



# A Programme for a Partnership Government



**A PROGRAMME FOR  
A PARTNERSHIP GOVERNMENT**

**May 2016**

## Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction .....	9
1. Making Partnership in Democracy Work.....	11
2. Ending the Housing Shortage and Homelessness.....	19
3. Creating A Social Economy.....	32
4. Jobs and Rural Development .....	41
5. Health.....	53
6. Mental Health .....	65
7. Improving the Lives of People with Disabilities .....	70
8. Children and Youth Affairs .....	75
9. Working to Make Our Older Years Better Years.....	82
10. Education .....	86
11. Crime Prevention, Justice and Equality .....	96
12. Agriculture and the Marine .....	108
13. Climate Change .....	121
14. Investing in Society: Urban Regeneration .....	131
15. Ireland and the World.....	137
16. Political and Constitutional Reform .....	147

## Executive Summary

A New Partnership Government is ready to embrace the opportunity presented by the Irish electorate on 26 February 2016. Our ambition is to combine all our different talents to build a strong economy and to deliver a fair society, so that communities thrive, throughout both urban and rural Ireland. We are committed to tackling the most pressing challenges Ireland faces, in areas such as housing and health, while continuing to focus on increasing employment across the country. We will work closely with the Oireachtas, in recognition of the new political reality, to deliver in the interests of all of our people.

For each policy challenge that the new Government prioritises, a clear unambiguous high level ambition will be attached to it to ensure clarity of purpose and ensure clarity of measurement is visible for all stakeholders. Examples include:

- Meet the target of building 25,000 new homes needed every year by 2020
- Create 200,000 jobs by 2020, including 135,000 outside Dublin
- Spend at least €6.75billion more on public services by 2021 compared to 2016
- Reduce the percentage of patients waiting longer than six hours in emergency departments from 32% currently to less than 7% by 2021, and reduce average Patient Experience Times for patients attending emergency departments and average waiting times for appointments, procedures and diagnostic tests across the health service

For every challenge, the new Government will ensure that a balance is struck between addressing urgent priorities and engaging in long-term planning and thinking, so that lasting solutions with broad based support are implemented.

### **Ending the Housing Shortage and Homelessness**

Our approach to governing will be clearly seen in how we address the issues of housing and homelessness. Our ambitious policy agenda will deal with the shortage of new homes and increase housing construction to create a functioning housing market. We also want to

keep families in their homes and avoid repossessions, where possible. To achieve this we will strengthen the existing mortgage arrears framework in a number of significant ways. At the same time we recognise that it is not acceptable in 2016 to have families living in unsuitable emergency accommodation or to have people sleeping rough on our streets. The actions of the New Partnership Government will work to end the homelessness crisis.

### **Creating a Social Economy**

We recognise that economic and social progress go hand in hand. Only a strong economy supporting people at work can pay for the services needed to create a fair society. The New Partnership Government is committed to a “Social Economy” model to deliver a strong economy and a fair society. This “Social Economy” will be built on four foundations:

- (1) Sound Public Finances and a Stable and Broad Tax Base
- (2) A Supportive Environment for Enterprise and Employment
- (3) More Investment in Economic, Regional and Social Infrastructure
- (4) A Just and Fair Society and a More Inclusive Prosperity

### **Rural Development and Urban Regeneration**

We also recognise that as the economy recovers it is essential that the new Government, together with the Oireachtas, puts in place measures to revitalise all of Ireland so that the benefits are felt inside every doorstep and in every community. To help drive this, we will support a new Cabinet level Minister and Department of [Regional Development and Rural Affairs] to provide greater political coordination and prioritisation of the work in other Departments in relevant areas that impact on rural Ireland.

At the same time, we also recognise that targeted investment is needed to regenerate our urban centres. As part of this, we are committed to the sustainment and reform of key programmes and improving the quality of life and opportunities for all sections of the population, especially our younger and older people in the most disadvantaged communities.

## **Health**

Budgets 2015 and 2016 increased the Health budget and it is our intention to work with the Oireachtas to sustain these increases. Efforts to increase access to safe, timely care, as close to patients' homes as possible will be a priority. As part of this, we will focus on developing an enhanced primary care system, and guaranteeing the future sustainability of GP practices in rural Ireland and in disadvantaged urban areas. We will also make a number of key public health interventions, such as implementing a national obesity plan, building capacity in our emergency services, improving waiting times and reforming the HSE into a more efficient and transparent health service.

We also recognise that the stigma associated with mental health remains and will require a wider and more concerted effort across all aspects of society, not just focussed upon our health services. There is a clear consensus that the education system – at primary and secondary level in particular – is the key to greater awareness, to cultural change, to prevention and to early intervention for the next generation. It is also clear that access and availability of both early intervention services as well as aftercare and recovery following an incident need to be developed.

## **Improving the Lives of People with Disabilities**

As part of our commitment to equality of opportunity, we will support people with disabilities in maximising their potential, by removing barriers which impact on access to services, education, work or healthcare. A particular focus will be placed on supports at key transition points – going to school, progressing to further training or education, commencing employment, or moving into a new home. In recognition that personalised budgets provide an individual with more control in accessing services, giving them greater independence and choice, we will devolve budgets to the person so they may shop beyond traditional service providers to better fit their needs.

## **Children**

This same commitment will be at the core of our focus when it comes to children, and we will target investment at crucial areas such as the early years to give all children the best possible start in life. As part of this focus, we will establish a dedicated Prevention and Early

Intervention Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform/Finance. It will focus on early intervention policies that can improve the life outcomes of children.

No child should be left behind in the economic recovery and we should use our strengthening economy to become a leader in the provision of world-class education and skills. We will put a specific focus on early years by, amongst other measures, reducing the pupil-teacher ratio for junior and senior infants and providing smaller classes, which have the greatest beneficial impact on younger pupils.

### **Working to Make our Older Years Better Years**

Our oldest citizens must also be supported, and their diverse needs catered for, with a specific focus on enabling people to live independent and active lives in their communities. To achieve this we will increase the State Pension and improve home care. At the same time, we will also invest in residential care and support in rural and urban regions, so that those in need of it are fully supported.

### **Crime Prevention, Justice & Equality**

We will prioritise the prevention and reduction of crime, by providing investment in An Garda Síochána, creating a more efficient legal system and implementing a tougher sentencing approach for offenders. We will increase Garda numbers to 15,000, invest in CCTV and review the boundaries of Garda districts. Maintaining and strengthening close relations between all communities and the Gardaí will be central to delivering our policing objectives. Working with local communities, we will set priorities to tackle crime and ensure our cities, villages and towns remain safe places in which to live.

We will develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights. We will also develop a new Integrated Framework for Social Inclusion, which 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.

## **Agriculture**

We will pay particular attention to the development of the Agriculture and Food sector. Agriculture is the heartbeat of the rural economy and schemes must be tailored to meet the challenges of farming on all types of land, across all sectors and on all sizes of farm holdings. The next generation of farmers must be supported and Ireland positioned as the highest quality food producing nation in the world, based on innovation and sustainability.

## **Climate Change**

We will shape the long-term direction of Irish environmental policy that will chart the course towards our low carbon future. The new Government and the Oireachtas will agree Ireland's first statutory National Low Carbon Transition and Mitigation Plan.

We want Ireland's image as the green island to inform all areas of policy so that the global image of our country is transformed and we are recognised as one of the cleanest and safest environments in the world. To achieve these ambitious goals, all State bodies will need to engage positively with local communities, both early and often, to manage the transition to a low carbon future.

## **Political & Constitutional Reform**

The new political landscape in Ireland presents a historic opportunity to radically reform Irish politics – to fundamentally change the relationship between Government and the Oireachtas, and with it the relationship between the Irish people and their parliament.

We want to be part of this change; not only to shape it but also to help drive it. We are proposing substantive political and constitutional reform in order to create a strong and responsive political system. Greater openness, improved accountability and delivery, and more effective public participation are at the core of our vision.

We recognise that in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil, the challenge of change will not fall to any one party, nor will it be the responsibility of the Government alone. Achieving political and constitutional



reform will be the responsibility of every member elected to Dáil Éireann. Reform will require constant pursuit throughout the lifetime of the next parliament.

Through all of our efforts we will be guided by a unifying goal; to work together in the interests of all of our people, to deliver a fair society. We recognise that we do not have a monopoly on good ideas. We are open to good ideas from any quarter. We readily acknowledge that we will have to work with others to achieve our shared ambitions. We will listen, we will learn and we will act.

# Introduction

## **A Partnership Government for a Fairer Ireland**

The New Partnership Government is unlike any other established in Ireland since the foundation of the State, comprising Fine Gael, members of the Independent Alliance, and a number of other independent TDs, working together.

In forming the Government, the traditional rules no longer applied. A new approach was required. Both the structure and the consultation process, leading to the Government's formation, represent the politics of possibility. Our discussions took place in a civil and cordial atmosphere. And we have now reached this agreement based on our ambition for a Fairer Ireland.

We are all at one in our belief that government is not about *having* power. It is about *using* power to effect the kind of change, opportunity and compassion we need and desire in our society.

The 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil is diverse but need not be divided. We are united in our common cause to make life better for every person in every part of Ireland. This shared ambition burns strong and bright in our agreed Programme for Government.

The formal process of meeting and agreement began on 24 March. There followed many hours and days of formal discussions and informal conversations, sharing our priorities and perspectives. The result is a New Partnership Government for a Fairer Ireland.

Ireland's continued economic success remains central to our work and the Irish people have worked hard for this progress. A fair society must lean on a strong economy. But that strong economy will work primarily to create a fair and compassionate society which people can feel part of and proud of, a society for everyone, at every stage of their lives. With our different and shared perspectives, this New Partnership Government is perfectly placed to make that happen.

- We want a fair society based on a strong economy
- We want thriving communities in urban and rural Ireland
- We want an Ireland that looks after its people from the time they come into the world to the time they leave
- We want an Ireland where everybody is given the opportunity to succeed, where nobody is left behind
- We want people to have the peace of mind that comes from feeling safe and secure in their lives

None of this will happen on its own. To achieve it we need an ambitious new Government. A new Government bold in its decision-making. A new Government that understands the need to keep our economy strong. A new Government working to give every person equality of opportunity in a fair society.

Ireland has experienced an unprecedented economic crisis. Tackling that crisis has been difficult and painful for our people. Now, however, the foundation of a growing economy is in place. We have choices again. And those choices can transform Ireland and the lives of our people. A new type of government can help build this new Fairer Ireland.

The new Government, working in close partnership with the Oireachtas and others outside of the Oireachtas, will invite the Opposition to come with us. We urge them not to oppose for the sake of party-political gain; not to protest for the sake of protest. We will work with all those who share our ambition to change Ireland for the better.

In forming this New Partnership Government those involved are ready to tackle the many challenges faced by the country. We are mindful of our duty to put the people of Ireland first. Our desire to do politics and government in a different way unites us.

We realise that to govern is a great responsibility, but equally, a great honour. We are humbled by the opportunity and will give all we have to creating a Fairer Ireland.

# 1. Making Partnership in Democracy Work

## **Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil**

For each policy challenge that the new Government prioritises there should be a clear, unambiguous high level ambition attached to it to help ensure clarity of purpose and clarity of measurement for all stakeholders. Some examples might be:

- Meet the target of building 25,000 new homes needed every year by 2020
- Create 200,000 jobs by 2020, including 135,000 outside Dublin
- Commit to spending at least €6.75billion more on public services by 2021 compared to 2016
- Reduce the percentage of patients waiting longer than six hours in emergency departments from 32% currently to less than 7% by 2021, and reduce average Patient Experience Times for patients attending emergency departments and average waiting times for appointments, procedures and diagnostic tests across the health service

Once the ambition is set the supporting framework needs to be installed and supported to deliver on the immediate work-plan and goals.

