, the IDA will generate over 1,000 new investments that will help grow employment in IDA companies by 42,000.

This is the only way to ensure a sustainable jobs-led recovery where growth is based on making and selling high-quality services and products overseas rather than building and selling property among ourselves.

A New Independent Competitiveness and Productivity Commission of Ireland: Building on our reform of the National Competitiveness Council (NCC), and responding to the 2015 OECD recommendations regarding developing a stronger whole-of-government productivity agenda, together with expanding the remit of the NCC into a more productivity-focused body, Fine Gael will transform the NCC into the Competitiveness and Productivity Commission of Ireland (CPCI).

### The Commission's remit will be to:

- Advise the Taoiseach and Government on how to maintain competitiveness and develop productivity-enhancing programmes
- Independently assess, and comment publicly on, whether policy actions and initiatives are consistent with maintaining Ireland's competitiveness
- Produce reliable independent evidence on the costs of doing business in Ireland and benchmark Ireland's competitiveness performance
- Provide a set of recommendations to Government, including a submission to the APJ, which will be considered by Government within 6 weeks of submission

**Corporation Tax:** Fine Gael defended our corporation tax regime throughout the financial crisis and we are committed to maintaining the 12.5% rate into the future. We will continue to work with our international partners in tackling aggressive international tax

planning through the OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) initiative.

**Developing and Retaining Talent:** Fine Gael is determined to deliver a step change in our capacity to educate, develop, deploy and retain talent. National and regional targets for critical skill provision will be set and competitive funding models will encourage their delivery in partnership with enterprise. This will be essential to keep up with the disruptive impact of new technology. In order to achieve this we will:

- Create financial incentives for the third level system to respond to skills gaps
- Invite industry to partner in the delivery elements of the curricula at third and fourth levels
- Create a strong system for the delivery and renewal of skills in newly emerging technical areas (including apprenticeships, traineeships, and in service progression)

**Innovating to Drive Growth:** Fine Gael will implement Innovation 2020, Ireland's 5-year strategy for research and development, science and technology. As part of this strategy, and to continue to drive growth we will need to develop clusters which will allow us to get early mover advantage from innovation and emerging technologies. This will require us to better align public and private sources of investment in research. This will be crucial in reaching our overall goal of increasing public and private investment in research and development (R & D) to 2.5% of GNP by 2020. This will amount to an almost doubling of current levels of investment. As part of this, €1.25bn in funding will be drawn down from the EU Horizon 2020 programme. We will also develop our systems of data protection, copyright and patent protection in such a way that allows enterprise and innovation to thrive within an environment that gives robust protection to citizens

As part of the same alignment between public and private, we will open up the scope for enterprise to deliver innovation to the public sector, both in routine work and through grand challenges. We will also ensure that the Knowledge Development Box element of our corporation tax system supports the research and development objectives of indigenous Irish companies.

We will set ourselves a number of innovation-specific goals, including:

- Delivering a 60% placement rate from research centres to enterprise

- Creating new models of collaborative research
- Establishing a new advanced manufacturing research and training facility
- Introducing a new tiered Innovation Voucher scheme for SMEs that would help to both generate ideas and commercialise them, through collaboration between the business and the academic community
- Doubling investment in publicly performed research
- Increasing the number of research personnel in enterprise from 25,000 to 40,000
- Selecting a number of “grand challenges” which we face as a society with respect to which a competitive call from mixed public / private consortia would be sought

**Building Competitive Regions:** Fine Gael is implementing the eight regional Action Plans for Jobs, and has allocated €250m to a fund to help spread growth to all areas. The Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation will oversee the delivery and implementation of each regional Action Plan. Competitive funding calls will continue to ensure the ideas with the greatest impact on jobs and enterprise will get funding.

The Action Plans will be part of an overall strategy, aimed at ensuring that the unemployment rate in every region is within 1% of the national average. Each plan seeks to increase employment by approximately 15% by 2020 and includes targets to increase start-ups by 25% and IDA investments by 30-40%.

The €250m in funding available for the Plan will allow the IDA invest in ten additional advanced manufacturing and office facilities in regional centres and for EI to invite regions to compete for €50-60m in funding for locally developed enterprise projects.

We will also reinforce the role of the Western Development Commission (WDC), so that it supports the implementation of the Regional Enterprise strategies in the West and North-West. As part of this, the WDC will be given a specific mandate to stimulate the development of enterprise networks in these two regions and to stimulate innovative approaches to development. This will build on the recent allocation of €2m in additional funding to support regional economic development in the West of Ireland, which the WDC will administer across a number of economic development projects.

**Red-Tape Reduction:** Administrative burdens act as a drag on the economic recovery and Fine Gael will

target a €1bn reduction in the cost of the red tape during the course of the next government. To this end, we will establish a High Level Group on Business Regulation, with an independent chairperson.

**Smart Regulation:** We will also step up the use of impact assessments of legislative proposals across Government. We will publish new guidelines, taking account of the latest EU and OECD smart regulation practices. A screening impact assessment, at a minimum, will have to accompany all primary legislation and significant secondary legislation.

**Sheltered Sectors of the Economy:** Fine Gael stands alone as the only party prepared to shine a light on the sheltered sectors of the economy. We believe in the benefits of competition. The new Competition and Consumer Protection Commission is a beefed-up watchdog, which will help protect consumers. We will monitor the new Commission’s progress and add to its powers if necessary.

**Expert Group on Commercial Rates:** We will establish an Expert Group on Commercial Rates to report, by the end of 2016, on the feasibility of replacing the current system of local authority commercial rates with a Site Valuation tax, as recommended by the National Competitiveness Council, with the objective of ensuring fair and affordable rates on businesses and encouraging the development of unused or underdeveloped premises and land.

In parallel, we will press ahead with the implementation of the recently passed Valuation Act, which is designed to speed up the cumbersome revaluation process. Fine Gael will closely monitor its effectiveness and will introduce further measures if we do not see sufficient improvement.

We will also instruct all county councils to publish the breakdown of how all commercial rates collected are spent, facilitating comparisons across different local authorities. This provision will encourage efficient local authorities to adopt commercial rates policies that help sustain existing businesses and encourage new start-ups.

## REVITALISING THE MAIN STREET

At a time of falling but still high unemployment, it is critically important that the economic potential of each region is maximised and that each region builds on its particular strengths and assets to provide a competitive environment that stimulates entrepreneurship and attracts investment, both

indigenous and foreign. Regional strategies that encourage and facilitate job creation will also support the economic and social fabric of rural areas.

**Planning:** We will look to introduce initiatives that will encourage people to live in towns, which will have the added benefit of guaranteeing footfall for local businesses. This may necessitate a re-examination of the current planning framework so that planning policy is aligned more closely with business realities in these areas.

**Employers' PRSI:** To mitigate the impact on jobs and small employers of further, sensible rises in the minimum wage to €10.50 per hour, we will cut the lower 8.5% rate of Employers' PRSI to 6.5% and increase the lower rate threshold to €426 per week (from €376). We will still be guided by the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission on the phasing in of these minimum wage changes during a term of office.

**Online Retailing:** As well as encouraging more footfall in rural towns and villages we also understand that a significant amount of business these days is done online. In this context, we will expand the Online Trading Voucher Scheme. We will also continue to review the value of the vouchers, to ensure that small businesses are able to use the vouchers to obtain the expertise they need.

## PROMOTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Fine Gael is a pro-enterprise party and we firmly believe that entrepreneurs are the lifeblood of the economy. In a second term, we want to see Ireland become a European leader in the number of start-ups and in their survival and growth. Similarly, we want to see continued growth in the important social enterprise sector. We will achieve these goals through a number of new and innovative approaches.

**Access to Finance:** Access to finance will be absolutely critical to realising our ambition that Ireland will become a leading country for start-ups and that our enterprises will more easily progress in capacity and scale. To achieve this, we need to deliver €1bn per year from new commercial sources of finance to supplement normal bank offerings to SMEs.

Such an ambitious goal will require a mixture of sources and include:

- New forms of equity
- Mid-size investment rounds

- Development finance for manufacturing and international services
- New forms of export and trade finance
- Peer-to-peer lending

We will also ensure that there is careful monitoring of the performance of the institutions in this area (such as Microfinance Ireland and the SBCI) so that we continually update our knowledge on the needs of enterprise, as they emerge, as we move to deliver this ambitious target.

**Small Business Investment Trusts:** The introduction of Real Estate Investment Trusts has proven to be a successful vehicle for investment in the commercial and residential property market. We will explore the role that Small Business Investment Trusts could play in Ireland. Such a vehicle could be an alternative source of funding for Irish SMEs and provide small investors with the opportunity to invest in Irish SMEs.

**Capital Gains Tax Relief for Start-Up Companies:** We will introduce a new Capital Gains Tax Relief [Start-Up Relief] to support and encourage start-ups in Ireland. Gains arising on chargeable business assets acquired from later this year and held for 5 years will be charged at a rate of 10% on disposal, up to a maximum liability of €10m. Gain arising on investment in all Employment Investment Incentive (EII) qualifying companies will be eligible for the lower capital gains tax rate of 20%, introduced in Budget 2016.

**Family Businesses:** Fine Gael will instruct the Department of Finance to review, in advance of Budget 2017, the tax barriers to the long-term growth of Irish-owned family businesses, with particular reference to the competitiveness of the Irish tax regime with that of the UK and other advanced economies.

**Equalising Tax:** We will continue to improve the tax offer to small business and reduce and ultimately eliminate the historical income tax discrepancy that exists between PAYE workers and the self-employed by 2018.

**Educational Initiatives:** We will introduce educational initiatives aimed at encouraging entrepreneurial thinking in schools, throughout second level. At third level, we will build on the emerging engagement between Enterprise and higher education and encourage universities to promote entrepreneurship on their own campuses and to develop course offerings with a strong entrepreneurial content. We would also provide support to universities who introduce mid-

degree “sandwich year” courses, whereby students spend their third year of university working for an Irish business. Such an initiative would be mutually beneficial for both students and businesses. This commitment to entrepreneurial education will also be seen in our support for mentoring and other forms of training and development for start-ups and existing SMEs.

**Female Entrepreneurship:** Fine Gael has sought to increase female entrepreneurship through a number of targeted initiatives, such as the ACORN programme, which supports early stage female entrepreneurs in rural Ireland. We are determined to build on the latest EI figures, which show a significant increase in female participation in entrepreneurship. As part of this, one of the key actions of Action Plan for Jobs (APJ) 2016 will be to fund locally delivered courses for women which will comprise a series of training opportunities on self-development and work-related skills to assist a return to the labour market and promote entrepreneurship.

**Increasing Awareness of Supports Available:** Government surveys have consistently shown that the majority of SMEs are unaware of the supports that are available. It is for this reason that the Government launched the SME Online Tool, to help Irish start-ups and small businesses navigate the over 80 government business supports that they could be eligible for. In the next term of government we will both increase awareness levels of the supports available and continually improve the usability of the Online Tool, so that it works with the efficiency and efficacy SMEs expect from their own businesses.

## WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Fine Gael will continue to promote quality workplaces as the key to innovation and improving living standards through delivery of quick and effective resolution of workplace disputes. We will also introduce balanced improvements in working conditions consistent with our full employment ambition.

Fine Gael has worked to improve employment rights for all workers in a fair and balanced way. We have introduced numerous changes which have improved employment rights, in particular:

- Re-establishing the Joint Labour Committees on a sound constitutional basis
- Putting temporary agency workers on an equal footing with permanent workers
- Enacting laws on collective bargaining
- Introducing a scheme to protect migrant workers in the fishing industry

**Employment Rights Act:** Following the merger of the Employment Rights and Industrial Relations bodies into the Workplace Relations Commission, the next step is to enact an Employment Rights Act which will consolidate all primary and secondary legislation dealing with employment rights into a single act. This will improve compliance and make it easier for both employees and employers to understand their respective rights and obligations and also reduce the need for expensive legal advice.

**Public Service Disputes:** Fine Gael will remove all individual public sector industrial relations disputes from the Civil Service Conciliation and Arbitration scheme. Such disputes will in future be heard by an Adjudication Officer of the Workplace Relations Commission and on appeal to the Labour Court. This will bring an increased level of transparency to industrial relations disputes within the civil service, with all Labour Court decisions being published.

**University of Limerick (UL) Report on Zero Hour Contracts:** Fine Gael will consider the UL Report on Zero Hour Contracts. We will respond to the proposals put forward in a balanced way, taking into account the views that were expressed in the public consultation which has been undertaken.

## CONSUMER RIGHTS

Fine Gael will enact a Consumer Rights Bill which will be the most far-reaching reform of Consumer Protection for decades. This Bill will include a ban on expiry dates for gift cards and a right, for the first time, to have a substandard service remedied or refunded.

# 18. Justice, Crime and Law Reform

Fine Gael's priority is protecting our citizens by reducing crime through significant investment in An Garda Síochána, the creation of a more efficient legal system and a tough sentencing approach to offenders.

Fine Gael will continue to strengthen and update Ireland's laws to tackle new and emerging crime trends. We will also continue to work with Garda management and the Policing Authority to implement reforms that will provide greater confidence, protection, transparency and efficiency to crime reduction, detection and prosecution, across our country.

## AN GARDA SÍOCHÁNA

Fine Gael is committed to the delivery of an effective, visible and responsive policing service, to prevent and pursue crime and to protect our communities, both rural and urban. We ended the moratorium on Garda recruitment, reopened the Garda College in Templemore to new recruits and have invested over €34m in 1,300 new Garda vehicles since 2012.

**Recruiting More Gardaí:** Fine Gael is committed to the recruitment of 600 new Garda recruits per annum. This will bring Garda numbers to approximately 14,000 by 2021, an increase of approximately 1,500 after retirements are taken into account. This additional recruitment will allow for more Gardaí to be appointed to detective roles to help increase crime detection, to tackle serious crime, including burglaries and gangland crime; and to protect our State.

**Civilianisation:** Following recommendations from the Garda Inspectorate, Fine Gael will fund the recruitment of at least 300 more civilian staff to non-frontline administrative and analyst positions. These reforms will free up 300 sworn Gardaí for frontline policing in the community.

**Garda Vehicles:** Fine Gael will invest €46m, as part of the recently announced Capital Plan, in approximately 1,700 new vehicles, including patrol cars and high-powered vehicles, to ensure Gardaí are visible and responsive and to ensure enforcement of the Road Traffic laws. We will also invest in more mountain bikes so Gardaí can be visible and mobile in urban areas.

**Doubling the Garda Reserve:** We will double the number of Reserves to 2,200 and we will review the deployment and tasks assigned to Reserves to better support the provision of visible frontline policing.

**Tackling Gangland Crime:** Fine Gael will not tolerate gangland crime. A dedicated new Armed Support Unit for Dublin will be established, comprising 55 Gardaí. This new unit will operate in addition to the Emergency Response Unit (ERU). The new unit will build on interim armed response measures currently being rolled-out by the ERU and other units. We will ensure sufficient resources (including staffing, overtime and high-powered vehicles) are provided



We ended the moratorium on Garda recruitment, reopened the Garda College in Templemore to new recruits and have invested over €34m in 1,300 new Garda vehicles since 2012.

to support the work of the both the Garda Armed Response Units and the new Garda Drugs and Organised Bureau, which was established in 2015.

**Technology for 21st Century Policing:** We have, in the Capital Plan, committed to the most comprehensive upgrade ever of Garda technology and ICT systems. This will ensure improved response times, enhanced management of criminal investigations, and less paperwork so Gardaí can spend more time on frontline community policing. This will facilitate the integration of Garda, Court and Driver Licensing IT systems on road traffic offences and support investment in CCTV along the road network and in urban centres.

**Modernising Garda Stations:** We are committed to ensuring Gardaí have fit-for-purpose facilities nationwide. As part of this, we have committed funding to refurbish or develop 32 locations nationwide.

**Garda Oversight and Reform:** Fine Gael fully supports the new Policing Authority as the new public oversight body for policing in Ireland. The Garda Inspectorate's in-depth report is far reaching, and will involve a restructuring of An Garda Síochána, as it faces changing criminal activities and trends into the future. Building on the report's recommendations, we will work with Garda management, the Policing Authority, and staff representative bodies to implement agreed reforms in the areas of civilianisation and in rostering and structure.

**Protecting Gardaí, Prison Staff and Frontline Emergency Workers:** We will strengthen the law and implement ongoing measures to protect Gardaí, prison staff and frontline emergency workers from injury, including from the ramming of vehicles.

**Working with Communities, Businesses and Farmers:** We will support the establishment of Garda Business Fora in urban centres to allow Gardaí and businesses to work together to improve public safety, ensure a safe night-time economy and respond to crimes against businesses, such as shoplifting. We will ensure the laws and resources are in place to support Gardaí to protect agricultural communities and to tackle rural crime, such as the theft of farm machinery and livestock.

## TACKLING RURAL CRIME

**Patrolling Rural Communities:** Fine Gael has committed €46m for approximately 1,700 new Garda vehicles in the Capital Plan and we will ensure these new vehicles are allocated to provide effective, mobile and visible policing of rural communities. Having ended the moratorium on Garda recruitment, made our commitment to 600 Garda recruits per year and plans for Garda reform, we will ensure that dedicated Community Teams are operating in all areas of the State, including rural communities.

**Tackling Criminal Gangs:** We will provide Gardaí with the resources necessary to tackle mobile criminal gangs operating in rural communities. We will continue to ensure adequate overtime is available for special operations to tackle criminal gangs. We will also complete a review of effectiveness of Garda CCTV with a view to investing in effective systems that are proven to help in tackling crime including, where appropriate, at motorway junctions.

**Extending Text Alert and Neighbourhood Watch:** We have doubled funding for community crime prevention. We will continue to work with community groups to extend Text Alert and Neighbourhood Watch schemes in rural communities.

## SECURING THE STATE

The preservation of security and peace on this island is a core priority. We will continue to support An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces and to cooperate internationally to respond to all threats of extremism and we will support all efforts to crack down on paramilitary and dissident activity. We will increase the capacity of the Army Ranger Wing and of special operation forces, to assist in meeting emerging challenges in all environments.

**Security Review:** While Ireland's current capacity to respond to security challenges is robust, the international security environment is rapidly changing. Fine Gael is committed to completing within 12 months a core structural review of decision-making arrangements across the common areas of security and defence. This will be led by the Department of An

Taoiseach with input from the Department of Justice, who have lead responsibility in this area, together with the Department of Defence and other relevant departments.

**Disrupting Cross-Border Crime:** We will support both An Garda Síochána and the planned new Joint Agency Task Force to implement co-coordinated frontline interagency operations aimed at disrupting cross-border organised crime and fuel and tobacco smuggling. We will also seek to disrupt environmental crime and mobile organised crime gangs and improve cross-border assets recovery. Fine Gael will continue to support all efforts to crack down on paramilitary and dissident activity.

**Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB):** We will ensure that adequate resources are provided to support the work of CAB in tackling money laundering and to target the proceeds of crime.

**Information Sharing:** We will implement the Schengen II information-sharing IT system, in order to enhance the policing of entry points to the State, and to support Gardaí in detecting and preventing suspected, dangerous and wanted criminals or prospective terrorists from entering the country.

## AN ACCESSIBLE AND EFFICIENT LEGAL SYSTEM

Fine Gael has implemented comprehensive reforms to the Courts system and regulation of the legal professions, including a new Court of Appeal and reformed legal services to reduce delays in court proceedings. These reforms will support equality of access to justice for all. We will continue our reforming agenda in this regard as we place victims and our wider society at the heart of the justice system.

**Prioritising Victims:** We will strengthen the rights of victims of crime and their families, through implementation of the EU Victims Directive and provide for a right of access for victims to information and protection. We will continue to develop victim support services, including the Garda Victim Support Offices, and enhance support services in the Courts system.

**An Effective Courts System:** Fine Gael will reduce excessive delays to trials and court proceedings

by introducing new measures, including pre-trial hearings. The Department of Justice will commission an annual study on court efficiency and court sitting times, with international benchmarks. We will publish its first report by March 2017. We will also instigate a full review of the rules for disclosure and evidence. We will also introduce court reforms to more sensitively facilitate children giving evidence.

**A Competitive Legal Services Industry:** We will ensure that the public and business see the benefits of recent reform. In order to achieve this, a number of steps will be taken. For instance, the new Office of the Legal Costs Adjudicator will make their determinations public and Fine Gael will continue to drive measures to reduce legal fees. We will also:

- Resource the Legal Services Regulatory Authority and the new single Disciplinary Tribunal for solicitors and barristers to provide independent and effective oversight of the legal profession
- Deliver an effective independent public complaints procedure that will be backed up by a legal practitioners' disciplinary tribunal to deal with solicitors and barristers
- Promote the rollout of new business models for legal practitioners and support the future establishment of new multi-disciplinary practices
- Support the development of a specialist conveyancing profession, with appropriate regulations and standards

These reforms will allow us pursue opportunities to maximise the international economic potential of Ireland's legal services and arbitration services.

**Tackling Insurance Costs:** We will task the Departments of Justice and of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation with reviewing the framework for injury claims, and the effectiveness of the Injuries Board, with the ambition of discouraging fraudulent claims and lowering premiums for law-abiding motorists.

**Establishing a New Family Court:** We will establish a dedicated Family Courts system within the District, Circuit and High Courts, and develop a new state-of-the-art Family and Children's Court complex in Dublin.

**Promoting Mediation:** We will enact a new Mediation Bill and introduce new models of non-adversarial mediation.

**Safeguarding Intellectual Property (IP) and Patents**

**Rights:** We will provide improved and cost-efficient access for SMEs and individuals to the Courts in cases of IP disputes, including holding a referendum on Ireland's participation in the Universal Patent Court.

**Reforming the Coroner System:** We will enact legislation to update the operation of Ireland's coroner system.

**Standards in Justice:** We will establish the planned Judicial Council. We will review Inspectorate and Ombudsman arrangements across the justice and detention systems, to ensure effectiveness in the handling of complaints and compliance with national and international standards.

**SENTENCING AND REPEAT OFFENDING**

Communities and victims must be confident that crimes against them will be prosecuted and appropriate sentences handed out. Fine Gael has been tough on repeat offenders and will continue to focus on tough penalties for reoffending, as well as on initiatives to reduce reoffending. In particular, we are committed to engaging with young offenders with alternative life choices than progression to career criminality. By adopting a differentiated approach to sentencing we can reduce repeat offending and reduce crime overall.

**Tougher Sentences for Serious and Repeat Offenders:** We introduced tougher sentences to keep repeat burglars off the streets. Our next step to crack down on crime is to introduce legislation to widen the range of serious crime categories for repeat offenders who can receive these tougher sentences. We will also resource the Courts, particularly the Circuit Court, to deal with increased non-summary prosecutions of serious crimes.

**Targeting Young Repeat Offenders:** Fine Gael will introduce a targeted new initiative, involving Gardaí, Tusla and other agencies, to more effectively deal with those prolific youth offenders who are responsible for a large proportion of youth crime and for whom traditional Youth Diversion has not worked.

**Strengthening Bail Laws:** Fine Gael will enact new legislation to provide stricter bail terms for repeat serious offenders, to strengthen Garda powers to

deal with breaches of bail, and to increase the use of curfews.

**Electronic Tagging:** Fine Gael will introduce electronic tagging of those on bail, where requested by Gardaí, to reduce the risk of reoffending.

**Ending Automatic Remission:** We will introduce new systems of earned remission and make increased use of community return, including a requirement for participation in supervised community service and provision for immediate re-committal to prison for reoffending. We will place the Parole Board on a statutory, independent footing.

**Community Sanctions for Minor Offences:** We will increase the use of supervised community sanctions for non-violent and minor offences, including the use of part-suspended or deferred sentences which ensure there is a forfeit penalty of imprisonment for reoffending.

**Supervising Prolific Offenders Post-Release:** Fine Gael is committed to strengthening the supervision of prolific repeat offenders after they have served their prison sentence, to reduce the risk of reoffending.

**Restorative Justice and Community Intervention:** Fine Gael will introduce a new Community Justice Intervention scheme to deal with persistent, low-level adult offenders, to divert them from the Courts system, and to more effectively address their underlying offending behaviours, such as addiction issues. This initiative will be piloted in Dublin City Centre, with a view to tackling persistent, low-level public order offending.

**LEGISLATIVE REFORM**

Since 2011, we have published and enacted 130 pieces of reforming legislation. We will continue to ensure that legislation is updated and amended to reflect our changing society.

**Domestic and Sexual Violence:** Fine Gael has taken decisive action to tackle domestic and sexual violence. We will fully implement the Istanbul Convention on tackling Domestic Violence and the commitments contained in the recently published Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence. We will streamline the governance, funding and implementation of all polices and services on

domestic violence to ensure a single, coordinated approach. We will enact the new Sexual Offences Bill, including improving protections from online grooming and exploitation. We will also enact legislation to strengthen the post-release supervision of sex offenders and to provide for disclosure by Gardaí of details on sex offenders where they believe public safety concerns exist.

**Updating our Laws:** We will update Ireland's laws to tackle new and emerging trends, in areas such as gambling, gaming, corruption, white-collar crime and with regard to the proceeds of crime. We will enact legislation to provide an independent and effective licensing system for handguns.

**Charities:** Fine Gael recognises the need for a thriving and well-regulated charity sector. We will ensure that the recently established Charities Regulator is fully resourced, including to carry out all of its statutory compliance and investigation functions.

**Assisted Decision Making:** We will fully implement arrangements, introduced by Fine Gael, in the Assisted Decision-Making Act, including advanced healthcare directives and the establishment of a Decision Support Service to replace the Wards of Court Office and manage capacity matters.

## A BALANCED MIGRATION POLICY

Fine Gael will continue to pursue a balanced migration policy that supports our economy and meets our international and humanitarian obligations, whilst also taking a tough approach to tackling illegal migration.

**Immigration Bill:** We will introduce a comprehensive Immigration and Residency Reform Bill, aimed at modernising Ireland's visa and residency systems.

**Refugee Protection:** We will continue to offer safe haven for refugees under EU and UN resettlement and relocation programmes, while promoting the integration of refugees in our communities.

**Direct Provision:** We will reform the Direct Provision system, with particular focus on families and children.

**Abuse of Immigration System:** We will get tougher on abuses of our migration system by ensuring implementation of the new enforcement and deportation provisions in the recently enacted International Protection Act. In implementing EU regulations, we will ensure a stringent and effective approach to speedily refusing bogus applications and facilitating removal from the State. We will also increase cooperation with the UK to crack down on the increasing numbers of bogus asylum seekers who are applying for unmerited asylum status in Ireland solely because their UK visa has expired.

# 19. Local Government and Communities

During a first term of government, Fine Gael implemented a number of radical reforms across local government, which will have significant long-term benefits. During a second term, we will ensure that local government is more accountable than ever before.

**Reform of County Councils:** We implemented the most significant reform of local government in over 100 years, replacing ineffective structures with more autonomous county councils and boosting councillors' responsibilities. In a second term, we will build on these structural reforms.

One of the most important elements of these reforms was the enhanced economic mandate of county councils and their councillors. Fine Gael will encourage county councils to play a significant role in the Regional Action Plan for Jobs and ensure that economic recovery is felt inside every door of their county.

**Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs):** Enterprise Ireland (EI) will support the LEO network to develop their own capacity and their range of policy tools, to grow their base of start-ups and small businesses. It will encourage greater scope for local innovation and the build-out of a supporting enterprise network in every county. We want to see Ireland become a European leader in the number of start-ups and in their survival and growth – facilitated by better mentoring, funding models, accelerators and business space. To this end we will ensure that the standard of service delivered is consistent across the country and that any SME or prospective SME that visits its LEO will receive high-

quality mentoring, support and seamless access to the wider range of Enterprise Ireland supports for high-potential enterprises.

**Empowering Councillors:** We will focus on empowering local councillors and increasing transparency to facilitate better engagement with the citizen, and greater accountability. This includes, for example, local councillors being given, since January 1st 2015, the power to vary the basic Local Property Tax (LPT) rate on residential properties in their administrative area by up to 15%.

**Benchmarking Performance:** To ensure Councils are performing for their citizens, they will be benchmarked against key performance indicators by the recently established National Oversight and Audit Commission. This Commission will produce performance reports to rate the level of service provision by Councils, their appropriateness, and whether targets have been met. Councils will also have their performance assessed relative to other Councils. Particular focus will be placed on social housing turnover.

**Ethics and Transparency:** Fine Gael is determined to ensure that the bad practices of the past will never be repeated. It is crucial that decision making at local and national level is transparent and professional. To this end, we will introduce a new code of ethics for local

government to build on the legislative frameworks that have been developed across the public service.

**Local Government Leadership and Accountability:**

Recent reforms of local government have boosted local autonomy and given local councillors and Councils more influence and responsibility over the economic development of their locality. As part of the next wave of local government reform the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government, having consulted widely with all relevant stakeholders, will prepare a report for Government by mid-2017 on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability.

**An Affordable Local Property Tax:** We will retain the LPT as a superior alternative to taxes on incomes and jobs and as a driver of local government accountability for service delivery. We will provide each citizen with a breakdown of how LPT revenues are spent, in order to increase transparency and allow people to scrutinise how exactly their money is spent. To reflect the strong recovery in house prices since the introduction of the LPT, and to better align the revaluations to the local government electoral cycle, we have deferred the next revaluation of house prices to 2019. We will increase local authority freedom to set the local rates. We will freeze equalisation contributions to the Local Government Fund at their current levels, allowing all Councils to retain 100% of any additional LPT receipts following the revaluation. We will increase the thresholds for the deferral of LPT for low-income and mortgage-distressed home owners.

**Libraries:** We will place libraries at the centre of reformed and strengthened local government in the community. Libraries have a crucial role in the economic, social and cultural development of their communities and they will be supported in their efforts to provide services in the most efficient, effective, and creative ways possible.

**LEADER:** We will work with local authorities and local action groups to ensure that LEADER funding delivers the maximum possible benefit for communities throughout the country. In rolling out our Future

Jobs Investment Fund we will seek to allow LEADER groups to bid for additional resources for projects that support rural economic development.

**Stronger Local Communities:** We also firmly believe that one of the most effective ways of ensuring rural renewal will be to empower communities to help themselves in regenerating the areas in which they live. To further this goal, we will support local community groups who wish to roll out programmes that would be of benefit to their local area.

We will establish a number of pilot projects to examine the feasibility of giving local communities more decision-making power through the introduction of Participatory Budgets. This innovation will allow local citizens, along with their elected county councillors, to have a greater say in how state money is spent in their community. We will also pilot a Community Right to Challenge which will give Civil Society Organisations the right to express an interest in taking over the running of a local authority service.

**Expert Group on Commercial Rates:** We will establish an Expert Group on Commercial Rates to report, by the end of 2016, on the feasibility of replacing the current system of local authority commercial rates with a Site Valuation tax, as recommended by the National Competitiveness Council, with the objective of ensuring fair and affordable rates on businesses and encouraging the development of unused or underdeveloped premises and land.

In parallel, we will press ahead with the implementation of the recently passed Valuation Act, which is designed to speed up the cumbersome revaluation process. Fine Gael will closely monitor its effectiveness and will introduce further measures if we do not see sufficient improvement.

We will also instruct all county councils to publish the breakdown of how all commercial rates collected are spent, facilitating comparisons across different local authorities. This provision will encourage efficient local authorities to adopt commercial rates policies that help sustain existing businesses and encourage new start-ups.

**Local Government Funding Review:** As the economy continues to recover, we want to provide long-term stability and certainty for the funding of local government services. With this aim in mind, we will complete a review of local government funding, by March 2017, with a view to reinforcing local government autonomy, accountability and efficiency.

**Social Innovation Fund:** Fine Gael believes that social innovation has an important role to play in shaping the future of Ireland; to shape Ireland as a country that is not only economically prosperous but a more inclusive and fairer society in which to live. Due to the winding down of major philanthropic organisations, such as Atlantic Philanthropies and One Foundation. A potential gap has opened up in the funding of social projects. To close this gap, Fine Gael propose to drive social innovation policy in the Department of the Taoiseach and establish Social Innovation Fund Ireland with a view to raising a minimum of €50 million to provide growth capital to Ireland's best

social innovations. This money will be raised through philanthropy, along with a previously announced commitment of €5 million matched by philanthropists, and will strengthen and foster social innovation.