## **1. An Action Plan Framework for Urgent Priorities**

The Action Plan for Jobs has won recognition from the OECD as a coherent and effective way to confront urgent priorities. Its features can equally be applied to other urgent priorities, such as housing. This process can provide an opportunity for continuing political input both for those within Government and the wider membership of the Dáil.

The framework consists of a rolling cycle of:

- A limited number of high level objectives
- Engagement across Departmental or Agency silos
- A structured consultation leading to an evolution of time bound actions

- Oversight of delivery from the Taoiseach's Office
- Public reporting of delivery of actions and progress towards objectives
- An analytical capacity to measure success, to test the feasibility of new ideas and put forward and shape rolling policy development
- Engagement of partners from outside of the public sector itself - particularly on new initiatives of strategic importance - to act as a catalyst for effective delivery, feedback and learning

This Action Plan process facilitates a way of governing that is a genuine partnership and maximises the chance of delivering the objectives, specifically by:

- The immediate implementation of actions within the powers of the Executive within agreed Budgets
- An open opportunity for structured input into an evolving policy mix by Oireachtas members that are committed to its objectives
- The attraction of a broader civic coalition behind these ambitions
- The facility to evaluate progress in a transparent and accountable fashion

## **2. Addressing Long-Term Challenges**

Our political system is still too focused on the short-term and does not easily accommodate long-term thinking. There are policy challenges where long-term political planning and thinking are as important as a structured approach to delivery. They require the development of a broad based consensus at political and public level before a settled action plan can be developed. In the case of these more long-term challenges a preliminary phase of engagement is required before an Action Plan process should commence. Such challenges include housing and broadband, climate change, pensions and long-term funding models in higher education and health.

Phase 1 of this exercise is to secure buy-in or at least engagement from four key groups; the public, the media, relevant stakeholders, the political system/parties (including relevant Departments & Agencies) and the public service.

One might set an 18 month/24 month timetable for public consultation and structured engagement with key target groups with the stated intention of reporting back to the Dáil where a commitment is given to develop an Action Plan off the back of that process.

To tee up the development of a subsequent Action Plans the consultation/engagement process needs to advise on issues such as:

- A broad agreement on what the challenge is and the objective over a ten year period
- What is a credible ambition for Government to work towards?
- What is a reasonable timetable for action to impact on the challenge?
- A broad understanding of budgetary, legislative, staffing and resource implications of tackling this policy challenge
- Agreement on how success might be measured, without being wholly prescriptive

### **3. Transparent Oversight of Departmental Performance**

A more open partnership approach needs to be developed in every Department. This can be done in a number of ways, some of which are set out below:

- Developing the process of Ministerial Strategy Statements by requiring consultation with key stakeholders - both in politics and outside - and formal tabling in the Dáil
- Requiring Annual Performance Reporting to meet standards of SMART governance
- Upgrading the Evaluation Review process in both quality and coverage so that all programmes are subject to independent review in a standard Dáil term
- The evolution of Service Level Agreements within a defined time period with key delivery agents within each Department to allow more devolved initiatives and accountability
- Linking this strategic planning framework more closely with the annual budgetary cycle
- Building on FOI reforms and committing to further changes and a more open FOI regime

This allows much more open setting of priorities and a framework for much greater accountability by both ministers and the public service.

#### **4. Reforming the Budget Process**

Tied in to the processes involved in developing Action Plans and improved oversight of Departmental performance is the reform of the Budgetary process.

Key to this is a fully resourced independent Budget Office within the Oireachtas available to all members.

This is a key reform in making the functioning of government more effective and more transparent while giving the Dáil greater say in the development of Budgets and Deputies greater opportunity to propose substantive changes.

This could involve the following sequence of actions and outputs:

##### **Pre-Budget Consideration**

##### **Draft Timelines**

Spring Statement sets the parameters on what is possible	April
Presentation of Tax Strategy Reports	July / August
Presentation of draft allocation of expenditures by Government	September
Separating out new initiatives with their projected cost and impact over a 3 year horizon	October
Scope for cost neutral amendment within each estimate area	October

##### **Better Scrutiny of Revised Estimates**

##### **Draft Timelines**

Estimate statements enhanced by also providing a Report detailing activity levels and outcomes from the spending programmes	February
Include "Tax Expenditures" in scrutiny with activity level and costings	February
A "comply or explain" requirement would apply in respect of recommendations of Expenditure Review	March / June

**Better Evaluation of Programmes****Draft Timelines**

Expenditure Reviews must be established on a more comprehensive basis than now occurs	Ongoing
The role of Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in this process must be clear and understood	Ongoing
The C&AG should play a role in identifying good practice and promoting good corporate governance as well as identifying failings	Ongoing
The use of competitive calls to encourage innovation should be promoted where appropriate	Ongoing

**Resourcing the Process****Draft Timelines**

Establish an Oireachtas Budget Office and a new Dáil Committee on Budget and Finance	Ongoing
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These reforms to the Budget process would give much greater scope for consultation and amendment, as well as greater scope for objective evaluation of the outcomes delivered from publicly funded inputs. It would expose public bodies to greater performance accountability and a greater focus on outcomes.

In addition, we will develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights.

We will ensure the institutional arrangements are in place to support equality and gender proofing in the independent fiscal and budget office and within key government departments and to draw on the expertise of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) to support the proofing process.

For Budget 2017 the Budget and Finance Committee will be tasked with looking at gender and equality proofing budget submissions and proposals with independent expertise (including the IHREC) to assist where necessary.



## **5. Evolving Political Relationships**

Central to our approach in a new form of government must be the concept of ‘good faith and no surprises.’

Other countries that have experienced regular minority governments or variable coalitions have developed conventions which make it easier to maintain a partnership approach. A number of reforms that are complementary to this agenda include relaxing whipping rules, sharing ordering of Dáil business and others that are being managed by the Oireachtas Reform group operating under the chairmanship of the Ceann Comhairle.

In order to make partnerships work in practice within the Oireachtas changes will be necessary. Among them are the following:

- Develop extended opposition Dáil time and access to assistance in legal drafting of workable legislative instruments
- Develop agreed urgency procedures in the Dáil to prioritise certain Bills
- Develop a structured process for resolving differences between government and parliament
- Evolve varied levels of cooperation agreements ranging from ‘consultative’ to ‘enhanced confidence and supply’ which could be worked out with opposition parties willing to support stable government
- Evolve better methods of sharing information from Departments with Deputies

All of this will require further collaborative work with all parties in the Dáil.

## **6. Partnership in a Minority Government**

In a minority government situation the cohesiveness of those participating will be very important to the ability to project a positive image to the public and to persuade both the Oireachtas and wider civic society of the value of government initiatives.

This protocol would apply equally to TDs within Fine Gael, TDs in other groupings and other TDs making up the Government. It is recognised that Independents don't have the formal whipping arrangement which is a feature of political parties. This accommodates a wider spectrum of views and opinions to be expressed by those groups, which is to be valued.

The new Oireachtas will see the relaxation of whipping arrangements across all parties. Notwithstanding that, a balance has to be struck between the coherence of government and its capacity to implement policy and the openness for all voices to be heard.

All parties to this agreement will operate on a 'good faith' and 'no surprises' basis for the term of this Oireachtas.

### **A) Policy Implementation**

On items agreed as part of the Programme for Government, all parties to the agreement will publicly support and vote for the development and execution of the associated initiatives. Parties to the agreement will also support Budget and Confidence matters.

Policy initiatives advanced by parties to the Government during this Oireachtas term will be considered under agreed procedures to allow full consideration of the issues involved before any potential Dáil vote. Where an agreed position is reached, all parties to the agreement will publicly support the process and the outcome.

Individual ministerial strategy statements will be considered by Government and by the Oireachtas before adoption in a manner which allows early input by parties to this agreement. Once settled, this would represent an agreed approach of the parties on the broad direction of policy for that Department.

### **B) Office Holders**

Ministers and Junior Ministers will have formal participation in Cabinet and Cabinet Committees which carry obligations of confidentiality and collegiate decision-making, and being collectively bound by the Cabinet decision.

This means that Cabinet decisions, for example, in the response to Private Members' Motions and on Government Memoranda, will be collectively decided and bind all office

holders. This will also require communication ahead of Cabinet within groupings involved to ensure that issues are understood across the group in advance.

### **C) Consultation**

Formal consultation will be managed between the Taoiseach's Office and the appointed interlocutor for the group and include:

- Regular leadership meetings
- Ongoing relationships at portfolio level

They will be designed to be inclusive and to minimise surprises.

Policy briefings will occur on issues which are likely to be politically sensitive. Briefings and consultations shall be confidential unless otherwise agreed.

Formal Early Warning Procedures will be developed across all Departments.

Recognising that not all issues will allow early warning and prior consultation or agreement, parties shall operate to a protocol to permit differences to be triaged involving

- Notice of concern giving time for response
- Discussion involving representatives of the constituent parts of government.
- The adoption of a common response when possible

Detailed arrangements will be further developed and agreed in this regard.

### **D) Procedures**

Where amendments to legislation are being tabled by a party to this agreement, it shall be done according to an agreed protocol involving

- Advance notification to the Minister before the amendment is tabled
- Agreement to give time for an assessment of feasibility and consequences before being put to a vote

All parties shall support procedural motions unless advised previously that such support is not forthcoming.

## **2. Ending the Housing Shortage and Homelessness**

### **Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil**

Providing affordable, quality and accessible housing for our people is a priority for the New Partnership Government. We will work together - and with those who have other good ideas - to address the consequences of the devastating construction bubble and the property crash.

We recognise the difficulties faced by people renting accommodation and by first time buyers seeking to enter the property market. Our ambitious policy agenda will deal with the shortage of new homes. Our actions will increase housing construction to create a functioning housing market. Some 25,000 new homes will be built every year by 2020, with higher targets thereafter, to address unmet needs.

We believe that a fair society looks after its most vulnerable citizens. It is not acceptable in 2016 to have families living in unsuitable emergency accommodation or to have people sleeping rough on our streets. The actions of the New Partnership Government will work to end the housing shortage and homelessness crisis.

### **1. Leadership on Housing**

#### **A) Political Leadership**

The Taoiseach will appoint a Cabinet Minister for Housing to provide political leadership on resolving the housing shortage and homelessness crisis. (First 100 Days Action)

We will support the Oireachtas Committee on Housing as a forum for consulting with all relevant State and non-State stakeholders, including builders, developers and housing charities, on the design and implementation of new housing policies. (First 100 Days Action)

We will seek the views of stakeholders on the role and function of the Housing Agency in the provision of additional housing and we will engage with European authorities on the budgetary treatment of new housing development. (First 100 Days Action)

## **B) Action Plan for Housing**

The first major initiative of the new Minister for Housing and the Government will be to, draw on the work of the new Oireachtas Committee on Housing and Homelessness, draft and publish within the first 100 days a new Action Plan for Housing, to include, but not be limited to, the actions laid out in this document. The drafting of the new Action Plan will be a collaborative process with opportunities for all stakeholders, including local authorities, housing agencies and the voluntary sector, to contribute ideas through submissions to the Minister and a new Oireachtas Committee on Housing. When completed, each action will be assigned to a specific organisation with published timelines for implementation. (First 100 Days Action)

The Action Plan will be subject to key targets and deadlines and regular Cabinet review. Implementation will be overseen by the Taoiseach and his officials through a new Cabinet Committee on Housing, with quarterly progress reports published.

The Action Plan will look at existing housing stock that is uninhabited, and vacant commercial units, with a view to incentivising the refurbishment and change of use to homes.

The Department will publish a monthly release on all housing construction activity and output in the State for public, voluntary and private housing. (Year 1 Action)

The eighth report of the Constitutional Convention on economic, social and cultural rights recommended that the State progressively realise economic, social and cultural rights subject to maximum available resources, that this duty be recognisable by the courts, and that specific additional rights on housing be inserted into the Constitution. Due to the substantial questions raised on the balance of rights, proper governance and resources, we will refer this report to the new Oireachtas Committee on Housing for consideration.

## **2. Improving Housing Supply**

### **A) Social Housing**

We will significantly increase and expedite the delivery of social housing units. The new Government will accelerate the delivery of the committed €3.8 billion Social Housing Strategy – funded through the existing Capital Programme - which targets the delivery of 35,000 new social housing units. The local authorities will deliver new housing in two phases: (1) 18,000 additional housing units by end 2017, and (2) 17,000 additional housing units by end 2020. Local authorities will be provided with the resources and the power to implement this.

Steps will be taken to introduce more coordination between local authorities, housing agencies and voluntary housing associations, to ensure value for money for the taxpayer when purchasing housing or land.

The Social Housing Strategy also commits funding to meet housing need through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS); however until the supply of new housing is increased it will be difficult to meet the targets set out. Enhancing security of tenure is essential for the HAP to be an effective means of delivery for tenants. For this reason the new Government will introduce a new model of affordable rental to provide more housing options for low income households and to relieve pressure on the social housing sector. We will also increase Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) limits by up to 15% taking account of geographic variations in market rents, and extend the roll out by local authorities of the HAP, including the capacity to make discretionary enhanced payments.

To accelerate delivery we will devolve more power, responsibility and resources to local authorities, including for the design of social housing. Drawing from the benefits of the devolved grant system for schools, we will increase the threshold for the single-stage process for social housing approvals by central Government from €2 million to €5 million, subject to agreement between central Government and local authorities on a new risk-management mechanism to ensure cost control. (Year 1 Action)

We will encourage the expansion of Voluntary Housing Services through a dedicated “best practice” and central coordination support section in central Government with responsibility for increasing delivery by housing associations for funding schemes and coordinating policy implementation for the sector. We will investigate with all stakeholders how Credit Unions can support social housing through Voluntary Housing Services (Year 1 Action).

As part of the Action Plan for Housing, we will look to support housing associations in their establishment of a sector led special purpose vehicle to provide long term finance for the sector.

The new Tenant Purchase Scheme will make specific provision for local authority discretion to limit the disposal of certain types of social housing in short supply.

The new Government will incentivise local authorities to return more vacant social housing units to use by linking exchequer funding for local authorities with better performance in estate management and will publish regular statistics on their performance. (Year 1 Action)

We will maintain enhanced tax relief for landlords who accept rent supplement and HAP tenants. We will request the new Oireachtas Committee on Housing to examine other tax relief proposals designed to encourage a greater supply of private rented accommodation for tenancies supported by housing assistance, longer term leases and support more medium term emergency accommodation for homeless families. (First 100 Days Action)

As part of the Action Plan for Housing process, we will explore the option of incentivising developers to build and lease back homes to housing authorities and associations. As part of the same process, the new Minister for Housing will review and strengthen the regulations governing listed buildings that are derelict.

We will review the disparate systems of differential rents for social housing across local authorities to ensure that housing supports, including the HAP, are fair and sustainable, prioritise those on the lowest incomes and avoid creating social welfare traps that stop people returning to work or to the private housing market. (Year 1 Action)

We will ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are incorporated into all future housing policies.

### **B) A New Model for Affordable Rental**

It is clear that the social housing sector will remain under pressure unless we reform our wider housing sector. There needs to be more options beyond full State social housing or full private home ownership or rental. European countries with more stable, affordable and socially inclusive housing systems generally provide modest support for large-scale provision of secure rental accommodation, mostly by non-profit bodies, in which rents reflect costs, not the maximum that market pressures will sustain.

To this end the new Government will introduce a new model of affordable rental by working with housing associations and local authorities to develop a “cost rental” option for low-income families, as recommended by the NESC. The new Minister for Housing will provide leadership, work with all relevant stakeholders, and will set out in the Action Plan for Housing, a roadmap to implement the cost rental model. The Minister will set out a plan on how we will scale up the number of cost rental housing units in the years ahead. Cost rental will help to keep rental costs manageable for tenants and allow them to avoid future rental increase shocks. (First 100 days)

We will examine, as part of the Action Plan for Housing, how we can better incentivise landlords and tenants to agree long-term leases in the private sector.

### **C) Boosting Supply in the Private Sector**

We will remove barriers to private housing supply and initiate an affordable housing scheme. We will work with the Irish banks, the European Investment Bank, industry bodies, the Central Bank and the Irish Strategic Investment Fund to develop a new ‘Help to Build’ funding scheme for the development of affordable housing in the private sector. (Year 1 Action)



We will re-prioritise the capital programme to put in place a new €100million Local Infrastructure Housing Fund, from which local authorities can deliver local projects needed to unlock development land in high demand areas. (Year 1 Action)

We will review the CPO powers available to local authorities in order to fast-track the opening up of land in both public and private housing developments.

We support NAMA's plan to work with and fund developers to deliver 20,000 residential units before the end of 2020. However, given the scale of the housing supply challenge we will request that NAMA review their business plan to encourage it to be more ambitious in housing delivery. (Year 1 Action)

In the meantime we will also expect NAMA to continue to agree rent reductions for SMEs and collaborate with the IDA to maximise new commercial investment opportunities from its portfolio. (Ongoing)

In the long term we will support the use of the projected NAMA surplus after 2018 to fund new investment in infrastructure, including affordable housing programmes to ensure a sustainable level of housing output.

We will support the Irish Strategic Investment Fund to encourage the delivery of housing-related enabling infrastructure in large-scale priority development areas. (Ongoing)

We recognise the potential role that Credit Unions can play in housing finance. We support the efforts of the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank to gradually lift current lending restrictions as appropriate, including for housing. To investigate what role the Credit Union movement can play in the development of new housing, the Department of Finance will engage with the League of Credit Unions to help them develop their housing proposals. (First 100 Days Action)

We will expand the existing targeted development contribution rebate scheme in Dublin and Cork to other areas suffering a housing shortage in order to encourage immediate development. (Year 1 Action)

Consistent with our existing deficit reduction targets, we will ask the Oireachtas to consider the merits of a temporary targeted reduction of the rate of VAT from 13.5% to 9% on new, affordable houses and apartments, both public and private, timed to generate the maximum impact on supply and to target principally the purchasers of affordable homes. (Year 1 Action)

We will examine the possibilities for new and innovative roles for local authorities in housing provision, via means such as Municipal Housing Companies and arm's length management organisations. (Year 1 Action)

We will support housing associations to purchase houses being sold by investors, in such situations where a sale and vacant possession could lead to families becoming homeless.

The new Government will help fund the completion of the remaining unfinished housing developments, which have been reduced from nearly 3,000 in 2010 to 668 by the end of 2015. We will seek to fund another €10million Special Resolution Fund from increased capital funding available from 2017. (Year 2 Action)

To deter "land hoarding" by developers, we will monitor and benchmark the use by local authorities of the new "Vacant Site Levy" legislated for by the last Government, to take effect from 2018.

In recognition of the potential of third level institutions to provide or facilitate more student accommodation on their property or in their environs the new Minister for Housing will examine new measures to boost student accommodation supply as part of the Action Plan on Housing.

The new Action Plan for Housing will reinforce proactive land management to increase the pipeline of suitable land for social and private housing development, in partnership with local authorities.

### **3. Preventing & Tackling Homelessness**

#### **A) Preventing Homelessness**

To protect low-income families in private rented accommodation and avoid further market rental inflation we will expand access to the Tenancy Sustainment Protocol throughout the country. This scheme, operating in conjunction with Threshold in the Dublin and Cork City areas, has assisted almost 6,000 rent supplement households to date. (First 100 Days Action)

The new Action Plan for Housing will contain a specific section on ‘preventing homelessness’ that will consult on and target new measures such as:

- Family mediation services
- Step down services and facilities after drug rehabilitation
- Preventing youth homelessness
- Services to victims of domestic abuse
- Structured programmes for those leaving hospital, prison or state care after a long period of time
- Community mental health services

#### **B) Tackling Homelessness**

We will end the use of unsuitable long-term emergency accommodation, such as hotels and B&Bs, for homeless families by, in part, delivering 500 rapid-delivery housing units. 22 Units have been made available in Ballymun. More units will be targeted for completion in Dublin in 2016. All local authorities will be allowed to develop their own rapid build housing schemes for emergency accommodation if appropriate.

We will also:

- Maintain the rent limits available under the HAP Homeless Pilot to 50% above the rent supplement levels (Ongoing)
- Implement a housing-focused strategy to end involuntary long-term homelessness (Ongoing)
- End the need for rough sleeping by providing a high level of funding for homeless services that supports emergency beds and accommodation options. Currently €70million a year is budgeted for and we will keep this financial support under review as the homeless situation evolves (Ongoing)
- Acknowledge the complex needs of rough sleepers and provide healthcare, mental health and other services as required to help the transition to independent living (Ongoing)

#### **4. Planning Reform**

We want to attract people back into main streets and town centres by examining new incentives to regenerate derelict and underused buildings. To achieve this we will seek Oireachtas support for a new Town and Village Renewal Scheme to support the revitalisation of our towns and villages and improve the living and working environment of communities. Using the €30million available from this year to local authorities for town and village regeneration, the scheme will, among other things, seek to increase the attractiveness and sustainability of our towns and villages as places to live and work. (Year 1 Action)

In the context of this new scheme we will examine:

- Introducing a similar scheme to the 'Living City Initiative' to regenerate town centres and villages throughout Ireland (Year 1 Action)
- Establishing a national register of derelict sites, in addition to the new vacant site levy, to bring vacant and underutilised sites into beneficial use for housing and urban regeneration purposes (Year 2 Action)

- Mandating local authorities with better land management powers, including the possibility of additional CPO (Compulsory Purchase Order) capabilities (Year 2 Action)
- Reclassifying and incentivising the use of underutilised or vacant areas over ground floor premises in towns, for both residential and commercial use (Year 1 Action)

We will propose to reform the Derelict Sites Act to tackle the under use and hoarding of derelict land by the State, semi-State and private sectors. (Year 1 Action)

We will propose a new Rural Resettlement Scheme to promote the advantages of rural living and ease housing pressures in high demand urban areas. (Year 1 Action)

We will promote higher urban densities in terms of housing design, particularly in public transport corridors, through a new National Planning Framework to replace the National Spatial Strategy, to be finalised by the first quarter of 2017. (Year 1 Action)

We will commission a “root and branch” review of the planning system with the aim of reducing the uncertainty and length of planning processes. This will include a review of the resources and structures required by An Bord Pleanála to meet its statutory objective of deciding appeals within 18 weeks. (Year 1 Action)

We will conduct a review of nationwide housing building standards. (Year 1 Action)

We will commission an audit of land holdings by State bodies and local authorities that might be used for housing. (Year 1 Action)

We will consult on possible amendments to the planning guidelines to support the construction of on campus or near-campus, high-quality, purpose-built student accommodation, and retirement villages for the elderly. (Year 1 Action)

## **5. Protecting & Promoting Tenancy Rights and Home Ownership**

### **A) Protecting & Promoting Tenancy Rights**

To reflect the growing public concern regarding credit servicing firms and other property firms we will ask the Central Bank and the Oireachtas Committee on Housing to examine the legislation introduced last year that ensured that borrowers, whose loans are sold to third parties, maintain the same regulatory protections they had prior to the sale. We will provide greater protection for mortgage holders and tenants and SMEs whose loans have been transferred to non-regulated entities ('vulture funds'). (Year 1 Action)

We will review the current regulatory regime for the private rental sector to ensure an appropriate balance is struck between the rights and interests of landlords and tenants. (Year 2 Action)

### **B) Promoting & Protecting Home Ownership**

Difficulties faced by first time buyers in accessing mortgage finance have placed increased pressure on the rental market and may be hampering the recovery of the residential construction sector. The new Government will work with the Central Bank, as part of its review of its mortgage lending limits, to develop a new "Help to Buy" scheme to ensure availability of adequate, affordable mortgage finance or mortgage insurance for first time buyers as new housing output comes on-stream. (Year 1 Action)

The Government submission to the Central Bank will include a request to consider a 'capacity to pay' test (e.g. the payment capacity of potential purchasers based on rent paid over a five year period to be off-set against the current deposit rules).