**Philanthropy:** Fine Gael will support the crucial role of philanthropy in the social and voluntary sector and will develop a supporting infrastructure to facilitate its growth, including new initiatives.

**No Fry Zone:** The 2013 guidelines for the development of local area plans state that a local area plan can seek to reduce exposure of children to the promotion of foods that are high in fat, salt or sugar through the careful consideration of the appropriateness and/ or location of fast food outlets in the vicinity of schools and parks. So far there has been little adherence to these guidelines. In a second term Fine Gael will examine proposals and international evidence in how to better encourage use of this health promotion measure.

## 20. Northern Ireland, European and Foreign Affairs

### THE PEACE PROCESS

From the Sunningdale Agreement to the Anglo-Irish Agreement to the Stormont House Agreement to the Fresh Start Agreement, Fine Gael has a strong record of working to achieve a peaceful and prosperous future for the people of this island, north and south.

**Agreement Implementation:** Fine Gael will actively fulfil the Irish Government's mandate as a co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement and, building on the substantial progress already made, will honour commitments under subsequent agreements including the 2014 Stormont House and the 2015 Fresh Start Agreement, which together provide a new political, social and economic framework for Northern Ireland.

We will continue to work with the British Government and the US Administration to support the Executive Parties in Northern Ireland in the implementation of their commitments under these Agreements.

**Addressing the Needs of Victims and Survivors:** Maintaining the needs of the victims and their survivors at the core of our approach, we will build on the progress made in recent talks to establish the new institutional framework on the past, as agreed under the Stormont House Agreement.

We will actively pursue the implementation of the All-Party Dáil motions of 2008 and 2011 relating to the 1974 Dublin and Monaghan bombing atrocities.

We will continue to support victims' groups and to promote reconciliation among communities on both sides of the border, which were particularly affected by conflict, through the Government's Reconciliation

Fund and through ministerial engagement with representatives of different community traditions.

**Outstanding Commitments:** We will support efforts to implement the unfulfilled commitments under previous Agreements, including the establishment of a North-South Consultative Forum; the establishment of a public inquiry into the murder of Pat Finucane; and the promulgation of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland.

**Ireland-UK Relations:** Building on the successful state visits of 2011 and 2014, we will continue to enhance Ireland's relationship with the United Kingdom, including under the Good Friday Agreement, through the British-Irish Council and the annual summits between the Taoiseach and British Prime Minister. We will strengthen cooperation with all devolved administrations.

### NORTH SOUTH COOPERATION

North South cooperation has strengthened significantly in recent years. Fine Gael is committed to building on this momentum for the benefit of people on both sides of the border.

**Economic Cooperation:** Fine Gael pioneered trade missions jointly led by Jobs ministers north and south. We will increase the number of such trade missions to create new job opportunities for people on both sides of the border.

We will deliver on the Irish Government commitments made in the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements which will aim to boost economic growth in the North West through the North West

Gateway initiative, the upgrading of the A5 road and the further development of the Ulster Canal. We will continue to develop further cross-border Greenways and Blueways.

**Narrow Water Bridge:** Working with the Northern Ireland Executive, we will undertake a review of the Narrow Water Bridge project to identify options for future development.

**Atlantic Youth Trust Initiative:** We will work with the Northern Ireland Executive to agree a funding plan for the Atlantic Youth Trust initiative, which involves a new sail training vessel to facilitate youth development, mentoring and training on an all-island basis.

**North South Ministerial Council:** We will continue to advance North South cooperation, particularly through cross-border bodies and the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and harness the potential of the Stormont House Agreement to develop new areas of cooperation in areas such as trade, health, tourism, sport and security.

**EU Supports:** We will work with the Northern Ireland Executive to agree and implement cross-border projects that can benefit from EU funding through the INTERREG and PEACE programmes.

## SECURITY AND CRIME PREVENTION

The preservation of peace on this island is a core priority and is linked to maintaining a strong law and order focus as terrorist groups frequently profit from involvement in organised crime.

**Tackling Terrorism:** We will ensure that the Gardaí are adequately resourced and that all necessary cross-border cooperation takes place at ministerial, institutional, agency and policing levels to thwart the dissident terrorists who seek to destroy the peace process and the reconciliation agenda which is supported by the overwhelming majority of people on this island.

**Tackling Cross-Border Crime:** In the Fresh Start Agreement we committed to establishing a Joint Agency Task Force to tackle cross-jurisdictional

organised crime, which would build on current joint efforts focusing on tobacco smuggling and fuel laundering. Conscious of the serious economic, health and environmental consequences of cross-border crime, this Task Force, involving a new strategic and operational approach, will significantly enhance efforts to tackle the scourge of cross-border crime.

## IRELAND IN EUROPE

Since Fine Gael's election to government, Ireland has returned to the heart of Europe, moving from a bailout situation to regaining our status as a committed and active member of the European Union. This has been achieved through the dogged efforts of the Government, its officials and its diplomats.

**Addressing External Threats:** Fine Gael will work through the European Council and the Foreign Affairs Council to ensure that Ireland plays its part in resolving the many external conflicts facing the European Union today.

**Effective Institutions:** We will work with like-minded Member States to ensure that EU institutions more effectively address the concerns of Member States and work for and in the name of all the people they represent.

**UK Membership:** Fine Gael believes that UK membership of the EU is beneficial for Ireland, the UK and the EU. We will advocate for continued UK membership of the EU and play a positive role in negotiations and debates.

**The European People's Party (EPP):** The EPP is the largest and most influential political bloc in the EU. Fine Gael will continue to play a very active role in shaping EPP policy.

**Taxation:** At EU level, we will oppose any attempt to dilute the unanimity requirement for tax harmonisation.

**EU Competitiveness and Growth:** Ireland's national economy is recovering but we also want to see further improvement in the economic performance of the wider euro area and EU economies. We will work with like-minded countries to ensure that the

EU's regulatory regime is pro-jobs and pro-growth. As part of this, we will continue to focus on the need to achieve a deeper Single Market for goods and services in all key areas, through measures such as the implementation of the Digital Single Market and the Action Plan on Capital Markets Union.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MULTILATERAL ENGAGEMENT

Our own experiences of conflict on this island give us a unique perspective on conflict resolution, and in particular on the value of dialogue and patient, quiet diplomacy. While a small country, Ireland has played an energetic and leading role in a range of international organisations including the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe (COE) and the United Nations (UN).

**Security and Defence Policy:** Our Security and Defence Policy will be guided by the following key principles:

- The commitment to adhere to the fundamental principles of the UN
- The commitment to the pursuit of universal nuclear and biological disarmament, and a promise never to use either type of weapon
- The commitment to providing peacekeeping and peacemaking operations
- The commitment to respect the right of other EU Member States to enter other military alliances, or to be neutral, as they choose
- The right of Ireland to opt in and opt out of aspects of a mutual defence and security system on a case-by-case basis

**Protecting Women and Girls:** Recognising that women and girls are disproportionately affected by violent conflict, we will ensure the timely implementation of Ireland's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and support international efforts to protect women and girls in conflict zones.

**Conflict Resolution:** We will continue to play an active role at the European Union Foreign Affairs Council, the OSCE and through the UN, in seeking diplomatic

resolutions to crises and conflict, with particular reference to Syria, Iraq, Libya, and the Ukraine.

We will continue to play a role in advancing a stronger role for the EU in the Middle East Peace Process, having regard to the stalled nature of the process at present, and honour our commitment to recognise the State of Palestine as part of a lasting settlement of the conflict.

**Addressing External Threats:** Radicalisation and terrorism pose a threat to our safety and our value system. We will support EU and UN efforts to tackle radicalisation outside the EU's borders by measures such as working with third countries to stop the advance of brutal terrorists.

**Promoting Fundamental Rights:** We will promote fundamental rights, the rule of law and religious freedom and support efforts by the EU and UN to stop the persecution of ethnic and religious minorities. We will continue to protect and promote human rights through multilateral fora and to support the work of Human Rights Defenders.

**Active UN Membership:** Our active membership of the UN is an important aspect of our foreign policy. Fine Gael will campaign for Ireland's election to a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the 2021-2022 term. We will advocate for UN Security Council reform to ensure greater regional balance in membership.

**Non-Proliferation and Disarmament:** Continuing Ireland's proud legacy, we will ensure Ireland continues to play a leading role in nuclear non-proliferation and arms control through the UN and OSCE.

## TRADE

Ireland's strong export performance in recent years has been key to our growing economic recovery.

**Trade Missions:** Fine Gael will continue to deliver record numbers of minister-led trade missions.

**New Cross-Sectoral Trade Strategies:** Fine Gael will develop a new cross-sectoral, whole-of-government Asia-Pacific Strategy, recognising the strengthening relationship between Ireland and many Asia-Pacific countries.

We will develop a new cross-sectoral, whole-of-government Strategy for the Americas, taking account of Ireland's strong links to countries right across the American continent and the opportunities such links create.

**Continuing Reform and Modernisation:** We will evaluate the diplomatic mission network to ensure that its breadth and depth is consistent with Ireland's strategic priorities, with a view to expansion in line with the proposed strategies for Asia-Pacific and the Americas.

## OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE (ODA) AND HUMANITARIAN AID

In the face of difficult economic challenges, Fine Gael has remained strongly committed to our ODA programme, stabilising funding and recognising the crucial importance of Ireland's ODA and humanitarian response programmes. ODA was increased by 7% in Budget 2016.

**NGO Partnerships:** We will continue to closely partner with international and Irish NGOs to ensure that Irish aid funding effectively reaches those in need and has the flexibility to deal with emergencies whilst prioritising long-term outcomes from development programmes in line with the Government's 2013 international development policy, One World, One Future.

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** Ireland, along with Kenya, co-facilitated agreement of the new SDGs at the UN. Fine Gael will work to implement the SDGs and to promote their implementation around the world.

**Funding:** We will continue to make progress towards achieving the UN target of 0.7% of gross national product for ODA, as resources allow.

**Oversight:** We will ensure robust oversight of Ireland's ODA budget.

## PASSPORT SECURITY

The Irish Passport booklet is among the most secure in the world. We recognise that continued investment in new technology is essential to protect its integrity. We will continue the innovation agenda that led to the introduction of the Passport Card in 2015.

**New Technology:** Building on the progress already made, we will introduce facial recognition software to enhance passport security.

**Closer Cooperation:** To enhance the cooperative arrangements already in place, we will appoint a Garda fraud expert to the Passport Office.

## 21. Political Reform

Fine Gael in government has introduced a series of reforms to both open up and modernise Irish politics. We effectively abolished corporate and political donations, enacted gender quotas, restored the Freedom of Information Act and introduced new whistleblowing and lobbying legislation.

We have reformed local government, merged county councils and reduced the number of local councillors. We are reducing the number of TDs in this election and in the next Dáil the Government will no longer have a near monopoly of Oireachtas Committee Chairs and the next Ceann Comhairle will be elected by secret ballot.

We also devolved new powers to local councils, opened up the law-making process to citizens by involving them in a new Pre-Legislative Stage and established an independent Fiscal Advisory Council to analyse budgetary and financial matters.

We recognise, however, that more needs to be done to create a more effective political system, with greater openness, improved accountability and delivery, and more effective public participation. Underpinning our political reform programme will be a commitment to ensure that the mistakes of the past are never repeated to ensure we keep the recovery going.

### A MORE EFFECTIVE OIREACHTAS

**Parliamentary Investigation Unit:** Fine Gael will provide the Oireachtas with the supports necessary to establish a permanent Parliamentary Investigation Unit. This Unit, which will be independent of Government, will operate as part of the Oireachtas and will be headed by an Office of the Parliamentary Investigator. A Parliamentary Investigations Unit was

one of the recommendations of the Banking Inquiry; however, we will go further than this.

This Unit will carry out preliminary investigations in advance of the Oireachtas establishing any Commission of Inquiry or as part of the investigation phase of any Oireachtas Committee of Inquiry. The Houses of the Oireachtas will also be in a position to refer any matter to the Parliamentary Investigation Unit. The Unit will then carry out an initial feasibility study on the matter and report to the Oireachtas, who may request a more extensive report or refer the matter to an Oireachtas Committee.

**The Office of the Ceann Comhairle:** In government we introduced a new system under which the next Ceann Comhairle will be selected by secret ballot. After the election any Fine Gael TD who wishes will be free to seek nominations for the Office and all Fine Gael TDs will have a free vote to select the next Ceann Comhairle by secret ballot.

We will hold a referendum to give the Office of the Ceann Comhairle constitutional standing as recommended by the Constitutional Convention.

**Strengthening Oireachtas Committees:** The work of Oireachtas Committees will be further opened up, and made more strategic and effective. All government ministers will be asked to appear before their relevant Oireachtas Committee to update them on a quarterly basis. The chairs of Oireachtas Committees will be

allocated on a proportional basis using the D'Hondt system in order to ensure fairness and greater accountability of the Executive to Parliament. In line with the recommendations of the Constitutional Convention we will give Oireachtas Committees constitutional standing. Oireachtas Committees, rather than government ministers, will review the functioning of an Act a year after its enactment under a restructured system of Post-Legislative Scrutiny.

In addition to these reforms we will also:

- Restructure the Oireachtas Committee system to create stronger committees, including an Oireachtas Budget and Finance Committee
- Reduce the size of Oireachtas Committees so they have fewer members
- Seek to assign each TD to only one Oireachtas Committee so they can give due attention to that Committee and its business
- Establish a Dáil Committee of Selection, like that which exists in the Seanad, with the parties coming together to agree on this selection process
- Establish panels of relevant external experts to advise and work with each Committee

#### **Taoiseach's Engagement with Committee Chairs:**

In the next Dáil the Taoiseach will appear before the Working Group of Committee Chairpersons twice a year to discuss matters of public policy. This will further enhance the accountability of the Office of the Taoiseach to the Oireachtas, reinforcing Parliament's power to hold the Government to account.

#### **Committee Engagement with the Dáil and the Seanad:**

After a Committee Report is published, time will be allocated in the Dáil for the Committee Chair and members to outline the purpose of the report. More reports will be debated in the Dáil and Seanad. Chairs/Vice Chairs of Oireachtas Committees will be allowed to appear before the Seanad (as ministers do) to participate in debates on Committee Reports.

**Application of the Party Whip:** The use of the whip is ultimately a matter for each individual party. Fine Gael will work on an all-party basis to relax its use. Fine Gael supports the removal of the whip, on an all-party

basis, in committees, except on budget matters. No whip will be applied in the election of the next Ceannt Comhairle, which will be a secret ballot.

**Pre-Legislative Scrutiny:** In order to embed the new pre-legislative scrutiny process, new bills will commence in Oireachtas Committees. Ministers will be required to seek the approval of the Working Group of Committee Chairpersons to bypass this pre-legislative stage.

**Programming of Government Bills:** Fine Gael will introduce a requirement for the Oireachtas to be provided with new timelines for the passage of legislation through the Oireachtas, to avoid the use of the guillotine, where possible. When a Bill is taken at Second Stage in the Dáil or Seanad, a detailed programme setting out, in broad terms, a timetable for the Committee and Report Stages of the Bill in that House must be presented. Any future proposal to guillotine a debate on any aspect of a Bill will automatically trigger a Dáil vote.

**Question Time in the Dáil:** The way the Government is held to account in the Dáil will be transformed and strengthened and backbench TDs will be given a greater role in the process. Specific measures that will be taken will include the following:

- Leaders' Questions will be formally extended to half an hour each day.
- Ministers' Questions will be extended to 90 minutes a day (from 75 minutes), with a set 30 minutes for priority questions from Opposition Spokespeople and 60 minutes for questions from backbench TDs, selected by draw. TDs will continue to be required to be present in the Chamber to have their question taken.
- Taoiseach's Questions will be overhauled to make it more relevant and topical by giving party leaders' priority questions and not allowing questions become out of date
- The Order of Business will be restructured to make it more responsive to the work of the Dáil, involve government ministers and allow questions on legislation be taken by ministers from the Department concerned.

**Seanad Reform:** Fine Gael will ask its proposed Citizens Assembly to consider the merits of comprehensive reform of the Seanad. It will examine various reform proposals, including the Report of the Working Group into Seanad Reform and proposed legislation to give effect to the 1979 referendum on extending the Seanad electorate to all graduates.