We will overhaul the terms of the Tenant Purchase Scheme to make it more attractive for social housing tenants and to raise new funds for housing development. (Year 1 Action)

It is not ethically acceptable for Irish banks to charge excessive interest rates on standard variable rate customers. We will take all necessary action to tackle high variable interest rates; including through establishing a new code of conduct for switching mortgage provider, administered by the Central Bank and the development of a new, easy-to-use

standardised and dedicated switching form. We will also request the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission to work with the Central Bank to set out the options for the Government in terms of market structure, legislation and regulation to lower the cost of secured mortgage lending and improve the degree of competition and consumer protection. (Year 1 Action)

We support the Central Bank's regulation of 'negative equity' mortgage products that allow homeowners to move house while still in negative equity. (Ongoing)

We support the need to develop an overall banking policy that encourages more entrants and a vibrant banking sector with real competition in order to provide more choice to mortgage holders. (Ongoing)

The new Government wants to keep families in their homes and avoid repossessions insofar as is possible. We will protect the family home and introduce additional long term solutions for mortgage arrears cases. To accelerate the resolution of the remaining difficult-to-solve mortgage arrears cases, and building on recent reforms to insolvency and bankruptcy, we will:

- Establish a new national service to standardise the supports available to borrowers in mortgage arrears, with powers and resources needed to advise, assess, negotiate and recommend solutions
- Review the thresholds and the processes for Personal Insolvency Arrangements (including SMEs) and raise where appropriate
- Establish a dedicated new court to sensitively and expeditiously handle mortgage arrears and other personal insolvency cases, including through imposing solutions, including those recommended by the new service. The hearings of this court could be held in private if requested by the debtor
- Work with the Central Bank to amend the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears to include an obligation on providers of mortgage credit to provide a range of sustainable arrears solutions. This Code of Conduct will be put on a statutory basis

- Fund an information campaign to encourage engagement in the new resolution process

We will also retain mortgage interest relief beyond the current end date of December 2017 on a tapered basis.

Essentially we are seeking to create a framework that removes fear and brings predictability to a difficult process. We want to encourage those who have not been able to engage to reach a suitable long term debt resolution and avoid repossession if possible.



### 3. Creating A Social Economy

#### Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil

Economic and social progress go hand in hand. Only a strong economy supporting people at work can pay for the services needed to create a fair society. It is equally the case that higher levels of public investment in social and economic infrastructure, skills, childcare, and community empowerment are needed for more inclusive, fairer and sustainable patterns of economic growth.

We accept that the economic recovery remains incomplete and fragile. Many people have yet to feel the benefit of the upturn in the economy. Many families are still struggling financially. Many communities - both rural and urban - have inadequate services and infrastructure. There are genuine concerns about domestic and international risks. There are real fears about slipping back into the worst days of the recent past.

Based on our different experiences and perspectives we want to follow a new approach to ensure the best life opportunities possible for all our people. We want to protect our growing economy and to see the gains of further progress shared fairly with all Irish citizens. We will prioritise regional development across all policy areas.

The New Partnership Government is committed to a “Social Economy” model to deliver a strong economy and a fair society. This “Social Economy” will be built on four foundations:

- (1) Sound Public Finances and a Stable and Broad Tax Base
- (2) A Supportive Environment for Enterprise and Employment
- (3) More Investment in Economic, Regional and Social Infrastructure
- (4) A Just and Fair Society and a More Inclusive Prosperity

As we work with the Oireachtas to avoid the mistakes that caused the economic crisis, this ambitious framework will be the basis for designing and assessing policies, and measuring progress.

By combining our different experiences and different outlooks, the members of the New Partnership Government will make Ireland a country in which every citizen shares in the benefits of economic growth and, in turn, lives in a fair society. As part of this, we will seek to alleviate pressures affecting household budgets across energy, childcare, medical and insurance costs.

### **1. Sound Public Finances and a Stable and Broad Tax Base**

To retain confidence in the economy and protect our country from growing international risks, we will maintain our commitment to meeting in full the domestic and EU fiscal rules as enshrined in law. By adhering to these rules and by delivering steady economic growth, we will eliminate the remaining Government deficit by 2018, and keep the public finances broadly in balance thereafter. We will also establish a rainy day fund.

At the same time, economic repair must be complemented by social repair. We need to meet the needs of a growing population and to repair the damage to our economic and social infrastructure from the economic collapse and the cuts in public expenditure over the last eight years. We are committed to re-growing public expenditure in a sustainable way, while always ensuring value for money for the taxpayer. To address unmet needs, we will introduce budgets that will involve at least a 2:1 split between public spending and tax reductions.

In this way, the Government will – consistent with current growth forecasts and adherence to the fiscal rules – work with the Oireachtas to spend at least an additional €6.75 billion in delivering public services by 2021 compared with 2016, to cover:

- The costs of an ageing and growing population
- Targeted improvements in public services, with a particular focus on health, education, disability, and child development and care
- Targeted improvements in welfare payments for the elderly, people with disabilities, the sick and carers, among others
- Sustainable increases in public service pay and pensions

New investment in public services will allow the new Government to recruit additional front-line service professionals such as doctors, nurses, Gardaí, teachers, and social workers within a reformed and better-managed public service.

We will also keep the tax and revenue base broad, while reducing the rate of tax on work and some other activities to achieve specific social and economic objectives, such as full employment, more housing and urban and rural regeneration. Any new tax incentives will be subject to detailed cost-benefit analysis, public consultation and Oireachtas debate.

We will not rely on unpredictable and fragile sources of revenue to finance permanent public spending increases. The reductions in personal tax rates – such as the continued phasing out of the USC – needed to reward work and support enterprise and employment (see below) will be funded largely through:

- Extra revenues from not indexing personal tax credits and bands
- The removal of PAYE tax credit for high earners and other measures to ensure the tax system remains fair and progressive
- Higher excise duties on cigarettes and increased enforcement and sanctions on the illegal importation and sale of cigarettes
- Increase enforcement and sanction of fuel laundering
- A new tax on sugar sweetened drinks
- Improving tax compliance

To complete the repair of the banking system and ensure that banks are supporting the wider public interest, we will:

- Commit that the State will use its bank shareholding in the best interests of the Irish people
- Not sell more than 25% of any bank before the end of 2018. (plus any small additional shareholding required by the under-writer to complete the sales process)
- Request the Central Bank to procure an independent assessment of the arrears and negative equity loan books of the banks

- Cease to appoint new Public Interest Directors to the banks, and reform the procedures for the appointment of bank directors by the State, with a view to increasing transparency in the process

### **A) Public Sector Pay and Industrial Relations**

We will fully implement the Lansdowne Road Agreement in accordance with the timelines agreed and recognise that the recruitment issues in the public service must be addressed as part of this Agreement. We will establish a Public Service Pay Commission to examine pay levels across the public service, including entry levels of pay. We will support the gradual, negotiated repeal of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts having due regard to the priority to improve public services and in recognition of the essential role played by public servants. Working with the Oireachtas we will reverse the public service pension reductions introduced during the crisis by 2021, prioritising in the early years those in receipt of low pensions.

We will respect the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court as the proper forum for state intervention in industrial relation disputes and ensure that both bodies are supported and adequately resourced to fulfil their roles.

## **2. A Supportive Environment for Enterprise and Employment**

### **A) Jobs Ambition**

In the last five years Ireland has created or rebuilt sustainable sectors which can support continuing strong growth. A strong, sustainable, stable and growing economy can provide us with the resources we need to rebuild vital services, cut high personal taxes and protect our country from any unexpected economic shocks. By now committing to an ambition of full employment and implementing a strategic plan to deliver the new sectoral and regional opportunities to underpin that ambition, we can create the room in our public finances to meet our urgent ambitions in other areas.

Specifically, the new Government will:

- Target 200,000 extra jobs by 2020, including 135,000 outside of Dublin

- Reduce the unemployment rate to 6%
- Facilitate the return of at least 70,000 emigrants
- Prioritise balanced regional development, which will allow us to aim for an unemployment rate in each county that is within one percent of the State average by 2020

## **B) Jobs Plans**

We will maintain the OECD endorsed Action Plan for Jobs process that will, on an annual basis, consult with all relevant stakeholders to draft an Action Plan that contains the best ideas for job creation within available resources. Building on this process we will also implement regional jobs plans, with local input, to help spread growth to all areas.

With the right policy mix behind it, Irish enterprise can deliver performance to match these ambitions. The key now is to do more to support Irish business to create more jobs 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
- Protect our national competitiveness from unsustainable cost growth (this involves active innovation and investment as well as containing income demands to the genuine delivery of productivity improvements)
- Excel in getting the basics right, and deliver a job-fit business environment which ranks in the top tier globally
- Invest in skills and training, to allow all to benefit from new opportunities in a recovering economy

This will require a sustained cross government focus on addressing the challenges set out in the Enterprise 2025 strategy over the coming years.

## **C) Tax Reforms to Keep Ireland Competitive**

We will maintain Ireland's 12.5% Corporation Tax, and engage constructively with any measures to work towards international tax reform while critically analysing proposals that may not be in Ireland's long term interests. We will work with our international partners in

tackling aggressive international tax planning through the OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) initiative. We will also closely monitor the introduction of the Knowledge Development Box (KDB) to encourage both Irish and multi-national companies to develop their knowledge-based capital in Ireland.

We will reduce the rate of Capital Gains Tax for new start-ups to 10% from 2017 (held for five years and subject to a €10million cap on gains).

High personal tax rates in Ireland discourage work and jobs. To make Ireland's personal taxation system more competitive, we will ask the Oireachtas to continue to phase out the USC as part of a wider medium-term income tax reform plan – to be published for consultation with the Oireachtas Committee on Finance by July and for approval by the Oireachtas in October – that keeps the tax base broad, reduces excessive tax rates for middle income earners, and limits the benefits for high earners. Reductions will be introduced on a fair basis with an emphasis on low and middle income earners.

Working with the Oireachtas, we will increase the Earned Income Tax Credit from €550 to €1,650 for the self-employed, to match the PAYE credit, by 2018.

We will explore the mechanisms through which SMEs can reward key employees with share options in a tax-efficient manner.

We will seek to introduce a PRSI scheme for the self-employed and provide a supportive tax regime for entrepreneurs and the self-employed.

Working with the Oireachtas, we will increase the Small Benefits Exemption (voucher) from €500 to €650, which is equivalent to approximately one week's wages for those on the average industrial wage.

Finally, we will work with the Oireachtas to raise the Band A Capital Acquisitions Tax Threshold (including all gifts and inheritances from parents to their children) to €500,000.

### **3. More Investment in Social, Regional and Economic Infrastructure**

Our national infrastructure compares poorly with the most advanced European countries, and threatens to smother the recovery in some urban areas through housing shortages and transport congestion, as well as limiting the participation in the economic recovery of individual communities and entire regions.

To help address this challenge we will protect the existing €42 billion capital investment plan published by the outgoing Government for the period 2016-21, including the €5.5 billion plan set out by Irish Water to continue to upgrade the dilapidated national water infrastructure. We will also provide additional exchequer capital, if needed, to deliver on our commitment to bring next generation broadband to every house and business in the country by 2020.

We will seek to use Government current and capital funding and tax and regulatory supports to leverage additional private investment in sectors struggling with large infrastructure deficits, including residential care, housing, regional transport and third level education.