## MORE INCLUSIVE POLITICS

**Automatic and Online Voter Registration:** Fine Gael will introduce automatic and new online voter registration for citizens once they reach 18.

**Electoral Commission:** Fine Gael in government will establish an Electoral Commission, taking into account the Oireachtas Committee's Report on their consultation process, published in January 2016. An Electoral Commission will oversee voter registration, promote voter education and seek to increase voter turnout. Such a Commission will also assume the role of Registrar of Political Parties, regulate political funding and election expenditure and allow the Referendum Commission to become a separate section within it. The Electoral Commission will be independent of Government and accountable directly to the Oireachtas.

**Increased Female Participation in Politics:** Fine Gael is committed to increasing female participation at local and national level and is committed to gender equality in politics. It was Fine Gael that introduced gender quota legislation and we have reached the 30% quota for Election 2016. To make our parliament a better working environment for all Oireachtas members with young families, Fine Gael will ask the Ceann Comhairle and the Oireachtas to consider the introduction of family friendly hours for the Dáil following a review of how other parliaments address this issue and a consultation process with all members as to how it would work in our parliament.

**A Digital Democracy Commission:** A Digital Democracy Commission will be established through the Oireachtas to examine how new technology can further open up politics and allow greater citizen participation in the political process.

## FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND NATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

**Independent Fiscal and Budget Office:** Fine Gael set up the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council (IFAC) in 2011 to serve as an independent fiscal watchdog after poor budgetary management led to the crash of 2008. IFAC has emerged as a credible independent institution, fulfilling its mandate and increasing transparency on fiscal matters.

We will build on IFAC's work to date by enhancing its role and giving it the powers and responsibilities of an Independent Budget Office, which will work directly with a new Oireachtas Budget and Finance Committee. In addition to fulfilling its current function, the new Independent Fiscal and Budget Office (IFBO) will be available to cost election manifestos and budget proposals for all political parties. This will go beyond the costing of individual proposals which is already done by the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform and look at the overall impact of a package of proposals. We will also mandate IFBO to put increased focus on long-term fiscal issues. Furthermore, IFBO will engage with members of the Oireachtas on important fiscal issues through presentations and written output. IFBO will have a strong statutory right to obtain information covering relevant public sector authorities as recommended for independent fiscal institutions by the OECD.

**A New Independent Competitiveness and Productivity Commission:** Building on the reforms of the National Competitiveness Council (NCC) introduced by the current government, and in response to the 2015 recommendations of the OECD, Fine Gael will transform the NCC into the Competitiveness and Productivity Commission of Ireland (CPCI). The Commission's remit will be, among other things, to:

- Advise the Taoiseach and Government on how to maintain competitiveness and develop productivity-enhancing programmes
- Contribute to a national productivity initiative which will underline the importance of supporting workers and employers to enhance productivity across the economy

- Independently assess, and comment publicly on, whether policy actions and initiatives are consistent with maintaining Ireland's competitiveness
- Provide a set of recommendations to Government, including a submission to the Action Plan for Jobs, which will be considered by Government within 6 weeks of submission
- Provide advice to Government on the competitiveness impacts of policy initiatives

## EMPOWERING CITIZENS AND DRIVING POLICY

**Citizens' Assembly:** Fine Gael is committed to establishing a Citizens' Assembly. Unlike the Constitutional Convention, the Assembly will be composed solely of randomly selected citizens and will be asked to undertake a detailed review of a limited number of key issues over an extended time period. These will include:

- Seanad Reform
- Climate Change
- The 8th Amendment of the Constitution

- A review of the power of Oireachtas Committees to conduct inquiries on foot of the recommendations of the Banking Inquiry and consider whether there should be a new Constitutional Referendum to strengthen these powers
- As part of the plans to mark the centenary of the 1916 rebellion, the Assembly will also be asked to examine how we should, as a republic, best respond to both the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population.

A range of specific propositions will be set before the Assembly by the Government for the former's consideration, while IFBO will be asked to provide the Assembly with the necessary technical expertise. All of the Assembly's proposals will be referred to the appropriate Oireachtas Committee for review, and then forwarded to Government for its consideration and response.

**Volunteering:** Fine Gael will publish a National Strategy for Volunteering, in order to encourage as much volunteerism at local level as possible.

**Policy Delivery:** Fine Gael will establish a Programme for Government Delivery Unit in each Department to ensure effective implementation of government commitments.

## 22. Older People

Fine Gael is committed to making our older years better years, and ensuring Ireland is a supportive country to grow old in. Over the next 30 years the number of people aged over 65 will double. Indeed, as we are living longer, the number of us living to be over 80 is set to quadruple. It makes it all the more important that we plan, design and deliver services appropriately, in order to keep people living independently in their homes. To do this, we will invest in and streamline services and supports so that older people have better quality services and better access to such services.

### OLDER YEARS, BETTER YEARS

Fine Gael has a plan to keep the recovery going in a way that will generate the resources to invest in and improve the living standards and quality of life of our older generation.

Budget 2016 provided targeted supports for older people, through increases in the weekly State pension, the Christmas bonus and the fuel allowance and provided additional funding for the Free Travel scheme, to ensure its sustainability.

**State Pension:** We will increase both the contributory and non-contributory State pensions by at least €25 per week by 2021 (a €5 increase every year).

**Living Alone Allowance:** We will increase the State pension for those who qualify for the living alone allowance by at least €30 per week by 2021 (a €6 increase every year).

**Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT):** We will increase the Group A tax-free thresholds (including all gifts and inheritances from parents to their children) to €500,000, from €280,000 at present. We will ensure that parents can continue to support – tax-free – their children through education.

**Significantly Reducing the Maximum Annual Cost of Medicines:** We will significantly reduce the level

of co-payment which families/individuals have to pay for medicines under the Drug Payment Scheme. Currently a family/individual has to pay a maximum of €1,728 per year and this will be reduced to €950, helping families/individuals with significant ongoing medical bills. Currently a family or individual with a medical card has to pay up to €25 a month in prescription charges, this cap will also be reduced to a maximum of €17.50 a month.

**Streamlining Access to Services:** Fine Gael will consolidate all means testing under a single national body so that people will only apply once for services or entitlements across all government agencies.

### ENHANCED PRIMARY CARE

As part of our Long Term Economic Plan to keep the recovery going we are committed to significantly increasing investment in primary care, which will include additional doctors, nurses, and therapists, keeping care in the community.

**Primary Care Centres and GP access:** We have committed funding for at least 80 additional primary care centres. To achieve our goal of providing more care in the community we must invest in more GP training places. We will increase the number of GP training places by 100 over the next five years to 259



**LET'S KEEP THE RECOVERY GOING**

Fine Gael is committed to making our older years better years, and ensuring Ireland is a supportive country to grow old in.

places annually. Subject to negotiations, we will fund GPs to expand to services like minor surgery and cardiac monitoring. We will ensure GPs have access to X-ray, ultrasound and other investigations for their patients.

**Chronic Disease Management:** We will expand chronic disease management in general practice, taking into account advice from the Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP). Over 63,000 patients have signed up for the diabetes cycle of care in general practice, which was initiated in 2015. In addition to diabetes, which is already covered, we will seek to cover chronic pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, heart failure and atrial fibrillation, so that patients can keep their care in their community, close to home.

**Multi-Disciplinary Teams:** To underpin the expansion of services we will increase the number of physiotherapists, occupational therapists, mental health professionals, public health and community nurses, advanced nurse practitioners, nurse/midwife specialists and social workers in our primary care centres.

**Dementia Care:** Fine Gael published the first ever National Dementia Strategy to plan for the future care needs of people, provide access to timely diagnosis, and increase awareness and care supports at local and national level for families. Fine Gael will fully implement this strategy.

**Community Pharmacists:** We will expand the role of community pharmacists, beyond dispensing prescriptions, to managing the health of their patients, within 2 years. This may include a minor ailments scheme, a new medicines and medication review service, vaccines, warfarin clinics, smoking cessation and chronic disease management. We will extend a limited authority to pharmacists to prescribe medicines.

## PROMOTING INDEPENDENT AND ACTIVE LIVING

Fine Gael is committed to ensuring that people continue to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible. In order to meet that goal, we

need to decisively shift care to the community and invest in home and community supports, thereby ensuring quality care for people in their older years.

**Services for Older People in the Community:** We will commit significant resources to older peoples' services over the next 5 years. This will include 2.2 million additional hours for home help, bringing it to 12.6 million hours annually, and additional home care packages, keeping older people in their homes.

**Uniformity of Home Care Services:** We know that home help and home care provision across the country ranges from excellent to irregular. Fine Gael will put a new structure in place that will provide a consistent, high-quality level of home care to those who need it.

**New Technologies for Community and Homecare:** Fine Gael will build on the success of the Health Innovation Hub by developing new technologies and solutions that help people remain independent in their home.

**Housing Adaptation Scheme:** Keeping people independent in their own home is a priority for Fine Gael and the Housing Adaptation grants provided to local authorities are essential to meeting this goal. Budget 2016 increased this scheme by 10% to €56m, which will see over 8,500 households benefit from the scheme. We will increase this scheme by a further 20% to €66m by 2021.

**Fair Deal:** We will fund additional beds for the Nursing Home Support Scheme to keep the Fair Deal scheme at approximately 4 weeks and ensure support for those unable to remain at home.

**New Residential Care Options:** We will mandate the Strategic Investment Fund to offer loan finance to provide stimulus to private nursing home investment and assisted living arrangements so that the needs and preferences of a more diverse older population can be met.

**Senior Alert Scheme:** The Senior Alert Scheme offers reassurance and support to older people. We will double the funding of this scheme to provide additional grants to the elderly. The operation of this scheme should be reviewed annually to ensure its effectiveness.

**Elder Abuse:** The last review of Irish legislation relating to elder abuse took place in 2009. Fine Gael will increase the awareness of this serious issue and will review legislative options again, given the increase in referrals and our ageing population. In 2014, there were 2,592 referrals made to the HSE Elder Abuse Service, with psychological and financial abuse the most frequently reported.

**Fuel Poverty:** Fine Gael will protect and maintain the Warmer Home Scheme to retrofit low-income housing for greater energy efficiency. We believe enhanced insulation of homes is the most effective way of keeping the elderly comfortable in their homes. We will produce a strategy to address energy poverty, with a specific focus on conservation, pricing and income support, with a targeted approach and a time frame for delivery. We will also target energy costs, with a view to pressurising the energy companies and the regulator to provide cheaper energy in the coming years in order to tackle fuel poverty.

**Health Insurance:** We will ensure the maintenance of a stable health insurance market which continues to monitor and introduce, where necessary, affordability measures. Successful measures to date include a reduction in the community rating levy, introduction of Lifetime Community Rating and a reduction in the Health Insurance Authority funding levy.

### CARERS

Family carers are the backbone of care provision in this country. Most of us will be carers – or cared for – at some point in our lives. And it is the family carer who will continue to play a key role in supporting family members to live independent lives.

**National Carer's Strategy:** Fine Gael published the first ever National Carers Strategy and is committed to implementing it in full.

**Income Support for Carers:** We will increase Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit by at least €20 per week by 2021 (a €4 increase every year).

**Care Plans:** We will ensure there is greater involvement of family carers in the preparation of care plans and provision of care, together with more accessible training and respite to facilitate full support.

### A STRONGER VOICE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

**Citizens' Assembly:** Over the last 5 years, several government strategies have been published and are being implemented, including the Positive Ageing Strategy, National Smart Ageing Strategy, National Dementia Strategy and National Carers Strategy. Each seeks to improve the lives of our elders and their families and support people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities. In an age when more and more people will be in retirement, we need to be aware of, and cater for, an increasingly diverse elderly population. Fine Gael will establish a Citizens' Assembly, which will, amongst other issues, discuss and plan the future needs into one integrated approach for implementation.

**Age Friendly Ireland and Older People's Councils:** Fine Gael is committed to the success of Age Friendly Ireland and its programmes. Fine Gael also supports the establishment of Older People's Councils in every local authority, which will include older people from the area and also local service providers.

**Active Retirement National Fund:** A new fund of €5m annually, to be administered by Pobal, will support community initiatives for retired and older people, led by retired and older people. People can choose to support their peers through home care support, courses, reducing social isolation and more active citizenship.

## 23. Public Sector Reform and Public Procurement

Since 2011, our public service reform agenda, as a central element of our recovery plan, focused on cost-cutting and eliminating waste, while protecting frontline services. While continuing to cut out waste, our next wave of public service reforms will, consistent with our Long Term Economic Plan, ensure that the resources generated by a growing economy and rising employment are used sensibly to deliver better services and outcomes for the public.

Our ambition is to create a public service that:

- Improves outcomes for citizens that are benchmarked against other countries
- Delivers measurable improvements in productivity each year, by embracing innovation, including the use of new technologies and work practices to deliver services
- Offers more opportunity for staff development and promotion

To achieve this, we will empower frontline service providers to make more decisions, encourage more collaboration between public service bodies, and between the public and private sectors, reward public service innovation and change, and allocate scarce resources using more competitive processes that shift budgets to successful programmes.

### A STRONG, STRATEGIC CENTRE OF GOVERNMENT THAT DRIVES NEW IDEAS AND INNOVATION

**Long Term Economic Planning Unit:** We will establish a Long Term Economic Planning Unit within the Department of An Taoiseach, encompassing the

current Action Plan for Jobs Monitoring Committee, to coordinate the work of all relevant departments (particularly the Departments of Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation) in managing the competitive process and making recommendations to Government on the allocation of the new €4bn Future Jobs Investment Fund.

To help inform this process, the Unit will coordinate a new, annual interaction between the Taoiseach and other ministers and the Irish Academy of Engineering on a range of key long-term policy challenges facing the country, including:

- Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- Energy policy and related environmental issues
- Planning and delivering national infrastructure priorities
- Technological solutions in the health sector
- Cost-effective transportation solutions – roads, rail, airport and harbours
- Communication infrastructure, including broadband and security issues

- Techno-economic aspects of the emerging “sharing economy” and other disruptive technologies

**Comprehensive Review of Expenditure:** The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will be mandated to complete a new Comprehensive Review of Expenditure, by September 2016, to underpin new 3-year departmental spending ceilings, for 2017, 2018 and 2019, to be published in Budget 2017, to allocate resources in line with the new Programme for Government.

**Competitive Funding:** The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will be mandated to reform the annual estimates process to drive the use of “competitive funding” across all departments in the budgetary process, thereby rewarding public service agencies and bodies that collaborate and innovate in designing and delivering solutions to complex social and economic problems.

**Better Regulation:** We will mandate the Cabinet Secretariat within the Department of An Taoiseach to act as a centre of expertise for, and enforce compliance with, the regulatory impact assessment procedures for all major regulatory and legislative proposals. To promote the better regulation agenda the Taoiseach will also host an annual meeting of economic regulators to discuss ways to promote greater efficiency in the regulated industries.

**Programme for Government Office:** We will strengthen the role of the Programme for Government office in the Department of An Taoiseach and give it the responsibility to:

- Oversee the delivery of the Programme for Government and keep the Cabinet informed on delivery of the Government’s key priorities
- Coordinate the work of new Programme for Government Delivery Units in each department to ensure effective implementation of government commitments and that departmental work plans reflect strategic priorities

- Publish annual reports on Programme for Government implementation
- Conduct and publish an annual National Risk Assessment
- Ensure that the budget preparation process takes account of, and reflects, strategic priorities of Government
- Ensure that the overall priorities of Government are reflected in departmental strategy statements and other strategic documents of Government, such as fiscal strategies and social policies

**Departments of Finance and of Public Expenditure and Reform:** The establishment by the current Government of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform played a pivotal role in Ireland emerging from the fiscal crisis by helping to drive efficiencies and value for money across Government. Another term of government is needed to finish the job. As the economic crisis abates, the Taoiseach will commission, by 2020 at the latest, an expert group to make recommendations on the future relationship between, and the roles of, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Finance.