The new Government will take advantage of the recent redefinition by the European Commission of structural balance for Ireland from 0% of GDP to -0.5% of GDP, and the favourable treatment of capital investment under the fiscal rules, to propose Oireachtas approval for a cumulative, additional €4 billion in exchequer capital investment up to 2021.

Following the mid-term review of the Capital Plan which is expected mid-2017, we will increase capital investment in transport, broadband, education, health and flood defences.

### **4. A Just and Fair Society and a More Inclusive Prosperity**

We have previously enjoyed and wasted prosperity. While Ireland has been a wealthy country for a generation, the gap between rich and poor has remained far too large. Even before the economic collapse, Ireland had the highest rate of jobless households in Europe, facilitated by educational disadvantage, poor childcare, and a passive social welfare system

that failed to offer people the supports and training needed for work. Scandals about historic and ongoing abuse and neglect of children, the elderly, racial minorities, people with disabilities and others, have long been an indictment of the motivation and capacity of our State and non-State institutions to include vulnerable groups in our economic and social progress.

The new Government commits to a more inclusive prosperity that uses economic growth to create a more just and fair society. Separate sections of this document commit to new actions to help the elderly, people with disabilities, children, people with mental illnesses, as well as to targeted additional investments in health, child development and care, education and other public services. In addition, we are also committed to:

**A) Developing a new Integrated Framework for Social Inclusion, to 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 National Women’s Strategy, (ii) New National Disability Inclusion Strategy, (iii) Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, (iv) National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, and (v) New Action Plan for Educational Inclusion.

**B) Reducing poverty levels by improving the take-home pay of families on low-incomes**

Specifically, we will work with the Oireachtas to introduce a new ‘Working Family Payment’, targeted at low-income families. Every parent working at least 15 hours per week will be guaranteed that every extra hour they work will result in more take-home pay. We will also make available further training and skills development opportunities for those in low income jobs. By increasing income disregards for lone parents through the Working Family Payment scheme we can progressively support low and middle income lone parents in work.

The New Government will develop our work activation, social protection and further education services to ensure a seamless service for jobseekers.



**C) Reducing poverty levels by supporting an increase in the minimum wage to €10.50 per hour over the next five years**

We will rely on the annual recommendations of the Low Pay Commission on the level of adjustment each year. Working with the Oireachtas we will cut Employers' PRSI for low-income workers to mitigate the cost of minimum wage increases, in order to protect jobs.

We will tackle the problems caused by the increased casualisation of work that prevents workers from being able to save or have any job security.

We will strengthen the role of the Low Pay Commission in relation to the gender pay gap and in-work poverty. We will strengthen regulation on precarious work.

**D) Reinforcing Labour Market Activation**

The new Partnership Government will develop our social protection services into an active employment service that works with, and helps, jobseekers to return to work. We are determined that nobody will be left behind in the recovery and for this reason the Government needs to be more radical to end the plight of jobless households. In addition to implementing the 'Pathways to Work' 5 Year Strategy which aims to help 50,000 Long-Term Unemployed people into jobs, we will publish a dedicated 'Pathways to Work for Jobless Households' to support jobless households into employment.

## 4. Jobs and Rural Development

### Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil

As the economy recovers it is essential that the new Government, together with the Oireachtas, puts in place measures to revitalise all of Ireland so that the benefits are felt inside every doorstep and in every community.

#### 1. Leadership on Jobs & Rural Development

##### **A) Jobs Target**

The ultimate goal of the new Government will be to deliver sustainable full employment. This will mean an extra 200,000 jobs by 2020, of which 135,000 will be outside of Dublin, leading to more people at work than ever before.

##### **B) A new Cabinet Minister and Department of [Regional Development and Rural Affairs]**

We will support a new Cabinet level Minister and Department of [Regional Development Rural Affairs] to provide greater political coordination and prioritisation of the work in other Departments in relevant areas that impact on rural Ireland. The Minister will create a clearing house forum to investigate the best ideas to advance economic and social progress in rural Ireland and will work to implement the best proposals in partnership with the rest of Government.

##### **C) Regional Spread of Growth and Jobs**

We will implement regional jobs plans, with local input, to help spread growth to all areas. The aim of these strategies will be to encourage agencies and companies to work together and build on the competitive strengths of each region. We will mandate local enterprise offices to set county-specific targets on job creation.

##### **D) Western Development Commission**

We will also reinforce the role of the Western Development Commission (WDC), so that it supports the implementation of regional jobs plans 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 €2million 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.

#### **E) LEADER**

LEADER groups will continue to play a central role in the rejuvenation of communities throughout Ireland and the new Partnership Government is committed to increasing funding for the LEADER programme. We will work with local authorities, local action groups and local communities to ensure that LEADER funding delivers the maximum possible benefit for communities throughout the country. In addition, we will make available more competitive capital funding to allow LEADER groups bid for additional resources for projects that best support rural economic development.

#### **F) Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA)**

Building on the €3million provided to support CEDRA initiatives, we will 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. The new Minister for [Regional Development and Rural Affairs] will take charge of implementing the CEDRA report.

#### **G) Impact Assessment**

As part of our smarter regulation agenda, the new Government will step up the use of impact assessments across Government, driven by a new specialised section within the Cabinet Secretariat. The new impact assessment guidelines will have to take account of impacts on rural Ireland as well as other socio-economic factors. Within the new Department of [Regional Development and Rural Affairs], we will task a coordinating unit to work with communities to develop co-operative structures to keep vital local services in place and to retain and develop vibrant local enterprises.

## **H) VAT Rates**

We recognise the difficulties faced by community groups in relation to VAT rates on certain products (e.g. defibrillators). While this is an EU competency we will work with our EU counterparts in seeking to reform this area.

## **I) VRT**

We recognise the difficulties faced by community and voluntary groups in relation to VRT rates on vehicles. We commit to examine the issue.

## **2. Attracting New Investment**

### **A) €500 million to accelerate export led jobs growth across Ireland's regions**

We will take full advantage of the favourable treatment of capital investment under the fiscal rules to fund additional regional capital investment over the 5-year period 2017-21 including:

- An extra €300million in capital funding between Enterprise Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta to allow them to provide additional support to Irish owned enterprises. This extra funding will give Local Enterprise Offices and incubation centres additional resources to help support start ups and small businesses across the country
- An extra €200million to the IDA which will allow it, among other things, to attract more multinational jobs by building additional advanced facilities in regional towns. This will follow on from the 11 advanced facilities which are currently being rolled out

### **B) The Development of a new Atlantic Economic Corridor**

The new Government will deliver balanced national development. One way in which we will achieve this goal is by creating sufficient scale in the west of Ireland, through an Atlantic Economic Corridor, to match other areas in developing infrastructure, attracting Irish and multinational investment, and growing jobs and wealth in local communities.

### **C) TEN-T Transport Funding**

In the first three months the new Government will apply to the European Union for the revision of the TEN-T CORE Network, including applying for the reinstatement of the cross-border Western Arc.

### **D) Road Investment**

We acknowledge that the capital budget for local and regional roads is still recovering after the economic crash and the new partnership Government will increase this budget by approximately 50% in the years ahead as the national finances are repaired.

Key radial routes will be prioritised from the existing motorway network, to ensure that communities isolated by inadequate national primary roads, have direct access to ports and airports. Transport Infrastructure Ireland should also be encouraged to commence planning other road projects to match/complement the National Action Plan for Jobs.

We will reinstate a fully funded Local Improvement Scheme to support the maintenance and repair of non-local authority roads.

### **E) Town and Village Renewal**

The renewal of towns and villages will be a top priority for the new Minister for [Regional Development and Rural Affairs] as a way to revitalise rural Ireland. To deliver on this goal the new Minister will develop a new and improved Town and Village Renewal Scheme with input from the Oireachtas in time for Budget 2017. As part of this scheme we will propose to commit additional funding to support the development of rural towns and villages, as a key priority for revitalising rural Ireland.

The central aim of supporting the revitalisation of towns and villages is to improve the living and working environment of local communities and to increase their potential to support increased economic activity into the future. The focus for improvements will extend to the enhancement of villages, small towns and the surrounding countryside.

## **F) Commercial Rates**

We will implement the Valuation Act, which is designed to speed up the cumbersome revaluation process, and 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.

We will maintain the three-year tax relief for certain start-up companies until the end of 2018 which is an important support for entrepreneurs and local job creation.

## **G) €100million Capital Investment in Wild Atlantic Way & Greenways**

One of the biggest achievements in revitalising tourism has been the creation of the Wild Atlantic Way. We will seek to set aside €100million in additional capital funding to take the Wild Atlantic Way to the next level, including an Atlantic blueway route, and the Ireland Way, and to invest further in developing a nationwide Greenway network. As part of this additional funding, we will double the funding available for the Rural Walks Scheme from €2million to €4million to increase the number of walks covered from 40 to 80.

We will also direct Fáilte Ireland to develop the 'Ireland's Lakelands' brand as a separate proposition to sit alongside the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Ancient East. To assist with sustainability of tourist accommodation and small tourism ventures, a support scheme will be introduced for businesses operating along these routes.

## **H) Tourism Policy**

We will work towards achieving the ambitious tourism policy goals set for 2025. These include increasing revenue from overseas visitors to €5billion, growing employment in the tourism sector to 250,000 (from 200,000 currently) and increasing the number of visits to Ireland to 10 million. We will do this through the national tourism policy and through specific measures like the maintenance of the 0% Airport Travel Tax and the retention of the

hugely successful 9% VAT rate on tourism related services, providing that prices remain competitive.

#### **I) €10million in additional funding for Regional Airports**

Building on engagement between Government and regional airport management, we will seek to invest an additional €10million to intensify efforts to properly prepare our regional airports for a future where they can operate on a standalone commercial basis. This new investment will be in addition to the €28million already committed.

#### **J) Western Rail Corridor**

The new Government will provide for an independent costing and review of the Western Rail Corridor Phase Two between Athenry and Claremorris for passenger and freight use. No measures will be taken to prevent the future reactivation of this corridor for rail use, as set out in the McCann Report.

### **3. Protecting Local Services**

#### **A) Next-generation Broadband**

One of the biggest challenges facing rural Ireland is to bridge the digital divide with urban areas. To remedy this situation for at least the next 25 years, we will guarantee the delivery of 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. Once the contract is awarded the rollout phase will begin immediately and, in conjunction with commercial investment, 85% of premises in Ireland will have access to high speed broadband within two years, with 100% access as soon as possible up to at most 5 years.

The tender process for the National Broadband Plan is currently underway and will influence the contract's terms and conditions. Following the completion of the tender process and the awarding of the contract, targeted for June 2017, the new Government will work with the winners to accelerate the roll out of the infrastructure next year. We will work with local councils to establish broadband taskforces to help facilitate the local rollout of commercial and National Broadband Plan infrastructure in each county area. The relevant Cabinet Committee will be updated regularly on the progress of the National Broadband Plan.

To manage that process and to manage all the State's commercial communications contracts, we will consolidate these responsibilities into a single entity. This will act as a centre of expertise for managing all the State's commercial activities in communications such as the TII fibre ducts, the MANs network and masts on OPW lands, as well as the ultimate National Broadband Plan contract.

#### **B) Mobile Phone & Broadband**

Within 100 days, we will establish a mobile phone and broadband taskforce to provide immediate solutions to the broadband/phone coverage deficit, involving the Department of Communications, the Department of Environment, the Department of Transport, ComReg, the telecommunications industry and consumers, to investigate how to provide better services for consumers including better use of State assets.

#### **C) No Closure of Small Schools**

To protect the sustainability and viability of rural communities we will not close any small school without the consent of parents. Existing support schemes will remain open for new infrastructural investment in schools.

#### **D) Local Improvement Schemes**

As the economy recovers, we will promote increased funding for Local Improvement Schemes and Community Involvement schemes, on an annual basis. A major transport objective for the new Government will be to prioritise new investment in local and regional road maintenance and improvements, and the LIS and CIS will play a key role in meeting that objective. 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. We will expand the scheme to include the taking in charge of non-council roads with a view to having this scheme up and running by end 2017.

#### **E) Regional Apprenticeships and Traineeships**

In partnership with the Apprenticeship Council and industry we will double the number of apprenticeships to provide a total of 31,000 places by 2020 through an annual call for new



proposals. We will target over 100 different apprenticeship schemes spread across sectors of the economy and in every region in Ireland.

#### **F) Post Offices & Community Banking**

We acknowledge the renewal of the Department of Social Protection's contract for cash social welfare payments at post offices, which is worth €54million, with over 38 million social welfare payments being made in post offices throughout the country. We will actively encourage payments at Post Offices.

The new Government will act swiftly 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 advance a new model of 'community banking' by:

- Requesting An Post and the League of Credit Unions, as well as any other interested stakeholders, to investigate and propose a new model of community banking that provides a suite of banking services through the large network of Post Offices. This could be based on the Kiwibank model in New Zealand, where the Post Office owned bank provides a comprehensive suite of financial services, from personal loans and bank accounts to credit cards, business banking, and insurance
- We will thoroughly investigate the German Sparkassen model for the development of local public banks that operate within well-defined regions

The new Government will also establish the feasibility of offering motor tax services and other State services in post offices. We will establish a working group to identify the potential for local post offices to act as 'hubs' to facilitate other services such as health and transport and a one-stop-shop for Government services.

We will also support the establishment of a post office network renewal process to build on An Post's existing 5-year strategy for the network.

## **G) Credit Unions**

We will 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. We will develop a strategy for growth and development for the credit union sector. We are also committed to ensuring that credit unions benefit from regulatory support, in order to respond to the needs of a changing economy. Specifically we 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
- Assisting 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
- Asking 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 new Partnership Government
- Working with the Registrar of Credit Unions at the Central Bank to gradually lift current lending restrictions as appropriate, including for housing
- Credit unions' move towards more electronic and online services, including the rollout of debit cards and enhanced online banking services
- Asking 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

## **H) Local Access to Credit**

Access to finance is essential for local business and new start-ups to progress in capacity and scale. To achieve this, we need to deliver €1billion 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

More generally, we will also examine all options for increased credit availability, competition and quality of service in the banking sector through the development of new and existing platforms.

### **I) Technological Universities**

The new Government will support the creation of Technological Universities. These regional institutions will have greater links 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. The requirement of a mandatory merger of existing institutions can be reviewed, if a case can be proven, that for geographical reasons, a merger isn't feasible.

### **J) Supporting Local Jobseekers**

We will invest in new services and caseworkers to support jobseekers through the network of local Intreo offices. We will support a regional approach to Intreo offices where job vacancies are brought to the attention of qualified jobseekers in neighbouring counties.

We will review work activation and social welfare schemes to ensure that schemes do not contain anomalies that may impact unfairly on people in rural areas, including farmers.

### **K) Rural Transport**

We recognise the value and benefit of rural transport to many communities, in particular for older people vulnerable to social isolation. We will examine how best to improve integration of services in the rural bus network within regions, including public buses, school transport and the HSE transport networks. A report will be provided to the relevant Oireachtas Committee within 6 months examining how existing routes can be made more sustainable and accessible to the public, the potential for new routes, and reflecting international best practice.

## **L) Turf Cutting**

The Government recognises that domestic turf cutters have a traditional right to cut turf. This right is balanced with the conservation objectives and legal obligations on the State.

The Government commits to the continuation of the current process involving all stakeholders including the NPWS, Government appointed scientists and the TCCA.

The Government will do all in its power to facilitate and expedite this process, including providing additional resources, to provide impacted turf cutters with an agreed and reasonable alternative, with the aim of making substantial progress within the lifetime of this Government.

The Government will publish new legislation to de-designate 46 NHAs within the first 100 days of Government.

The Government commits to reviewing the timetable for the implementation of actions relating to NHAs in consultation with the EU. The Government is committed to building on the progress already made on SACs and will continue working to expedite the relocation process.

The Government commits to reviewing the position in relation to the planning code as it relates to turf cutters for domestic use.

## **M) Government Procurement and Smaller Businesses**

The public procurement market in Ireland is worth roughly €8billion a year, or over €20 million a day. To improve access to smaller Irish businesses we will:

- 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 Office of Government Procurement
- Commission an external review of the TAS (Tender Advisory Service) model by 2017

- Continue to develop measures to support SMEs in accessing the public procurement market
- 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

#### **N) Arts (further detail available in chapter 15)**

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 and support the Heritage Council. We will respond to the Western Development Commission's Creative West report within three months. We will also boost supports to facilitate increased loans between our National Cultural Institutions and our network of regional museums. We will also expand the Historic Towns Initiative to include more towns. We will support the traditional heritage of literature, music, song & dance.

#### **O) Underwater Search & Recovery**

We recognise the need for a grant aid scheme for underwater search and recovery, in line with the state support currently available to mountain search and rescue.

#### **P) Community Support**

In addition, we will also strengthen the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and develop new Community Development Schemes for rural areas and reactivate and increase funding to RAPID areas through the local authorities.

## 5. Health

### **Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil**

Efforts to increase access to safe, timely care, as close to patients' homes as possible will be a priority for the new Partnership Government. In 2014, over 1.1 million people went through the doors of our Emergency Departments, over 957,000 people had day case treatments, there were 2 million outpatient clinic attendances and over 622,000 had inpatient procedures. 38% of the population have a medical card and on average they have six consultations a year with their GP. These increased levels of activity have occurred against a backdrop of budgetary pressures and funding limitations.

Government efforts will be made to reduce these attendances by enhancing primary care and the integration of care between primary and secondary care.

As the economy improved, increases in the health budget were possible both in Budget 2015 and 2016. It is our intention to work with the Oireachtas to sustain these increases. The additional funding to date has allowed Government to start rebuilding our health services, with increases in funding for record numbers of doctors, for more 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.

We still need to do more, and working with the Oireachtas, we must plan ahead for the needs of people in a few years time, conscious of the fact that we have an ageing population who are living longer, whose needs will become greater and more diverse, and that we also have the highest birth rate in Europe.

## **1. A Decisive shift of the Health Service to Primary Care with the delivery of enhanced Primary Care in every Community**

The funding commitment for 80 additional primary care centres has been secured. Priority should be given to the staffing of primary care teams for timely and appropriate levels of care for patients. We support the commencement of these projects.

It is necessary also to build GP capacity to respond to patients needs and provide access to X-rays, ultrasound and other investigations as well as the expansion of chronic disease management in general practice. In addition to diabetes, which is already being dealt with in general practice, we will seek to cover chronic pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, heart failure and a trial fibrillation, so that patients can keep their care in their community, close to home. General Practice needs a new contract to address its changing role in delivering chronic care within the community and to allow it play its part in addressing the challenges that face the health service. This contract is under negotiation and the Government will work with doctors' representatives to successfully conclude discussions.

While we also increase the number of GP training places, we recognise the need to increase the number of therapists and other health professionals in our primary care centres to maximise the potential of services and provide maternity and long term illness cover for staff absences where possible. Within two years, we will expand the role of community pharmacists in managing the health of their patients and medicine prescription.

We will also significantly reduce the cost of medicines by reducing the annual required co-payment on the Drugs Payment Scheme and reducing prescription charges for medical card holders.

We will increase funding for homecare packages and home help every year.

## **2. Guaranteeing the Future Sustainability of Rural Practice and in Disadvantaged Urban Areas**

We support the full implementation of the agreement reached in recent weeks with the IMO on rural practice this summer. This includes changes in the qualifying criteria for rural support, an increase in the rural practice allowance and amending the special items of service.

We will increase the number of GP training places by 100 over the next five years to 259 places annually. We will also therefore increase the availability of medical education tutors for CPD.

We will examine the use of tax instruments and other incentives to support investment by GPs, dentists and other professionals in primary care centres, technology and service developments. We will also publish proposals, following consultation with representatives, to support GP practices in disadvantaged urban areas.

The HSE will be mandated to employ GPs on a salaried basis where needed and put in place support structures and staff.

## **3. Creating a Healthy Ireland**

Extending in phases, and subject to negotiation with GPs, we are committed to the introduction of free GP care to under 18s. This will require a substantial increase in GP numbers to support the additional workload.

Promoting oral hygiene is important and early intervention saves the taxpayer later. We will introduce a dental health package for the under 6s. 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. We are committed to timely access to orthodontic care.



We will also extend the Dental Treatment Benefit under the Social Insurance Fund to reimburse the cost of some routine dental treatments. For medical cardholders, we will introduce a preventive dental health package also.

We will update the national eye care plan, including evaluation of the Sligo model for cataract surgery.

We will maintain a humane approach for discretionary medical card provision.

We will extend the entitlement to a medical card for all children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance in Budget 2017. Approximately 10,000 children would benefit from this initiative. We will request the Clinical Advisory Group on Medical Cards to examine the guidelines for the awarding of discretionary medical cards for patients undergoing treatment for cancer

We will make a number of key public health interventions including:

- Enacting the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill
- Making Ireland Tobacco free by 2025 (less than 5% of the population smoking)
- Introducing a health levy on sugar-sweetened drinks
- Implementing a national physical activity plan, a national obesity plan and a sexual health strategy
- Putting in place a programme to improve the quality of food in our hospitals

We will also focus on a number of key programmes and strategies including:

- The extension of the childhood vaccination programme to include meningitis B and rotavirus vaccines
- The extension of Breastcheck to all women aged 65 to 69
- Completing work and commencing implementation of a new National Drugs Strategy within 12 months
- We will support a health-led rather than criminal justice approach to drugs use including legislating for injection rooms

- Implementing the National Maternity Strategy
- Implementing the National Dementia Strategy, and publishing a plan for advancing Neuro-Rehabilitation services in the community

We will also propose legislation in the following areas:

- The regulation of surrogacy and assisted human reproduction services
- Family consent and an opt-out register for organ donation before the end of 2017

We will increase funding for the Health Research Board.

We will develop National Patient Disease Registries and prioritise the passage of the Human Tissue Bill and the Health Information and Safety Bill.

We will implement the National Rare Diseases Plan.

We will ensure appropriate care pathways are in place to improve cancer services and invest in end of life care, including the provision of hospice and 'end of life care' during the perinatal period, infancy, childhood and adulthood.

We will bring into operation further hospices, the construction of which local communities have funded. We will encourage the development of a hospice in the Midlands and North-East, and home care in regions where there are no hospices.

We will work with nongovernmental 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 also assist local communities and schools in purchasing defibrillators for public places and support the Departments of Health and Social Protection in working together to pursue a "Fit for Work Programme" to support more people to get back to work if they have an illness or disability.

#### **4. Building Capacity for our Emergency and Acute Services**

We will reduce emergency department overcrowding following a four pronged approach - to reduce numbers coming into hospital by developing primary care services and integrating primary and secondary care services, to expand hospital capacity, to support timely patient discharge from hospitals and to address hospital responsiveness to increased demand

In advance of, and in preparation for the 2017 review of the Capital Plan 2016-2021, the new Government will undertake a national hospital bed capacity review to establish the number, type and location of beds required into the future, recognising the need for a range of beds including critical care, palliative and day case bed stock.

We will also reduce the length of time from when a patient presents at an Emergency Department (ED) to their discharge home or admission to a ward, including a reduction in the numbers waiting for more than 6 hours. 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%.

The Government agrees to a timely review of the management, operation and funding of national home-help services.

Medical Assessment Units (MAUs), Urgent Care Centres, and Minor Injuries Clinics provide a safe and local alternative to EDs, but usually operate within limited hours and 5 days a week. In our first year there will be a full review of these with a view to extending their hours of opening and weekend opening.