**NewERA and Commercial Semi-States:** We will add the Dublin Airport Authority, the CIE companies, and the sea ports of national significance to the list of commercial semi-states under the NewERA portfolio. We will, subject to EU competition policy constraints, transfer shareholdings in all the commercial semi-states under the NewERA portfolio to either the Minister for Finance or the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. NewERA will provide both ministers with financial and commercial advisory services in relation to the activities of these commercial semi-states, including on the exercise of any ministerial consents required. This centralisation of the ownership functions will help address the conflicts that can arise from many ministers’ current responsibilities, as both shareholder of a commercial

semi-state and as a policy maker. Line ministers will remain responsible for policy matters in transport, water, energy, forestry etc.

NewERA will be asked to set out a new dividend policy for the commercial semi-states to increase overall dividend receipts. NewERA will also be mandated to prepare a new comprehensive 5-year strategy by March 2017 for the portfolio of commercial semi-states to ensure maximum coherence, cooperation and synergy in the delivery of renewable energy, broadband and infrastructure services. The cabinet handbook will be changed to require that every year when the annual report and financial statements of each semi-state are presented to cabinet, they will be accompanied by an analysis by NewERA of the financial statements and company strategy.

**eGovernment for the 21st Century:** Fine Gael will mandate the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to publish, by March 2017, an eGovernment strategy with the goal of moving Ireland into the Top 5 internationally within a decade. This strategy will emphasise an “Agile IT” approach to both system design and implementation, and partnerships with other countries who have relevant experience in the delivery of effective eGovernment.

We will set a deadline of end 2017, by which all significant government transactions with business will be available online. This will reduce the administrative burden for small Irish businesses.

**Data Analytics in the Public Sector:** We will ensure government departments and agencies meet their obligations to protect personal data that is entrusted to them by citizens. We will also expand the remit of the recently established Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service to include a centre of excellence in data analytics in order to provide skills and services across all government departments and agencies.

**Providing the Skills for a Digital Future:** As part of our investment programme, we have committed to upgrade school ICT and to install robust wireless networks in all schools under our Digital Strategy for Schools. This investment will provide the infrastructure to support ICT skills on the schools curricula and will encourage more computer coding clubs throughout national schools.

## PUBLIC SERVICE NUMBERS, PAY AND PENSIONS

An Additional 10,183 Frontline Public Servants: Fine Gael plans to hire an additional 10,183 doctors, nurses, teachers, Gardaí and other frontline professionals to address the needs of a growing and ageing population, comprising:

- 3224 Teachers
- 2,800 Nurses
- 600 HSE consultants, other doctors and dentists
- 1,000 Other health and social care professionals
- 1,800 Gardaí
- 217 Speech and language therapists
- 500 Social workers
- 42 NEPS psychologists

**Ongoing Public Service Recruitment:** After years of blanket recruitment freezes across the public service as a result of the economic crisis, we are committed to allowing public service bodies to begin new hiring programmes that bring new skills, energy and vitality into the public service.

**Public Sector Efficiency and Reform Plan:** To contain the growth of public service numbers at these levels, even as the economy and population grow, we will mandate the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to prepare a new overarching Public Sector Efficiency and Reform Plan by September 2016, comprising:

- A new shared services plan, to be prepared and implemented by the National Shared Services Office (NSSO), to extend shared services, on a mandatory basis, to all public service bodies in areas of Human Resources, Finance, Pension Administration, Payroll and ICT. We will legislate to put the NSSO on a statutory footing.
- A further reduction in duplication of activities across numerous public bodies through:
  - Consolidation of procurement under the Office of Government Procurement (OGP), which will be put on a statutory footing

- A rationalisation of the number of economic regulators, to be set out in a new White Paper on Economic Regulation to be published by 2017
- A further consolidation of all business licensing activity by public bodies – on a mandatory basis – under the Integrated Licensing Application System
- Consolidation of all means testing under a single national body
- Examining mechanisms by which responsibility for collecting commercial rates may be moved from local authorities to the Revenue Commissioners
- A new programme of external service provision where this offers demonstrable savings for the taxpayer, to be published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform by the end of 2017
- A reduction in the number of administrative grades across the civil service and other public service bodies, to be agreed by Government by the end of 2017
- Reducing the excessive bureaucracy in the relationship between public bodies and non-government organisations (NGOs), by coordinating all public funding for any NGO through one public body, building on the “Benefacts” partnership initiative

**Public Sector Pay:** As the economy recovers, it is right for public servants to seek gradual, sustainable pay recovery. Fine Gael will honour the terms of the Lansdowne Road Agreement.

**Public Service Remuneration Commission:** We will establish a new statutory Public Service Remuneration Commission, within 6 months, as an independent statutory body, comprising solely independent experts, that will publish analysis and recommendations on future pay determination to the Government in advance of the expiration of the Lansdowne Road Agreement (September 2018). Our Long Term Economic Plan includes a provision to accommodate the costs of a new public sector pay agreement.

**Public Sector Pensions:** Fine Gael will, by 2021, reverse the public service pension reductions introduced during the crisis, prioritising in the early years those in receipt of low pensions.

## DEVOLVING POWER TO FRONTLINE DECISION MAKERS

Frontline professionals in the community are in a better position to prioritise resources and drive changes than central government departments. Under our new Earned Autonomy Programme, we will give schools, hospitals and other public service bodies new freedoms – within strict budgets and new accountability systems – to set their own staffing needs, automate routine processes and adapt work practices to local staff and customer needs.

**Earned Autonomy for Public Service Bodies:** Agencies across the public service that engage proactively with shared services and other efficiency initiatives will get devolved authority – within strict overall budget caps – to recruit staff and adapt employment conditions to local staff and customer needs. We will mandate the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to prepare, within 6 months, a plan to devolve decision-making powers – within overall guidelines agreed by Government – to public service bodies, including on the staff mix and some areas of pay setting. We will begin this process by:

- Moving from caps on numbers to budget caps for IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Tourism Ireland and economic regulators
- Freeing universities from centralised human resource controls
- Giving Hospital Groups and Trusts the freedom to determine their staff mix
- Giving school principals more discretion as to how their school's budget is deployed

**Linking Increments to Performance:** Fine Gael will empower public service managers to reward staff delivery and excellence by ensuring that pay increments are awarded on merit. We will mandate the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to recommend, by end 2016, a new model of devolved

performance assessment focused on identifying excellent performance, leadership potential and under-performance. The Department will police this new system and publish regular reports on its implementation for scrutiny by the Oireachtas and the public.

**Ending the Recruitment Embargo:** We will replace the recruitment embargo faced by public service bodies, which is restrictive and bureaucratic, with a new Payroll Control Framework, which requires departments and agencies to commit to keeping payroll budgets within agreed ceilings and imposes financial and other sanctions where these ceilings are breached.

**Expenditure Ceilings:** To give departments and other public service bodies adequate planning horizons, we will legislate to reinforce the credibility of the multi-annual expenditure ceilings. We will introduce new Standing Orders in the Oireachtas which will require special legislation to change a departmental expenditure ceiling outside of a 3-year Comprehensive Review of Expenditure and a written explanation from the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to the Dáil to explain the special circumstances requiring the change.

## CIVIL AND PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM AND ACCOUNTABILITY

**Civil Service Performance and Accountability:** With more autonomy and power must come more accountability. We will legislate for a new civil service performance and accountability framework by end 2017, which will clarify the respective responsibilities of ministers and civil servants. Ministers and civil servants will present bi-annual reports to the relevant Oireachtas Committees on the performance of their department against Programme for Government commitments and annual work programme targets.

**Civil Service Renewal:** Fine Gael is committed to implementing the four key areas identified in the Civil Service Renewal Plan: (i) A unified civil service, (ii) A professional civil service, (iii) A responsive civil service, (iv) An open and accountable civil service. Our aim is to implement the Plan's 25 actions by the end of 2016.

**Public Service Disputes:** Fine Gael will remove all individual public sector industrial relations disputes from the Civil Service Conciliation and Arbitration scheme. Such disputes will in future be heard by an Adjudication Officer of the Workplace Relations Commission and on appeal to the Labour Court. This will bring an increased level of transparency to industrial relations disputes within the civil service, with all Labour Court decisions being published.

**Appointments to State Boards:** All appointments to state boards will be advertised openly on [www.stateboards.ie](http://www.stateboards.ie), operated by the Public Appointments Service. Fine Gael will ensure that this website becomes widely used and regularly updated. We will ensure that at least 40% of all new appointments to state boards are women.

**Attracting Talent into the Civil and Public Service:** Fine Gael will extend open recruitment across all grades of the civil service and wider public sector.

## MORE DIVERSITY OF PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION AND MORE "CHOICE AND VOICE" FOR SERVICE USERS

Resources go further when users of public services choose or shape their delivery, and are well informed about quality. Rather than giving fixed budgets to traditional public service providers like the HSE and VECs, we will commission more service delivery by alternative providers, and put more resources into the hands of citizens to acquire services that are tailored to better suit their needs and are less expensive for the taxpayer.

**Public Service Commissioning:** The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will be mandated to lead a decisive shift towards the increased use of commissioning in the delivery of services. Within 6 months, the Department will prepare a coherent set of best practice principles for commissioners/funders and service providers.

**School Reports and Patronage:** We will require schools to publish annual reports, taking into account exam results, facilities, extra-curricular activities, ICT resources, and special education resources. We will also deliver better choice, diversity and standards

by expanding the diversity of school patronage and ethos.

**Training Vouchers:** Instead of giving block grants to Education and Training Boards, we will earmark a fixed proportion of SOLAS's annual budget for Training Vouchers that empower the unemployed to define – by agreement with their Intreo support officers – and acquire their own reskilling needs, and to help fund networks of businesses to customise their own training requirements at less cost.

**Individualised Budgets:** We will also give adults and children with disabilities and their families the option of Individualised Budgets to choose the services they want and need.

**Ending Block Grants for Hospitals:** Instead of giving block budgets to hospitals, we will put in place an activity-based funding system that pays hospitals for the patients they treat.

## MORE FOCUS ON PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Prevention and Early Intervention Unit: Fine Gael will establish a dedicated Prevention and Early Intervention Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. It will focus on early intervention policies that can improve the life outcomes of children in particular, as well as the quality of life for older people dealing with long-term conditions such as obesity, alcohol dependency and chronic illness. The unit will also produce an annual report outlining the percentage of departmental budgets which is devoted to early intervention and long-term planning on social issues, and recommend changes. It will oversee and monitor the impact of a number of new Prevention and Early Intervention programmes to be implemented by line departments, most notably:

- The second pre-school year and other early childhood development interventions, including additional educational psychologists and speech and language therapists
- The sharing and implementation of learning from Area Based Childhood (ABC) programmes to other initiatives as they expand their reach
- A shift towards primary care and population health, including the extension of free GP care at the point of access to all children
- Extra home help hours and home care packages for the elderly

## PUBLIC PROCUREMENT

**Better Value for the Taxpayer:** As part of a new Procurement Reform Programme, we will charge the newly established OGP with delivering cash savings in public procurement across all state-funded bodies of €100m per annum in 2016-18 (€300m in total) and with avoiding procurement cost inflation thereafter, through:

- Establishing new structures for procurement across the State that bring increased levels of collaboration and consistency to public service procurement
- Strengthening procurement spending analytics and data management
- Greater aggregation of purchasing across public bodies to achieve better value for money
- Examining the specifications set out for goods and services
- Evaluating ways to reduce procurement demand
- Putting in place dedicated teams for sourcing goods and services at a whole-of-government level in:
  - Facilities management
  - Legal services
  - ICT
- Driving savings in IT consultancy by hiring more specialist staff on contracts
- Reducing the cost of leasing buildings for state agencies through the OPW's rationalisation programme

**Supporting Irish Businesses:** The public procurement market in Ireland is worth roughly €8bn a year, or over €20m a day. We have developed a number of initiatives to use public procurement to support Irish businesses, including:

- “Meet the Buyer” conferences where businesses can meet public sector buyers, learn what their needs for the coming year are and network

- A new Tender Advisory Service (TAS) which allows businesses to submit queries about tenders and receive a speedy response
- Working with InterTrade Ireland to provide grants/training so that SMEs can upskill in terms of procurement requirements and tenders

We will build on these initiatives in the following ways:

- Facilitate quarterly meetings of the SME Advisory Group, chaired by a Minister of State at the Department of Finance / Public Expenditure and Reform, so that the voice of Irish SMEs can be heard by Government and the OGP
- Commission an external review of the TAS model by 2017
- Conduct a consultation on the merits of establishing a Procurement Ombudsman
- Refine the new procurement structures in place, such as the OGP, as they bed down and make adjustments according to best international practice and in conjunction with Irish businesses

**Social Clauses:** We recognise the potential of public procurement to help vulnerable groups in society – people with disabilities, people who are unemployed, etc. We have established a Social Clauses working group across government departments to examine ways in which we can appropriately use social clauses in procurement documents. Fine Gael will progress this in conjunction with stakeholders and in keeping with best practice in other countries.

**Green Public Procurement:** Given the scale of the Government's annual procurement budget, the State has the ability to significantly shape the environmental performance of activity in the Irish economy. Fine Gael will work to ensure that the Green Procurement Guidelines are applied across the public sector and we will amend those guidelines, if necessary, to ensure their implementation. This action complements our commitment to drive energy efficiencies in all state buildings such as schools and departments.

## 24. Rural Ireland

Rural Ireland is alive, but is changing. Fine Gael will continue to put in place measures to revitalise rural Ireland during a second term of government so that the recovery is felt inside every doorstep, in every community, in Ireland. Fine Gael will ensure that rural Ireland is supported, so that it can achieve its full potential across a wide-ranging spectrum of areas.

**Regional Spread of Growth and Jobs (see the Jobs, Enterprise and Regional Growth chapter for further detail):** Fine Gael will continue to implement Regional Enterprise Strategies to help spread growth to all areas. The aim of the Regional Enterprise Strategies, which are at the heart of the latest Action Plan for Jobs, is to encourage agencies and companies to work together and build on the competitive strengths of each region.

**Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) (see the Jobs, Enterprise and Regional Growth chapter for further detail):** During a second term of government we will continue to develop the LEO network, to ensure that the standard of service delivered is consistent across the country and that any SME or prospective SME that visits its LEO will receive high-quality mentoring, support and seamless access to the wider range of Enterprise Ireland supports for high-potential enterprises.

**Western Development Commission:** We will also reinforce the role of the Western Development Commission (WDC), so that it supports the implementation of the Regional Enterprise strategies in the West and North-West. As part of this, the WDC will be given a specific mandate to stimulate the development of enterprise networks in these two regions and to stimulate innovative approaches to development. This will build on the recent allocation

of €2m in additional funding to support regional economic development in the West of Ireland, which the WDC will administer across a number of economic development projects.

**Agriculture (see the Agriculture and Food chapter for further detail):** Fine Gael has recognised the crucial importance of agriculture to the Irish economy and has maintained a strategic and ambitious focus on the development of the sector. Over a second term of government, we will continue to implement an ambitious 10-year plan that will grow employment by 23,000 and substantially increase activity in this hugely important area.

**LEADER:** We will work with local authorities and local action groups to ensure that LEADER funding delivers the maximum possible benefit for communities throughout the country. In addition, as part of our Future Jobs Investment Plan we will seek to allow LEADER groups to bid for additional resources for projects that support rural economic development.

**Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA):** Having already provided €3m to support CEDRA initiatives, we will continue to implement the recommendations of the CEDRA report and the new Rural Charter, as appropriate, in order to further support the long-term sustainable development of rural Ireland.



Fine Gael will continue to put in place measures to revitalise rural Ireland during a second term of government so that the recovery is felt inside every doorstep, in every community, in Ireland.

**Impact Assessment:** As part of our smarter regulation agenda, Fine Gael will step up the use of impact assessments across Government, driven by a new specialised section within the Cabinet Secretariat. Our new impact assessment guidelines will have to take account of impacts on rural Ireland as well as other socio-economic factors.

**Village/Town Renewal Scheme:** We have committed funding of to support town and village renewal as part of a concerted effort to support the development of rural towns and villages. The central aim of the scheme is to support the revitalisation of towns/villages in order to improve the living and working environment of their communities and increase their potential to support increased economic activity into the future. The focus for improvements eligible under this scheme will extend to the enhancement of villages, small towns and the surrounding countryside.

**Credit Unions (see the Banking chapter for further detail):** Fine Gael will continue to support the invaluable role of credit unions in Ireland. We recognise that the sector requires further support to help overcome the significant challenges it faces. Fine Gael will roll out a number of initiatives to further strengthen the credit unions' crucial role in rural Ireland.