We will develop protocols to enable ambulances to take patients to the most appropriate place rather than the nearest ED. This shall include treatment and discharge at the scene, minor injury units, MAUs and specialist centres (e.g. trauma and orthopaedics).

We are committed to continued capital investment in our Emergency Departments (EDs). New EDs in the Mater Dublin and Wexford are now open; Kilkenny ED is opening on a phased basis this year; Limerick ED will open next year and the extension of Drogheda is

under construction. A new ED for Galway Hospital is currently being designed with a view to funding for construction being provided as part of the 2017 Capital Plan Review. Similarly, we will commence the design of a new ED in Beaumont later this year with a view to funding for the construction being provided as part of the 2017 Capital Plan Review.

We will continue to deliver safer pre-hospital care. As part of this, three reviews of Ambulance Services (HIQA Governance Review, National Ambulance Service Capacity Review, and a Dublin Emergency Services review) are currently being completed with the HIQA report already being implemented. We will consider the recommendations when published, and there will be an increase in ambulances, EMTs and paramedics every year to improve response times.

The new Government is committed to the expansion of the successful Emergency Aeromedical Service (air ambulance) and its possible extension to night time. A feasibility study will be carried out to explore how this might be achieved, who might provide it and the potential cost. This shall include consideration of a second base.

We will also expand the National First Responders Network.

The new Government will immediately proceed to the design and planning stage for a dedicated Cystic Fibrosis Unit at Beaumont Hospital Dublin for inclusion in the 2017 Capital Plan review. The HSE Cystic Fibrosis Clinical Programme will make further recommendations in the next few months, following a survey of centres and will complete a CF model of care policy.

We are committed to the development of a second Cath Lab in University Hospital Waterford subject to a favourable recommendation from an independent clinical review of the needs of the region to be carried out within 6 weeks. Then, it will proceed immediately to design and planning stage followed by construction, and will be completed and ready for operation without undue delay. In the interim, the hospital will be asked to review the resourcing necessary to extend the existing lab hours with a view to providing a more extensive service. It is understood that the extension and funding of these hours is subject

to receipt of a recommendation to proceed with the investment in a second lab. On receipt of this recommendation, partial revenue funds will be liberated immediately to allow for the recruitment of staff to facilitate the extension of lab hours.

## **5. Improving Waiting Times for Hospital Procedures**

We are committed to sustaining the progress made to date on waiting lists, and are committed to continued investment of €50million per year to reduce waiting lists further (inclusive of the €15million in funding for a National Treatment Purchase Fund). Resources will be set aside each year to reduce waiting lists with the funding targeted, in particular, at those most urgent cases and those whose who have been waiting longest. We will increase and ring-fence €15million in 2017 in funding for a National Treatment Purchase Fund to urgently address waiting lists for those waiting longest.

We will agree annual performance targets with each Hospital Group/Trust and CHO (Community Healthcare Organisation) on waiting times, linking to activity based funding.

We will establish a Performance Management Unit providing assistance to hospitals and service providers in reaching their targets.

We support a review of better integration between primary and secondary care as well as identifying good work practices currently taking place in specialist areas which could be replicated in other hospitals to address waiting lists.

## **6. Reforming HSE into a more Efficient, Transparent Health Service for Patients and Staff**

We will continue the process of dismantling the HSE, evolving it into a Health Commission.

We will advance progress made on Hospital Groups before strengthening their capacity to be stand-alone statutory Trusts. Hospital Trusts will gain greater autonomy (own their own assets, manage recruitment) while also ensuring accountability. Frontline staff and patients will have increased involvement in the policy making process. Hospital Groups/Trusts will be

required to develop strategic plans to re-organise services within their group of hospitals, which is key to minimising risks to patient safety and maximising favourable outcomes for patients with a full evaluation of the impact of geography on access to, and availability of, services. Annual performance targets will be agreed with each Hospital Group/Trust on waiting times for inpatients, outpatients and ED attendances. These targets will be built into Activity Based Funding.

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.

We will provide for the temporary transfer of management of hospitals to another provider where there are consistently poor outcomes, patient experiences and financial management.

A new performance Management Unit, with its own ring fenced budget per annum, will be established within the Health Commission. 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 new Unit will be obliged to use their own budgets to ensure targets are met with the assistance of private sector providers.

We will fund hospitals and other healthcare providers for the work they do rather than on the basis of historical budgets - 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 review the roles and responsibilities of various healthcare professionals working in our hospitals. This will include further 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.

The use of county boundaries for access to health and social services will be reviewed independently, to ensure that the most efficient and cost effective service is provided to those who need it.

Patient pathways, referrals, aftercare and recovery must be more efficiently managed with the HSE. We will mandate the HSE to engage strategic partners to help with the planning, financing and rollout of a 21st century IT health infrastructure, working towards the universal use of data to improve integrated care and outcomes across primary and secondary care.

We will establish an independent patient advocacy service. We consider 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.

We will tackle the rising cost of claims by establishing 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, and injuries that can result from vaccination.

We will put in place a scheme, on a no-fault basis, that will respond to the needs of people with disability arising from vaccination.

In order to recruit and retain talent we will:

- Negotiate a new consultant's contract and review the roles and responsibilities of health professionals providing extended scope of practice where appropriate

- Implement the new procedures to ensure more efficient and timely recruitment of nurses
- Implement the remaining elements of the Strategic Review of Medical Training and Career Structure Working Group (McCraith Report) to assist in the recruitment and retention of key medical staff
- We will fully implement the Lansdowne Road Agreement in accordance with the timelines agreed and recognise that the recruitment issues in the public service must be addressed as part of this Agreement

## **7. Funding of the Health Service**

We will request an Oireachtas All-Party committee to develop a single long term vision plan for healthcare over a 10 year period. This plan should have cross party consensus on healthcare planning and a shared vision. We will work to develop an agreed framework for an efficient and effective health service.

Key to the long-term sustainability of our health service and Universal Healthcare - access to quality preventative, primary, curative, rehabilitative and end-of-life healthcare that is timely and affordable for everyone - is the development of a new funding model for the health service. Considerable work has been conducted by the last Government on the costs and implications of the introduction of universal healthcare.

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. At this point, the Oireachtas Committee on Health will be asked to invite stakeholders and outside experts to hearings on how best to move forward on the outcomes of the work. The delivery of the reform programme must be completed first so that the foundations are in place to change the funding model. This will allow the New Partnership Government to make a final decision on the best way forward to finance Universal Healthcare.

The 2016 Health Budget is €13.1billion and increases in the health budget have been possible both in Budget 2015 and 2016. It is the Government's intention to work with the



Oireachtas to sustain these annual increases going forward. We will base health expenditure on multi-year budgeting supported by a 5 year Health Service Plan based on realistic, verifiable projections.

We will set out a detailed longer-term budget for the health service. It is acknowledged the additional funding will be used for 2016 and that, considering ongoing demographic change and medical innovation, increases of an average of more than 3% per annum, combined with an ongoing reform agenda, to drive further efficiencies, are needed to make real improvements.

We will drive down costs to provide new treatments, drugs etc. In particular, we will look at opportunities for leveraging purchasing power either through national or European initiatives and for making greater use of effective but less costly medicines.

## 6. Mental Health

### **Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil**

We support an ethos of healthy living and mental well-being encompassing housing, employment, education, lifestyle and the need to combat rural isolation. One in four of us will develop a difficulty with our mental health at some stage in our lives. The mental health budget will be increased annually during the lifetime of this new Government. The new Government is committed to meeting the recommendations of *A Vision for Change*.

The stigma associated with mental health remains and will require a wider and more concerted effort across all aspects of society, not just focussed upon our health services. There is a clear consensus that the education system – at primary and secondary level in particular – is the key to greater awareness, to cultural change, to prevention and to early intervention for the next generation.

Access and availability of both early intervention services as well as after care and recovery following an incident need to be developed. Connecting for Life, Ireland's National Strategy for Suicide Prevention has sought to draw together different strands of state and society, including community, health, education, to focus on prevention and early intervention. Many commitments in this plan do not have a financial cost; they require a political and community commitment. The relevant Oireachtas Committee in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil will be mandated to monitor and oversee the full implementation of this strategy.

### **1. Greater Access to Mental Health Services in Primary Care**

*A Vision for Change* recognises the key role of GPs – “GPs are the first, and in many cases the only, health professionals to be involved in the management of a wide range of mental health problems.” It also states that the most common support GPs sought in this regard is access to counsellors or psychologists. The strategy recommends that appropriately trained staff should be available at primary care level to provide programmes to prevent mental health problems and promote wellbeing. We will fully implement *A Vision for Change* in a manner which recognises geographic accessibility.

The strategy sets out wide ranging recommendations – improved communications for continuity of care, referral protocols, direct access to diagnostic facilities, discharge plans, individual care plans, integrated care pathways, and shared care arrangements. Full implementation of these recommendations would allow primary care teams provide much of the care currently provided by specialist services.

The network of mental health services proposed in *A Vision for Change* should offer one point of access for GPs who want to refer individuals onto mental health services or are looking for advice and guidance on the management of a specific individual. In the proposed model there should also be a single point of access for a crisis response when needed.

We are committed to conducting an evidence-based expert review of the current status of implementation in Ireland and of international best practice in the area of mental health.

The review will also advise on:

- Building further capacity in Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- More 24/7 service support and liaison teams in primary and emergency care
- Mechanisms to attract and retain staff in this area

The review will inform the next steps in the development of our mental health policy within the frame of human rights generally, feeding into the annual budgetary process and building upon the additional investment and progress of recent years.

Separately, we will extend counselling services in primary care to people on low income. We will also seek to extend this service to organisations that offer free counselling and psychological services for families who need it.

We will also introduce improved interagency working arrangements with other services to ensure access based on need as swiftly as possible (e.g. linkages between HSE, Tusla and prison services, local listening services and voluntary services).

## **2. Ensuring Support in Crisis**

Since early 2015, Clinical Nurse Specialists in psychiatry have started to work in emergency departments to provide a more rapid response to those who present with episodes of self-harm. We will work to ensure that every emergency department has such a team, and that greater linkages to aftercare and primary care are provided for.

For those vulnerable to suicidal behaviour, the HSE Mental Health Directorate should provide a co-ordinated, uniform, quality assured and safe 24/7 service and deliver pathways of care from primary to secondary mental health services for all those in need of specialist mental health services. The independent review will advise on how best to do this. This will be monitored and recommendations will be made by the appropriate Oireachtas Committee.

## **3. Bringing Youth Mental Health to the Fore through Our Education System**

An increasing concern in schools and for families, we need to promote awareness and prevention in our education system rather than reacting to incidents. In 2017, Well-being will be introduced as a subject in the new Junior Cert curriculum and this is a positive step in raising understanding and awareness amongst teenagers. However, a more thorough understanding of students' own emotional well-being is also required. A National Taskforce on Youth Mental Health will be established to consider how best to introduce and teach resilience, coping mechanisms, greater awareness to children and young people, and how to access support services voluntarily at a young age. For teaching staff also, we will invest in SafeTALK and ASIST courses.

Accessible and informal mental health services can play a vital role in connecting with young people. We will extend these services, such as Jigsaw, which is free to access and does not require GP referral, which are more informal and attractive to young people.

#### **4. Supporting People with Mental Health Difficulties and their Families**

Working with Intreo, we will seek to introduce flexibility and support in the social welfare system for people with severe and enduring mental health difficulties to transition into employment by ensuring a seamless return of their entitlements should a particular employment opportunity prove unsuitable.

We will establish dedicated funding supports for tenancy sustainment for people transitioning from HSE supported accommodation and for clients in mental health services living in other types of accommodation in the community.

The support provided by community, voluntary and advocacy groups is vital to people with mental health difficulties, to their families and carers. We will ensure they receive support for the initiatives and programmes they receive.