**Technological Universities:** Fine Gael continues to support the creation of Technological Universities, which will be linked to industry and will have an enormous impact on our capacity to create and retain jobs in regions. We will prioritise those institutions with clear ambitions and plans for the furthering of industry-relevant technological research and education.

**Rural Transport:** Fine Gael recognises the importance of the Rural Transport Programme, especially its role in protecting against rural isolation. Fine Gael will closely monitor the progress of the new Transport Coordination Unit structure and ensure that the scheme is adequately funded, to best meet rural transport needs.

**Rural Buses:** During a second term, Fine Gael will improve integration in the rural bus network. This includes public buses, school transport and the HSE transport networks, thereby increasing efficiencies

for both the passenger and taxpayer. This will make existing routes more sustainable and open up the potential for new routes to be established.

**Rural Hackneys:** In order to increase the take up of rural hackney licenses, we will review the regulations governing them, so as to allow more areas to be served.

**Community Involvement Schemes (CIS) and Local Improvement Schemes (LIS):** We will provide funding for Community Involvement schemes and Local Improvement Schemes, on an annual basis. As part of our commitment to local government reform we will also give councils greater discretion in how they spend their money on local and regional roads.

**Greenways (see the Tourism and Sport chapter for further detail):** During a second term of government, Fine Gael will build on the success of the development of the Greenway network and establish a central fund for supporting the network across the country. While we will continue to expand the network, we are also conscious of the rights of farmers and landowners and will work with them to ensure that the expansion of the network is beneficial for both users and landowners.

**Regional Airports (see the Transport chapter for further detail):** We will invest €28m under the Capital Plan for safety and security enhancements across the regional airports. We will also look to establish a fund to assist developing new flight routes from all airports outside of Dublin.

**Spreading Growth in Tourism throughout Ireland (see the Tourism and Sport chapter for further detail):** During a second term of government we will build on successes such as the Wild Atlantic Way to drive tourism to all parts of the country, in accordance with their potential.

**Post Offices:** Post offices are a local institution in hundreds of towns and villages throughout the country. Fine Gael has endeavoured to halt the rapid decline in our post office network which took place during the 2000s under Fianna Fáil. We recognise that post offices face unprecedented challenges, in a climate of rapidly changing mail trends. We have just renewed the Department of Social Protection's contract for cash social welfare payments at post

offices, which in 2015 was worth approximately €54m, with over 38 million social welfare payments being made in post offices throughout the country. We will swiftly act on the recommendations of the Post Office Business Development Group by supporting the introduction and rollout, by An Post, of an “ePayment Account” in 2016, to enhance post office activity in financial services and increase footfall. We will also support the establishment of a post office network renewal process, to report within 6 months, to build on An Post’s existing 5-year strategy for the network.

**Rural General Practice:** Fine Gael recognises the importance of maintaining and sustaining a general practitioner in rural communities. Therefore we support proposals aimed at incentivising rural general practice, with the first measures commencing in 2016.

**Arts:** In recognition of the crucial role that the Arts play in communities across the country, we will introduce a new small grants scheme to provide essential upgrades to existing regional arts and culture centres. We will also boost supports to facilitate increased loans between our National Cultural Institutions and our network of regional museums. During a second term we will also expand the Historic Towns Initiative to include an additional 15 towns.

**Supporting Islands and Costal Areas:** Fine Gael is committed to sustaining vital public services, investing in and developing our island and costal communities into the future.

**Broadband (see the Connected Ireland chapter for further detail):** Within the next Dáil term, Fine Gael guarantees to deliver next-generation broadband to every household and business in the country. No town, village or parish will be left behind under the National Broadband Plan (NBP) through a combination of industry and State investment, we will ensure that 85% of premises in Ireland will have access to high speed broadband by 2018, with 100% access by 2020.

**Public Houses:** Fine Gael recognises the economic and social role that the local pub plays in sustaining rural communities. Fine Gael will support pubs to diversify their range of services and products. As part of this support we will endeavour to deliver high-quality, high-speed broadband to every pub in the country by 2020 as part of our National Broadband Plan. We will also remove the rate of duty for publicans’ licences for premises with an annual turnover of less than €190,500.

## 25. Seafood and the Marine

**Fine Gael has published the first ever blueprint for the marine sector, Harnessing our Ocean Wealth (HOOW). It makes clear our ambitions for the sector: to double the value of the blue economy by 2030 and deliver 29,000 additional jobs across the various maritime sectors.**

This growth will be built on innovation, research and the sustainable use of our largest natural resource: the sea that surrounds us. Areas such as ocean energy, shipping, marine tourism, sport and leisure, offshore oil and gas, seafood, marine telecoms and marine safety are all exciting growth areas that will result in the development of the broader blue economy.

The structures are in place across Government to deliver on the ambition of HOOW through a cross-departmental Marine Coordination Group. Fine Gael will ensure this group continues to be chaired by a senior minister and the ambition and recommendations stemming from the taskforces underpinning the Group are progressed to deliver on our ambition for the marine.

We believe that the marine economy can be a major contributing factor to new growth in an overall Irish economic context in the next 5 years and we will prioritise the sector accordingly.

### FOOD WISE 2025 - SEAFOOD

One of the most significant growth areas in our strategy for the agri-food industry, Food Wise 2025, is the seafood sector. With an increase of 37% in seafood exports since 2011 and an estimated 40 million tonnes of seafood required globally by 2030, our target is to

increase the share of value-added seafood by 30-50%, maximising the value from our raw material base.

We will invest €24m from the Seafood Development Programme in seafood processing to support investment in capital infrastructure, innovation and business planning, scaling and new market development.

### INVESTMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Fine Gael has secured an EU co-funded Seafood Development Programme worth €240m, which will be central to achieving our ambition for growth in the seafood sector. This is more than double the size of the previous Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) fund. This investment will be targeted at a range of supports for fishermen to adapt to the challenges of the new CFP, seafood processing and marketing, aquaculture, inshore fisheries, Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGS), data collection and enforcement.

We will also invest in knowledge transfer, engine replacement, change management, new entrants, selective gear development, decommissioning, fleet improvement, mutual funds and storage aid.

Fine Gael has prioritised the marine at the Cabinet table during the past 5 years and we will continue to do so.

## THE NEW COMMON FISHERIES POLICY (CFP)

**Ending Discards:** The new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) was successfully renegotiated by Fine Gael and ensures a positive outlook for the fishing industry. Central to the CFP is the ending of discards, rebuilding stocks and generating higher quotas, ensuring more profitable livelihoods for fishermen. €45m will be made available to support the industry in adapting to the new CFP. Additional quota to cover the increased landings has been negotiated. For 2016, this uplift has resulted in a 10% increase in whitefish quota, with a value of €9m.

**Setting Quotas Based on Science:** We are committed to the internationally recognised concept of Maximum Sustainable Yield. This will mean setting quotas that maximise the available fish for fishermen to catch, ensuring stable fish stocks on the basis of science. Proof that the new CFP is working can be seen in the most recent negotiation of increases to whitefish quotas where the discards ban applies, where quotas were increased for stocks covered by the discards ban.

Fine Gael will continue to protect fish stocks while negotiating hard to provide for continued growth in the Irish fishing industry. We have committed €40m from the Seafood Development Programme to the collection of scientific data to achieve this objective. Healthy stocks will mean a growing fishing industry; this is of benefit to everyone.

## QUOTAS - A NATIONAL ASSET

Unlike other countries in the EU who have privatised ownership of quota, we will legislate to protect fish quotas as a national asset to be managed in the interest of healthy stocks and the fishing industry. Fine Gael will also enshrine in legislation the protection of quotas as a national asset.

**Regional Decision Making:** Fine Gael is committed to making decisions on fishing close to home. No longer will we have a one-size-fits-all approach. We have negotiated as part of the CFP a regional decision-making model, which means less control from

Brussels and more decision making regionally, with other countries who share our fishing grounds.

**Hague Preferences:** While negotiating the new CFP, Fine Gael prioritised the retention of the Hague Preferences, which were strengthened by the CFP process. This will continue to be of fundamental significance in future fisheries negotiations, guaranteeing Ireland a better share of stocks when they are at low levels.

## SUPPORTING GROWTH IN THE SEAFOOD SECTOR

**Aquaculture:** Significant potential exists for growth in the aquaculture sector. We have cleared 300 licences from the backlog caused by years of environmental neglect and will continue this work. We have committed €20m to the new National Strategic Plan for Aquaculture.

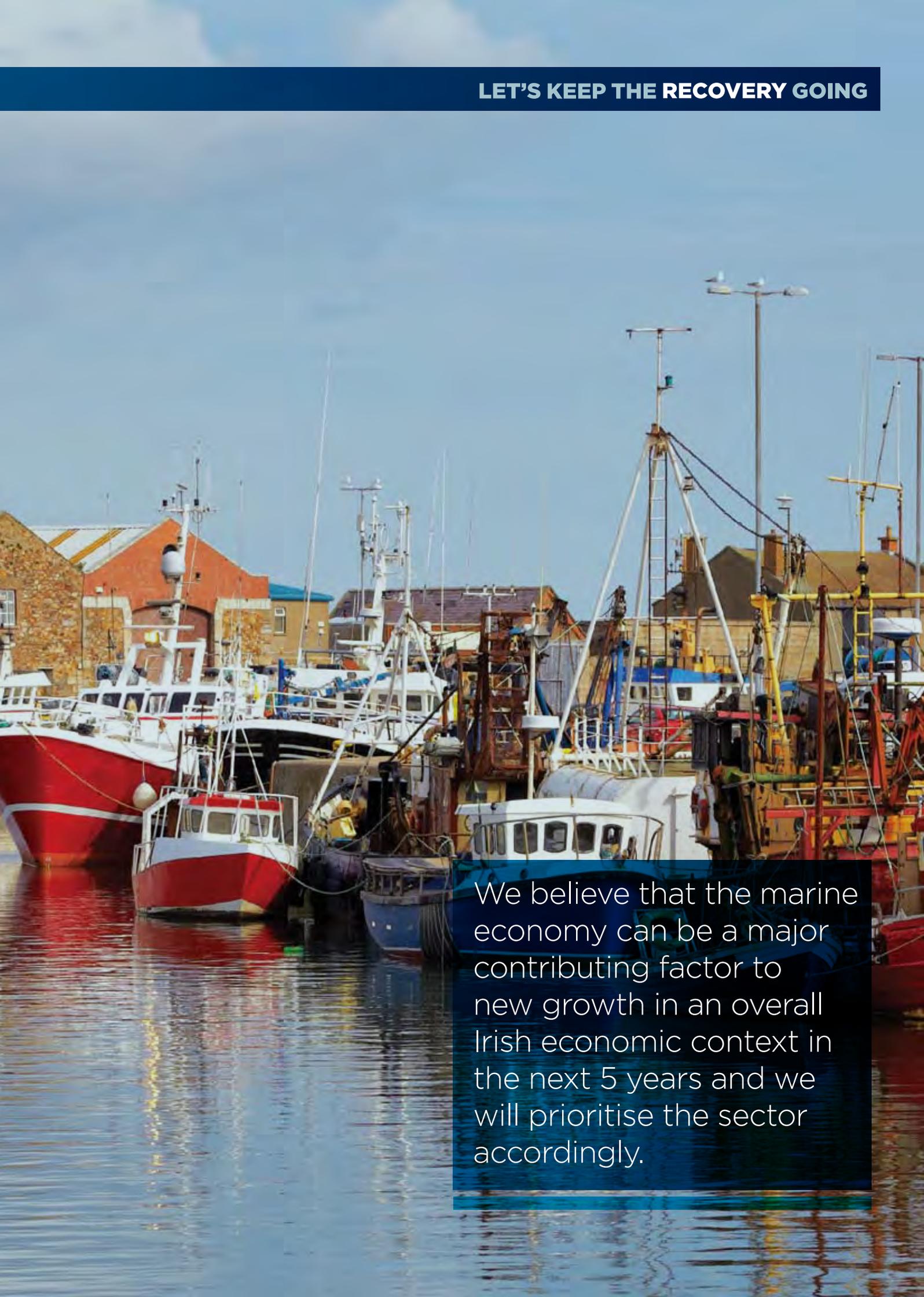
**Knowledge Gateway:** We have committed €8.2m from the Seafood Development Programme to the aquaculture sector to support research, new species development and commercialisation, management of disease and environmental and business planning advice.

**International Ocean Laboratory:** Subject to EU funding and support Fine Gael will develop an Irish-led international ocean research laboratory, changing the dynamic in how we produce food at sea by focusing on research into sustainable new approaches via cutting edge R&D in the aquaculture sector. This project will be developed with a focus on sustainability and in consultation with environmentalists and members of the research community.

**Marine Safety:** Too many families have experienced the tragedy of losing someone at sea. We published a marine safety strategy and will constantly update policy as well as invest €5.6m from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) in the fisheries sector for investment on fleet improvement and safety measures, to reduce the number of fatalities at sea.

**Inshore Fisheries:** Fine Gael is committed to ensuring that smaller inshore boats are given new opportunities for commercial fishing by developing sustainable new

**LET'S KEEP THE RECOVERY GOING**



We believe that the marine economy can be a major contributing factor to new growth in an overall Irish economic context in the next 5 years and we will prioritise the sector accordingly.

sectors and investing in marketing to back them up; for example, a mackerel line fishery. We developed the first ever National Inshore Fisheries Forum and six regional fora, representing the sector. We will provide €6m from the Seafood Development Programme to support enhanced management and conservation of inshore stocks, including v-notching of lobster, more selective fishing gear and preparation and implementation of management plans for inshore stocks.

**Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs):** We established six Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs), to focus on developing local marine economies and will invest €12m from the Seafood Development Programme in FLAGs to support 1,000 projects in fishing communities, starting in 2016.

**Marine Taxation:** Fine Gael has carried out the first ever review of marine taxation policy across Government, published in 2015. Fine Gael will implement measures aimed at growing the potential of marine industries and creating jobs in coastal communities. In particular, Fine Gael will investigate the possibility of introducing a seafarer's allowance, in line with other EU Member States.

**Harbours:** Fine Gael has invested €59m in harbours since 2011 and we will continue to invest strategically in the development of harbours in coastal communities.

**Marine Leisure:** We recognise that significant potential exists in the marine leisure area for tourism around our coastline. We will drive a step change in the development of this sector under the ambit of the Marine Coordination Group, to maximise the potential opportunities that exist.

## 26. Social Welfare, Making Work Pay and Pensions

The Government has started the job of overhauling the social welfare system, transforming it from a passive welfare system into an active and responsive employment service. Rather than sustain a system that encourages welfare dependency, we want to create a system that fosters independence through retraining and employment. In the next government we need to be more radical to end the plight of jobless households.

### MAKING WORK PAY

The Working Family Payment: We will roll out a new Working Family Payment that promotes work over welfare. Targeted at low-income families, it will supplement, on a graduated basis, the income of a household, while at the same time incentivising more hours and full-time work. It will ensure that parents working more than 15 hours a week will receive at least €11.75 an hour.

The current Family Income Supplement creates major hurdles for unemployed parents transiting from jobseekers welfare payments into work, and also locks many parents into working fewer hours. Under the current set-up, if someone on Jobseeker's Allowance works more than 3 days they are cut off welfare entirely and if they work less than 19 hours a week they do not receive any income support at all.

By better aligning the Working Family Payment with existing jobseeker supports, there will be a seamless transition from welfare to work for families and many of the welfare traps families face will be eliminated. This new in-work payment, in conjunction with our tax plan and increases in the minimum wage, will make work

pay. Existing Family Income Supplement beneficiaries will have the option of transitioning to the Working Family Payment if it makes work pay more, otherwise their current supports will be maintained. Fine Gael will also make available further training and skills development opportunities for those in low-income jobs. We will mandate the Low Pay Commission to make recommendations to the Government on the phased introduction of the Working Family Payment, from 2018.

**Minimum Wage:** Fine Gael will increase the minimum wage to €10.50 per hour, during a second term. It will still be a matter for the Low Pay Commission to make annual recommendations on the level of adjustment each year. We will cut Employers' PRSI for low-income workers to mitigate the cost of minimum wage increases, in order to protect jobs. Forcing unaffordable increases in the minimum wage on small Irish businesses will cost jobs and set back recovery.

**Employers' PRSI:** To mitigate the impact on jobs and small employers of further, sensible rises in the minimum wage to €10.50 per hour, we will cut the lower 8.5% rate of Employers' PRSI to 6.5% and increase the



Rather than sustain a system that encourages welfare dependency, we want to create a system that fosters independence through retraining and employment.

lower rate threshold to €426 per week (from €376). We will still be guided by the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission on the phasing in of these minimum wage changes during a term of office.

**Welfare Traps:** To break the cycle of joblessness, we will do more to close down poverty traps:

- **Housing Traps:** Recipients of Rent Supplement are faced with the worst welfare trap, with lone parents and larger families at particular risk. Fine Gael will roll out nationwide the Housing Assistance Payment, which provides housing support based on income and not employment status.
- **Healthcare Traps:** We will extend free GP care for the children of all working families.
- **Childcare Traps:** Parents need affordable childcare that makes work pay for their family. We understand that at each stage of a child's development their needs change and we will provide quality and flexible options for families to avail of. For more information, please see our chapter Families and Childcare.

**Pathways to Work Plan for Jobless Households:** Ireland's historically high prevalence of jobless households is the biggest cause of inequality in our society. During the height of the Celtic Tiger, Ireland experienced one of the highest rates of jobless households in Europe, even when unemployment was at its lowest. Building on the success of the Pathways to Work Action Plan during our first term, Fine Gael will publish a specific Pathways to Work Plan for Jobless Households. It will have specific targets for key groups of individuals within jobless households and updates to the Plan will be published on a regular basis.

## ACTIVATION

**Breaking the Cycle of Intergenerational Joblessness:** No young person wants to start their working life on the dole. Young people who are unemployed and not in education or training risk entering a cycle of lifelong joblessness and low income. Building on the successful Ballymun Youth Guarantee pilot scheme we will roll

out a guarantee scheme for all 18 and 19 year olds, where a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship will be made available within a period of 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

**A Social Contract with the Long-Term Unemployed:** Fine Gael will provide every long-term jobseeker with a caseworker to help them back into work, with individual engagements and work progression plans. Engagement with these services is vital, which is why Fine Gael introduced the Social Contract of rights and responsibilities, signed by all jobseekers. We will review the current regulations for caseworkers in order to streamline the application of penalty rates and payment suspensions for those who refuse to engage or take up genuine offers of training or employment. For those who are long-term unemployed, a caseworker will be empowered to compulsorily refer someone to a work placement programme such as Gateway or Tús, or risk suspension of their welfare payment.

**Incentivising Employers to Hire the Long-Term Unemployed (JobsPlus):** We will put the long-term unemployed at the top of the queue for new jobs by increasing the incentive for employers under the JobsPlus scheme. We will increase the level of payment from €7,500 to €8,500 for hiring someone between 1 year and 2 years unemployed, and from €10,000 to €12,000 for someone over 2 years unemployed.

**Providing Caseworkers for all Long-Term Unemployed (JobPath):** Fine Gael has sought to ensure that Intreo centres are adequately staffed with case officers to maximise reactivation. The new JobPath initiative will see approximately 1,000 more staff support the unemployed, bringing the ratio of clients to case officers from 500:1 towards 200:1. Fine Gael will prioritise the implementation of JobPath and keep it under review in light of changing labour market trends.

**JobBridge:** JobBridge has acted as a successful bridge from welfare to work. Independent research has shown that over 60% of participants go on to

paid employment shortly after their internships, which compares favourably to similar schemes in other countries. Fine Gael recognises there has been some abuse of JobBridge by certain employers. Controls have always been in place to prevent abuse of the system and we will adapt those controls as the scheme progresses. We will continue to fund the scheme into the future, adjusting it along with labour market trends.

**Gateway:** Fine Gael will continue to support the Gateway scheme, which is designed to provide short-term working opportunities for the long-term unemployed. We believe it has worked well and we will look to enhance the scheme as it takes root in communities across the country.

**Tús:** Like Gateway, Tús is a community work placement scheme designed to provide short-term work for the unemployed. We believe it is right and necessary to oblige the long-term unemployed to take up such offers and gain the experience and skills necessary to re-join the workforce.

## WELFARE REFORM

**Intreo Offices:** We have rolled out a new network of Intreo centres, which are job support and welfare offices that provide employment and income supports to jobseekers in one place, for the first time. Fine Gael wants to benchmark the centres at local, regional and national level and publish the results nationally to ensure targets are met.

**Rewarding Work by Boosting Jobseeker's Benefit:** Fine Gael will reform Jobseeker's Benefit to provide a better safety net for those experiencing short spells of unemployment. As part of Fine Gael's reforms to the tax and social insurance system we will increase Jobseeker's Benefit to €215 for the first 3 months of unemployment, reducing to €200 for between 3 and 6 months of unemployment and reverting to the standard rate of €188 after 6 months.

**Social Welfare Fraud:** Fine Gael adopts a zero-tolerance approach to social welfare fraud, which

undermines confidence in the social welfare system and drains money away from those who need it. In the case of welfare payments, Fine Gael will increase from 15% to 25% the amount that can be recovered from a person's weekly payment. Fine Gael will continue to support and fund the Special Investigations Unit that targets systematic fraud and we will further encourage people to avail of anonymous reporting mechanisms.

**Supply Once Means Test:** Fine Gael will develop a new system of means testing across Government that only requires applicants to submit their information once for it to be used by any agency that an applicant wishes to receive a service from.

## PENSIONS REFORM

Only half of the Irish workforce has supplementary pension coverage and, as life expectancy continues to rise, the risk is that too many people will have insufficient savings to adequately replace their pre-retirement incomes. A central element of our Long Term Economic Plan to keep the recovery going is our commitment to making the necessary policy changes to address the "pensions gap" in a way that is fair and affordable for young and old, men and women, and for public and private sector workers.

**State Pension:** We will increase both the contributory and non-contributory State pensions by at least €25 per week by 2021 (an increase of €5 per week every year).

**Clarity on State Pension Entitlements:** We will require the Department of Social Protection to provide contributors, from a certain age, automatic statements on social insurance contribution history and expected entitlements to the State pension. By doing this, every individual will know in good time the additional contributions required to access this valuable entitlement.

We will also require the Department of Social Protection to review, within 6 months, the calculation of State pension, and the costs and benefits associated with giving parents (mostly women) credits for years spent "home making" outside the paid workforce.

**Increasing Pension Coverage:** We will construct a new “universal” supplementary pensions savings system to substantially increase supplementary pensions coverage among private sector workers within the lifetime of the next Dáil. We will require the Inter-Departmental Universal Retirement Savings Group, which has been working on this issue since late 2014, to finalise its report to Government on the development of a Universal Retirement Savings Scheme within 6 months.

**Public Service Pensions:** Fine Gael will, by 2021, reverse the public service pension reductions introduced during the crisis, prioritising in the early years those in receipt of low pensions. Separately, we will ask the Public Service Remuneration Commission to make recommendations, by end 2017, to ensure the long-term sustainability of public service pensions, to reflect the value of public service pensions in overall public service remuneration and to promote greater mobility between the public and private sectors. This work should have reference to the development of a Universal Retirement Savings Scheme.

**Reviewing Compulsory Retirement Ages:** We will establish an Inter-Departmental Group to review, within 6 months, whether compulsory retirement ages, common in the public and private sectors, are still appropriate.

**Pension Tracking Service:** We will work with the Pensions Authority, the Revenue Commissioners and the pensions industry to develop a pension tracking service, ideally via an online portal, which would help people track their pension benefits as they move through their career. We want to facilitate career mobility and eliminate red tape to make workplace pensions more attractive to both employees and employers.

**European Pension Tracking Service:** As part of our push to attract emigrants home, we will support efforts in Europe to introduce a European Pension Tracking Service, helping mobile workers to keep track of their pension as they move jobs within the EU and helping pension providers to keep in contact with their customers.

In order to keep the recovery going, our infrastructure must be capable of meeting the demands of an expanding economy. Fine Gael is determined to meet those needs through a €10bn capital investment in Transport over the next 7 years.



## 27. Transport

During a second term of government Fine Gael will deliver a transport system that is better integrated, well maintained and which provides choice and value for customers throughout the country, while also helping in our efforts to combat climate change. In order to keep the recovery going, our infrastructure must be capable of meeting the demands of an expanding economy. Fine Gael is determined to meet those needs through a €10bn capital investment in Transport over the next 7 years.

### PUBLIC TRANSPORT

**Public Transport Investment:** We will invest €3.6bn across the lifetime of the next Capital Plan to enable a number of major public transport projects to proceed, and to fund additional capacity to meet existing and future commuter needs. These will include the new Metro North and the completion of LUAS Cross City.

In line with these commitments, we will instigate a full review of public transport policy to ensure services are sustainable into the future and are meeting the needs of a modern economy.

**Accessibility:** Fine Gael will continue to invest to make public transport services more accessible for people with disabilities. Examples of such investment include increased wheelchair access to bus and train stations, bus fleet enhancement and audio announcements on train and bus services, to aid the visually impaired.

We will also introduce a provision whereby taxi companies who wish to bid for state procurement contracts must ensure that a minimum of 10% of their fleet is wheelchair accessible.

**Bus Competition:** Fine Gael supports investment in our national bus market for the benefit of passengers

and supports more choice and competition in the bus market. We will support the role of the National Transport Authority in determining the appropriate mix of direct award and public service obligation contracts for bus routes. This will allow us to provide more routes and choice to the public.

**Integrated Ticketing:** Ireland is behind the curve when it comes to integrated ticketing. Fine Gael is determined to address this by fast-tracking the rollout of Leap Card nationwide.

**Rural Transport:** Fine Gael recognises the importance of the Rural Transport Programme, especially its role in protecting against rural isolation. We have radically restructured the scheme, putting it on a more secure financial footing. Fine Gael will closely monitor the progress of the new Transport Coordination Unit structure and ensure that the scheme is adequately funded into the future to best meet rural transport needs.

**Rural Buses:** Fine Gael will introduce improved integration in the rural bus network. This includes public buses, school transport and the HSE transport networks and will increase efficiencies for both the passenger and taxpayer. This will make existing routes

more sustainable and open up the potential for new routes to be established.

**Rural Hackneys:** In order to increase the take up of rural hackney licenses, we will review the regulations governing them, so as to allow more areas to be served.

**Public Bike Schemes:** During a second term of government, we will support the extension of existing public bike schemes and will also drive the rollout of additional schemes in other urban areas. Public bike schemes link up existing infrastructure, are environmentally friendly, and are in line with our vision for a “Healthy Ireland”.

## GREEN TRANSPORT

**Sustainable Transport:** Investment in our public transport system will uphold the principles of the Government’s Smarter Travel policy. Under the Capital Plan, €100m is being committed to smarter travel and carbon reduction measures, including Greenways, to ensure that the transport sector makes a major contribution to climate change mitigation targets.

**Electric Vehicles:** Fine Gael wants Ireland to become a leader in the take-up of electric vehicles. Within 6 months of government we will establish a dedicated taskforce to work on this goal, involving relevant government departments, agencies, industry and representative groups.

We will implement the recommendations contained in the Government’s energy White Paper, Ireland’s Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030, designed to increase the number of low carbon vehicles on the road.

**Climate Change Mitigation Plans:** As part of the first National Mitigation Plan we will focus on the development of a cost-effective policy platform for reducing emissions and increasing energy efficiency across all transport modes. It will examine the role of technology, sustainable land use patterns, modal shift, travel demand, alternative fuel options and the impact of proposed measures on other national policy objectives.

## ROADS

**Roads Investment:** In a second term of government, we will adopt a twin-track strategy to maintain our existing road network to meet climate adaptation and EU standard requirements, while also expanding our national roads network to meet our future economic needs.

In the context of an improving economy, our road network is likely to come under considerably more stress. To deal with this, €4.4bn will be invested over the 7 years of the Capital Plan to ensure the network is maintained and strengthened.

In addition to a maintenance focus, we will also make a number of targeted strategic investments in new national road upgrades, with €1.5bn allocated under the 2016-2022 Capital Plan towards these new projects, which are spread throughout the country.

As part of a mid-term review of the Capital Plan, we will also examine if funding allows for the progression of the M20, linking Cork and Limerick.

**Community Involvement Schemes (CIS) and Local Improvement Schemes (LIS):** We will provide funding for Community Schemes and Local Improvement Schemes, on an annual basis. As part of our commitment to local government reform we will also give councils greater discretion in how they spend their money on local and regional roads.

**Road Safety:** During a second term of government we will commit to ambitious targets to seek to reduce deaths on Irish roads from 166 in 2015 to fewer than 125 in 2020. Conscious of the fact that one road death is one too many, we will also leverage technology wherever possible to increase driver safety, as we have done in relation to testing for the presence of drugs.

We will enforce new legislation against driving while under the influence of drugs. We will establish a “third payment option” for Fixed Charge Notices (FCNs) and the creation of an integrated database that contains vehicle ownership and driving license information.

In tandem with this, we will consolidate all existing road safety legislation into a single Act, helping to safeguard against the emergence of legal loopholes.

## AIR AND SEA TRANSPORT

Aviation (see Tourism and Sport chapter for further detail): We will implement the National Aviation Policy in full, maintaining state ownership of Dublin, Cork and Shannon airports, while working to improve connectivity and further fostering Ireland's world-leading aviation leasing industry.

**Maritime Safety:** We will continue to invest in a robust maritime safety strategy that tackles the recurring factors that contribute to maritime fatalities, encourages those who take to the water to take maritime safety seriously, and supports a better maritime safety culture.

**Ports:** We will implement the National Ports Policy in full, with particular emphasis on the completion of changes in ownership structure to properly equip ports to attract new investment. To this end, Ports of National Significance shall be supported through state ownership, while Ports of Regional Significance shall be transferred to local authority control.

## 28. Tourism and Sport

### TOURISM

The tourism sector has played a crucial role in the Irish economic recovery. Underpinned by strategic decisions, such as the zero-rated travel tax and the introduction of a special 9% VAT rate, tourism has thrived during the last 4 years. During a second term of government, Fine Gael will work towards achieving the ambitious tourism policy goals that we have set for 2025. These include increasing revenue from overseas visitors to €5bn, growing employment in the tourism sector to 250,000 (from 200,000 currently) and increasing the number of visits to Ireland to 10 million.

**0% Travel Tax Rate:** Fine Gael will continue to maintain the 0% rate to ensure Ireland remains an attractive destination for tourists.

**9% VAT Rate:** We will retain the hugely successful 9% VAT rate, providing that prices remain competitive.

**Activity and Sport Based Tourism:** We believe that Ireland is a fantastic location for activity and sport based tourism and we will work with Fáilte Ireland to help them develop this sector further. As well as looking to grow the thriving marine, golf and angling sector, there is significant potential growth in the areas of cycling, sailing, running and in adventure sports.

**Greenways:** Fine Gael invested approximately €20m in new Greenway development in recent years. We will build on the popularity of new Greenways by establishing a central fund in the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to support the construction of a Greenway network across the country.

Our long-term vision is for Greenways throughout the country, promoting sustainable travel, increased

tourism and balanced regional development and forming a nationwide inter-connected network that will promote Ireland as a leading cycling and activity-based tourism destination. As part of this vision, we will complete the Ashtown to Athlone section of the Dublin-Galway Greenway by 2017.

While we will continue to expand the Greenway network, we are also conscious of the rights of farmers and landowners and will work with them in this rollout to ensure that the expansion of the network is beneficial for both users and landowners.

**Marketing Ireland as an All-Year-Round Destination:** Tourists visiting Ireland tend to be culturally curious and/or in search of adventure. We will do more to market Ireland as an all-year-round destination and Fine Gael will work closely with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Ireland to make this happen. Specific focus will be placed on building on the success of the Wild Atlantic Way, which has particular potential as a year-round destination.

**Marketing Ireland as a Destination for Cruise Holidays:** In order to fully exploit the tourism potential that Ireland's harbours, coastline and canal network offers, Fine Gael will promote Ireland as a destination for cruise holidays, both in overseas markets and for domestic tourists.

**Spreading Growth in Tourism throughout Ireland:** The tourism sector is uniquely placed to make a contribution to regional development. During a second term of government we will build on successes such as the Wild Atlantic Way to drive tourism to all parts of the country, in accordance with their potential.

We will also further develop the Ireland's Ancient East and Dublin – A Breath of Fresh Air campaigns to

ensure all parts of the country benefit from increased tourism levels to this country.

**Dublin Airport:** We will develop Dublin as a vibrant secondary hub that will compete effectively with the UK and other European airports for the expanding global aviation services market.

**Cork Airport:** Cork Airport's unique position as a "gateway" to both the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East is a clear advantage and a platform for growing inbound tourism traffic. The airport also plays a key role as a tourism and business gateway for the local region and its further development, particularly with regard to the development of key niche markets, will be supported.

**Shannon Airport:** Fine Gael recognises Shannon Airport's strategic importance for connectivity in the Mid-West region. To further strengthen the airport, we will support its development as an air-cargo hub. We will also support the airport as it seeks to increase the number of aircraft using US preclearance. These measures will help underpin the airport's ambitions to expand existing operations and develop new routes.

**Regional Airports:** Fine Gael understands the continued importance of Donegal, Kerry, Ireland West Airport Knock (IWAK) and Waterford airports, due to the level of international connectivity that they bring to their respective regions, both in terms of tourism and business. To this end, we will invest €28m under the Capital Plan for safety and security enhancements across the regional airports. We will continue to provide funding to assist developing new flight routes from all airports outside of Dublin. This would be similar to a recent UK initiative which has been shown to be permissible under EU rules.

**Flagship Events:** Building on recent successes, Fine Gael will continue to target the hosting of international sporting and cultural events. This will include the already announced hosting of the Boston College vs Georgia Tech American Football game, and the 2017 Women's Rugby World Cup. Having proven our ability

to host major international events we will also seek to host other such events as opportunities present themselves.

**Rugby World Cup 2023:** Fine Gael will strongly support Ireland's efforts to host the 2023 Men's Rugby World Cup and provide the assistance needed to produce a successful bid.

**Legacy of the Gathering:** Following on from the highly successful year of The Gathering, Fine Gael will develop the legacy of networks The Gathering has created and continue to invest in local tourism infrastructure. To build on this, we will hold a successor to The Gathering, in 2019.

## SPORT

Conscious of the significant social and health benefits that participation in sport delivers, Fine Gael is committed to supporting sporting organisations in their efforts to increase sporting participation across the country. Making improvements in the area will be a key factor in tackling the significant obesity challenge that we will face in the future if present trends continue. A healthy Ireland will improve everyone's physical and mental well-being, as well as enhancing the sustainability of future public health costs.

**Sports Capital Programme:** Building on the €130m investment in sports capital projects since 2011, Fine Gael will aim to allocate sports capital grants on an annualised basis. By awarding sports capital grants on an annual basis, sports clubs and voluntary and community organisations will be able to better develop their plans and apply for such funding at the most appropriate time, rather than potentially submitting applications before they are ready, due to a fear that a subsequent round of funding might not materialise.

**Sport for All:** Building on the proposals contained in the National Physical Activity Plan, Fine Gael will launch a programme aimed at encouraging all citizens

to participate in sporting activities on a weekly basis. A fund will be established that could be accessed by voluntary organisations and sporting bodies who can demonstrate that they can achieve clear objectives in this area. Particular preference will be given to organisations who can demonstrate that their programmes will increase participation amongst women and in disadvantaged communities.

**National Sports Policy:** We will publish a National Sports Policy, early in the next Dáil term, to support sport across communities and across Irish society.

**Sports Campus:** We will continue to invest in the National Sports Campus with a view to increasing the use of the facilities by the general public, and provide world-class support to high-performance athletes. In a second term of government, we will open the National Indoor Arena and the National Velodrome and Badminton Centre.

**Concussion in Sport:** Fine Gael is committed to keeping people healthy through sport and safe in sport. We will work with sporting bodies and medical professionals to develop robust concussion-management policies for every sport and to consider appropriate measures to ensure compliance.

## 29. Youth Affairs

Despite the economic crisis we inherited from Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael prioritised our children's welfare, by creating the first dedicated Cabinet Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, establishing a new Child and Family Agency, introducing strong child protection legislation, and holding a children's referendum.

Fine Gael's Long Term Economic Plan ensures that no one will be left behind in economic recovery, and that our focus is that every young person can reach their full potential. For those who do need support from state agencies, their role must be to guide people out of difficulty and into stability and safety.

### ENSURING OUR YOUNG PEOPLE MEET THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

**National Youth Strategy:** In consultation with 4,000 young people, Fine Gael published the first ever National Youth Strategy, which sets out 50 priority action points to be delivered for young people, including the Youth Employability Initiative. €600,000 has been provided for this scheme in Budget 2016, which will provide grants to voluntary youth services that target disadvantaged young people and improve their employability. We will continue to implement this strategy.

**Youth Services:** Fine Gael recognises the value of youth cafés and youth centres in communities with growing teenage populations. We will continue to support the work that the youth sector does for young people. Budget 2016 provided an additional €1.1m in current funding and €2.25m in capital funding.

**Tackling Youth Unemployment:** Tackling youth unemployment is a priority for Fine Gael. We therefore

support an increase in the mandatory schooling age to 17. We will also build on the successful Ballymun Youth Guarantee pilot scheme and roll out a guarantee scheme for all 18 and 19 year olds, where a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship will be made available within a period of 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

**Schools Excellence Fund:** We will establish a new €50m Schools Excellence Fund, which rewards collaborative approaches driven by schools and by parents themselves, aimed at improving school outcomes through the teaching of subjects such as maths, science and technology, key life skills programmes, and pupil retention initiatives. Applications that seek to tackle educational disadvantage will be prioritised. Outside bodies, such as business and higher education institutions, may collaborate with second level schools as part of this initiative.

### ENSURING OUR YOUNG PEOPLE'S WELL-BEING

**Free GP Care for Under 18s:** Fine Gael has introduced free GP care for under 6s and Budget 2016 provided for the introduction of free GP care for under 12s. Subject to negotiations with GPs, the next phase of our Plan is to provide free GP care to 12-17 year olds.

**Wellness and Healthy Eating Programmes:** Fine Gael recognises the growing problem of childhood obesity and supports all schools and pre-schools in developing an integrated wellness policy, which will include healthy eating and cardiovascular fitness.

**Expand the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS):** We will invest an additional €3m to increase the number of NEPS psychologists from 167 to 209 so that the Service can provide enhanced early intervention strategies for staff and pupils, and offer immediate support to schools in cases of critical incidents.

**Physical Education:** Fine Gael supports the introduction of more PE in primary schools and its introduction as a Leaving Cert subject. We will look at various ways in which organisations with experience in children's sports and fitness might provide schools with support.

## CHILD PROTECTION AND CARE

**Child and Family Agency:** Fine Gael established Tusla, Ireland's first dedicated child and family agency, which has changed the way we deliver child protection and welfare services. Funding for 200 additional social workers was provided for in Budget 2016. We will continue to develop Tusla as it cements its progress and moves forward from crisis intervention to early intervention and by end 2020 we will fund 500 additional social workers. We will extend its remit to incorporate new services and build improved interagency working arrangements with other services. For example, child detention schools will be transferred to Tusla as we establish a single national directorate to respond to the challenges and needs of our most troubled and troublesome teens, bringing together child detention, youth justice, special care and targeted therapeutic and support services.

**Ensuring Mandatory Reporting of Child Protection Concerns:** We introduced legislation on child protection and ensured that the voice of the child is

heard. All relevant groups will be required to develop Child Safeguarding Statements so that parents can examine these statements and satisfy themselves that their child is safe and protected from harm.

**Garda Vetting:** Fine Gael will continue to ensure that the highest of standards of vetting procedures are met for all positions where there is substantial access to children and vulnerable adults.

**Guardian Ad Litem (GAL):** We will review the operation of the GAL mechanism representing a child's view in court proceedings to ensure that the perspective of the child is always taken fully into account. This will include clearly setting out the role and functions of GALs, as well as the qualifications and experience required to act as a GAL. This will ensure a better service, and a more effective use of resources to protect children.

**Child Care Law Reporting Project:** Fine Gael will respond, with an implementation plan, to the independent Child Care Law Reporting Project report and recommendations within 6 months of entering government.

## YOUTH JUSTICE

**Early Intervention in Adolescence:** We will continue to extend youth justice and diversion programmes to seek to prevent and tackle youth offending at an early stage.

**Targeting Young Repeat Offenders:** Fine Gael is committed to supporting young offenders with alternative life choices, so that they do not progress to career criminality. We will introduce targeted initiatives, involving Gardaí, Tusla and other agencies, to more effectively deal with those prolific youth offenders responsible for a large proportion of youth crime and for whom traditional Youth Diversion has not worked. This will include, where appropriate, the use of extended detention with educational and therapeutic supports.

**Intensive Bail Supervision:** Fine Gael will pilot a scheme of intensive bail supervision to support vulnerable youths. Such a scheme will improve the chance of youths observing their bail conditions and engaging in therapeutic services. It will also reduce the number of high-cost remand places.

**Youth Detention:** The new Oberstown development project is nearing completion, which will allow St. Patrick's Institution to close this year. New therapeutic intervention services have also been introduced for children in detention, which provide psychology, speech and language therapy and referral to addiction services to children with the most challenging needs. Fine Gael is committed to driving these new initiatives further.

**Drugs Awareness:** Fine Gael will ensure full implementation of the National Drugs Strategy and continue to resource the new Garda Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau and local drugs units to tackle changing trends in drugs supply. We will continue to support Local Drug Taskforce projects for young people including targeted drug prevention and awareness programmes.

# 30. Appendices

Fiscal Commitments under Long Term Economic Plan (€m)	Total 2017-21
Step 1 - More and Better Jobs (Fiscal Space Used Up by €4bn Jobs Fund)	1,000
Step 2 - Making Work Pay (Fiscal Space Used by USC Abolition and Other Tax Changes)	2,458
Step 3 - Investing in Public Services (Fiscal Space Used by Extra Current Spending)	4,182
Contingency and Stability Reserve	2,495

Step 1 - More and Better Jobs (€m)	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Existing Capital Expenditure as per "Building on Recovery"	4,225	4,515	5,075	5,410	5,810
4-Year Rolling Average	4,064	4,270	4,505	4,806	5,203
New "Future Jobs Investment Fund"		500	1,000	1,250	1,250
Revised Total	4,225	5,015	6,075	6,660	7,060
New 4-Year Rolling Average	4,064	4,395	4,880	5,494	6,203
Revised Fiscal Space Used	244	331	485	614	709
<b>Extra €1,000m Fiscal Space Used By "Future Jobs Fund"</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>313</b>

Step 2 - Making Work Pay	Total Cost (€m)
USC Abolition	3,700
Carry-Over of Budget 2021 USC / Tax Package into 2022	-246
5% Levy on Incomes > €100k	-347
Base Broadening for High Earners (Removal of PAYE / Earned Income Tax Credits)	-260
PRSI Broadening	-14
Earned Income Tax Credit for the Self Employed (from €550 in 2016 to to €1,650 by 2018)	107
Increasing Homecarers' Credit from €1,000 to €1,650 (and income threshold to €10,500)	46
<b>Total Income Tax Changes</b>	<b>2,986</b>
Employer PRSI Cut for Part-Time and Low Paid Workers to Offset Minimum Wage Increases	103
10% Rate of Capital Gains Tax on New Start-Ups from 2017 (Held for 5 Years Subject to €10m Cap on Gains)	15
Tax on Sugar Sweetened Drinks	-122
Excise Duties on Cigarettes (45c per year)	-349
Improve Tax Compliance by 0.1% of Taxes Collected	-250
Raise Band A Capital Acquisitions Tax Thresholds to €500,000 from €280,000	75
<b>Total Tax Package</b>	<b>2,458</b>

<b>Step 3 - Investing in Public Services</b>	<b>Total Cost (€m)</b>
<b><i>Welfare Reform to Make Work Pay and Provide Opportunities for Our Young People</i></b>	
"Working Family Payment" (incl. Continuation of FIS Payments to Those Better Off on FIS)	60
Raise Job Seekers' Benefit to €215pw and €200pw for first 3/6 months	30
Restoration of Dental Treatment Benefit Scheme	52
Extra 4,000 "JobsPlus" Places (With Higher Subsidies for Long Term Unemployed)	20
"4-Month Youth Guarantee" for 8,000 Unemployed 18 and 19 Year Olds	22
Double to 31,000 the Number of Apprenticeships	40
<b><i>Expansion of Primary Care and Community Health</i></b>	
Increase Intake of New GP Trainees to 259 per Year (from 167 in 2016)	39
Extension of Free GP Care in Two Phases: (1) 6-11 by end 2016; (2) 12-17 by end 2018	69
Expanding GP Services (Chronic Disease Management; minor surgery; first line investigations etc.)	35
Extending Medical Card to All Children on the Domiciliary Care Allowance	15
Drug Payments Scheme (Cut Max. Annual Cost to €950 per Year over Three Phases)	87
Reduction in the Prescription Charge from €25 to €17.50	25
Dental Care Package for Medical Card Holders	10
Preventative Dental Package for Children	8
Increased Funding for Mental Health	175
Congregated Settings	30
Other Primary and Community Care Measures	90
<b><i>Hospitals and Health Reform</i></b>	
Waiting List Initiative	50
Performance Management Fund	10
Hospital Trusts and "Activity Based Funding" Initiative	25
National Maternity Strategy	46
Extra 137 Hospital Consultants and Other Doctors (On Top of 463 Demographic Increases)	22
Extra 993 Nurses (on top of 1,807 Demographic Increases)	56
Extra 284 Other HSE Medical Professionals (on top of 716 Demographic Increases)	14
Other Hospital and Health Service Developments	789
<b><i>Other Measure to Support Children and Working Families</i></b>	
Increase Paid Parental Leave by an Additional Eight Weeks per Year (on top of 2 weeks Paternity Leave)	84
€2,000 Childcare Subvention	60
Extra 217 HSE Speech and Language Therapists to Bring Total to 1,102 (25% Increase)	10
Extra 42 Additional Educational Psychologists (NEPS) to Bring Total to 238 (25% increase)	3
Extra 832 Teachers (on top of 2,247 to meet demographic pressures)	38
Extra 145 Teachers to Free up Teaching Principals for Management Responsibilities	9
2% Annual Increase in Per-Student (Primary and Secondary) Capitation Rates (on top of €13m for demographics)	38

Extra 20,000 Hours for Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	10
New "School Excellence Fund"	50
Extra 500 Social Workers for Tusla (100 Per Year)	25
<b><i>Elderly and Vulnerable</i></b>	
€5 Per Week Increase in Living Alone Allowance for Over 65s (€1 per week increase each year from €9 to €14)	40
€5 Weekly Increase in State Pension (and related payments) Every Year in 2017-21	791
€4 Weekly Increase in Illness, Invalidity, Disability, Carers Payments, Blind Person's Pension Every Year in 2017-21	284
Double Funding for Monitored Alarms for the Over 80s	4
New €5m Active Retirement Fund to be Administed by Pobal	5
20% Increase in Home Adaptation Grants	11
<b><i>Safer Communities and Policing Reform</i></b>	
Extra 600 Gardai Trainees Per Annum (Net of 300 Retirements - Extra 1,500 in Total)	74
300 civilians (200 COs, 100 Analysts) to Free Up Sworn Officers for Front-Line Policing	11
Double Garda Reserve	1
<b><i>Savings</i></b>	
Procurement Savings as per Government Procurement Strategy	-200
Additional Dividends from Commercial Semi-States (NewERA)	-100
<b><i>Other (including Pay and Pensions post Lansdowne Road Agreement)</i></b>	
	<b>1,115</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,182</b>





National Headquarters, 51 Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2, D02 W924.  
Tel: 01 619 8444 Email: [finegael@finegael.ie](mailto:finegael@finegael.ie) [www.finegael.ie](http://www.finegael.ie)

Facebook: [facebook.com/fine.gael](https://facebook.com/fine.gael); [facebook.com/endakennyofficial](https://facebook.com/endakennyofficial)  
Twitter: [@finegael](https://twitter.com/finegael) [@EndaKennyTD](https://twitter.com/EndaKennyTD) Youtube: [youtube.com/finegael](https://youtube.com/finegael)