We will improve the uniformity, effectiveness and timeliness of support services to families and communities bereaved by suicide.

We will provide more residential places for people with enduring mental health issues, including forensic and dual diagnosis patients.

#### **5. Ensuring the Development and Planning of Future Service Needs**

The stigma associated with mental health remains prevalent in Ireland today, and can keep a person isolated and vulnerable. We will work to improve Ireland's understanding and attitude to mental health and suicide.

While recognising the need for balanced intervention and admission, we will reform legal processes to deal with involuntary committals.

Advanced works have begun on the new National Forensic Mental Health Service Hospital at Portrane. Funding has been secured as part of the Capital Plan for this development. This will facilitate the closure of the Victorian Central Mental Hospital. In addition, proceeds

from the sale of older assets used for mental health services will be retained for new developments in mental health.

We will develop services and specialties to support people at different stages in life. With a growing older population, it is necessary to build capacity in the psychiatry of later life.

There are approximately 26 Psychiatry of Old Age Teams. Budget 2016 has provided additional funding and we will continue to increase this.

We will implement the Irish National Dementia Strategy.

We will continue to support rehabilitation centres.

# 7. Improving the Lives of People with Disabilities

## **Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil**

Throughout their lives, people with disabilities should be supported in maximising their potential, by removing barriers which impact on access to services, education, work or healthcare. We will improve services and increase supports for people with disabilities, particularly for early assessment and intervention for children with special needs and the provision of adult day services. A particular focus should be placed on supports at key transition points – going to school, progressing to further training or education, or moving into a new home. In achieving this aim, the new Partnership Government should be guided by two principles: equality of opportunity and improving the quality of life for people with disabilities. With the peace of mind that service supports will remain available, we can empower people with disabilities to live independent lives, provide greater independence in accessing the services they choose, and place them in a stronger position to tailor supports to meet their needs and plan their lives.

### **1. Focus on Rights**

Ireland signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007, and a roadmap to ratification was published in November 2015. The drafting of legislation to address a range of legislative barriers to ratification is underway with a view to putting it before the Oireachtas before the end 2016. The relevant Oireachtas Committee and relevant stakeholders will be asked to oversee its implementation.

### **2. Improving the lives of people with disabilities through better access, supports and independence**

Disability policy and supports cross most government departments and agencies resulting in complexity for service users. A review of State structures and delivery will take place to respond to the introduction of personalised budgeting tailored specifically to the needs of the individual.

We will consolidate all means testing under a single national body ensuring a single application process for services or entitlements across all government agencies.

We will also review the role of the National Disability Authority.

Employment is key to independence and social integration. However, employment for many people with disabilities will not necessarily generate the resources necessary to gain full independence. We will, therefore, implement the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, ensuring its actions are compatible with mainstream activation policies and that it addresses concerns surrounding the loss of secondary benefits, so that work always pays more than welfare.

We support an increase in the Disability Benefit and Allowance, Carer's Benefit and Allowance, and Blind Person's Pension.

Work is underway on the drafting of this new legislation for the introduction of a new mobility scheme to assist those with a disability in meeting their increased mobility costs.

Personalised budgets provide an individual with more control in accessing services, giving them greater independence and choice. We will devolve budgets to the person so they may shop beyond traditional service providers to better fit their needs. To do so, we will establish a Taskforce within 3 months on the implementation of personalised budgets for persons with disabilities. Core to this Taskforce will be:

- The adoption of a single national coherent application system to develop budgets before end 2017
- The adoption of a single national coherent system of accountability for the spend
- Exploring brokerage models whereby people are assisted to connect with and purchase the services that actually meet their own needs
- Actively monitoring practice, usage and trends and especially the linkage between personalised budgets, employability and employment rates as well as community living



The Taskforce should be led by policy/implementation entities within the public service in active consultation with civil society. After an initial period of 5 years it could be transitioned into the establishment of a national agency.

We will examine transport service provision for young people with disabilities to ensure that the service is fit for purpose, consistent with their needs.

We will ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are incorporated into all future housing policies.

The Housing Adaptation grants provided to local authorities are a vital support to keeping people in their homes. Budget 2016 increased this scheme by 10% to €55million, which will see over 8,500 households benefit from the scheme. We support further increases in funding for this scheme.

We will move people with disabilities out of congregated settings to enable them live independently and be included 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 and to ultimately eliminate all congregated settings. The movement of those with high dependency needs will start in parallel with that of others and will not wait until higher function people have been moved. This will be done in full consultation with families to ensure all moves are appropriate.

### **3. Equality of Opportunity**

Budget 2016 allocated €7.3million for the provision of 1,500 day places for school leavers with disabilities. The new Government is committed to ensuring that all 18 year old school leavers with intellectual and physical disabilities have continued education or training opportunities. In planning for the future lives of young people with disabilities, we must equip school leavers with the skills required to move into further education, training or employment, if they so choose. This means earlier planning and engagement than currently takes place, to ensure that adequate and early post-primary transition planning takes place for all school leavers.

We will support and expand supported employment opportunities and work with stakeholders to make supported employment more attractive to both prospective employers and employees.

We will highlight incentives for employers to employ a person with a disability, roll out a national awareness campaign, and ensure the full implementation of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for people with disabilities, as mentioned above.

Working with Intreo, we will support people with disabilities, and allow them to transition into employment, while ensuring a seamless return of their entitlements should a particular employment opportunity prove unsuitable. We will also address concerns surrounding the loss of secondary benefits, so that people are always better off in work.

#### **4. Access to Early Years and Educational needs**

A new scheme to ensure access to the Early Childhood Care and Education programmes for young children with disabilities is commencing this year. We will ensure the further development of this initiative.

Over €1.4billion is spent on special education annually, yet families still face anxiety in accessing services. We will examine the adequacy of current special education access and funding provision, in particular for children with Down syndrome and other conditions. We will request the National Council for Special Education to advise on how best to address this. We will also consult with stakeholders to see how best to progress sections of the EPSEN Act that were introduced on a non-statutory basis.

The Government is committed to early intervention and prevention services for children. Providing earlier access to children and adults to Speech and Language Therapy can make a vital difference to their future opportunities in life. We will introduce a new in-school speech and language service creating stronger linkages between parents, teachers and SLTs. We will also commence an in-depth review of the variation in waiting lists across the country.

## **5. A Stronger Voice for Carers**

Carers are the backbone of care provision in this country. In 2012, the first ever Carer's Strategy was published. We are committed to implementing it in full. We wish to see greater involvement of family carers in the preparation of care plans, aiding the provision of care, together with more accessible training and respite care, to facilitate full support. We also support an increase in Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit as well as improved access to counselling supports for carers.

## **8. Children and Youth Affairs**

### **Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil**

Recent findings in the UK show it could well become the norm for children born within this generation to live to an average age of 100 and beyond. Ireland has one of the highest birth rates in Europe with nearly 70,000 babies born annually. We therefore need to plan ahead for this new generation, by putting in place measures that provide them equality of opportunity; through education, preventative healthcare, and support services.

Targeting investment in crucial areas such as the early years, early intervention and prevention so that all families – young and old - can have the best opportunity possible, is crucial to achieving this goal. For those who do need support from State Agencies, their role must be to guide people out of difficulty and assist them into stability and safety.

To focus transfers on earlier support, we will establish a dedicated Prevention and Early Intervention Unit in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform/Finance in the first 100 days. It will focus on early intervention policies that can improve the life outcomes of children in particular, as well as the quality of life of older people dealing with long term conditions such as chronic illness.

The Unit will also produce an annual report outlining the percentage of departmental budget that 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 these new programmes, and report regularly to the relevant Oireachtas Committee.

### **1. Prioritising the Early Years**

The first five years last a lifetime. The experiences early in life are critical in establishing the foundation for learning, work and future health. Our commitments prioritise additional paid parental leave in the first year, quality affordable childcare, smaller class sizes, preventative dental care, and earlier interventions, as and where needed. These measures

underpin a targeted investment approach based on international best practice for young children.

Budget 2016 extended the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme to a second free year for all children, having seen the positive outcomes for young children and support for parents that it provides. As part of this extension, it is timely to:

- Review and assess the quality of the first pre-school year and the application of the Aistear curriculum and also include a review to ensure children can avail of a full two years
- Conduct and publish an independent review of the cost of providing quality childcare in private and community settings, consistent with the principle of ongoing professionalisation of the sector. We will continue to support quality and professionalisation initiatives and reforms such as Better Start, Síolta and the Learner Fund
- Monitor the implementation of new quality regulations and standards and work towards further paediatric first aid training for staff
- Review and reform the inspection regime, and withdraw funding from providers that do not meet quality standards

Smaller classes, for junior and senior infants in particular, are proven to increase pupil achievement, especially for disadvantaged children. Gains from smaller class size in early years are shown to carry forward into future years. Research shows pupils are more likely to stay in school longer and earn better results.

A new in-school speech and language service will be established to support young children as part of a more integrated support system. It has been shown across the OECD as the most effective way of managing and intervening with the educational and social issues consequential to speech and language difficulties in children. We will also invest additional resources in the National Educational Psychologists Service (NEPS) to ensure earlier intervention and access for young children (and also teenagers).

Similar to Free GP care for the under 6s, earlier engagement with dental care would encourage disease prevention and promote oral hygiene. We support the introduction of a preventative dental care package for the under 6s. Together with existing dental checks at 6, 9 and 12 years, every child under 12 would be entitled to a comprehensive preventive dental health programme.

We will increase paid parental leave in the first year of birth (currently maternity leave is 26 weeks, plus 2 weeks paternity leave to be introduced from September). Research shows children benefit most from parental care in the first year.

All parents, without exception, need support at some stage. We will look to publish a National Parenting Support Plan with a range of practical and supportive measures for all parents.

We will tackle child poverty by increasing community based early intervention programmes.

We will consolidate all means testing under a single national body so that people/parents will only apply once for services or entitlements across all government agencies. This new Agency will address the matter of access to services based on county boundaries, and implement a new approach following review and consultation.

## **2. Providing Family-Friendly Childcare**

We support the introduction of a robust model for subsidised high quality childcare for children aged 9-36 months in order for children and families to truly reap the benefits of greater investment, in line with the OECD recommendation that this approach is the best way to achieve affordability and quality at the same time is through subsidised childcare places.

We will develop targeted supports to reduce childcare costs, broaden parental choice and increase supports for stay at home parents.

We will introduce a new system to support and expand quality afterschool care for school-aged children.

We will continue to support subsidised childcare places for low income families.

While recognising the need for additional childcare subsidisation as proposed above, we will seek to streamline the existing schemes to make them more accessible for both parents and providers.

We will drive quality throughout the sector by investing in the professionalisation of the workforce, through continuous professional development within programmes of further and higher education.

We will support parents who choose to stay at home and care for their children (through an increase in the Home Carers Credit).

We must utilise our primary school buildings for afterschool care provision for school age children to offer more options and flexibility to parents. We will link additional capitation to the provision of buildings for afterschool care, where demand exists. Community groups and private providers will be invited to tender to use school facilities (outside school hours).

We recognise the value of informal childcare for families and support the development of a phased programme of reforms for childminders making it easier to support both families and childminders.

### **3. The Next Generation – Protecting and Enriching our Young People**

There are over 800,000 people aged 10-24 in Ireland. As these young people transition from adolescence to adulthood, primary school to secondary and further education or work, they are faced with major changes, pressures, expectations and, indeed, opportunities. We must ensure that their voice is heard, that they are respected, safe and healthy and that they

meet their full potential in life and in education. Emotional wellbeing is a significant part of our daily lives and impacts on our quality of life, our physical and mental well-being.

Active engagement in sports not only helps keep young people healthy, but also builds confidence, independence and promotes team building. We support the implementation of the national physical activity plan for all ages and we also support the introduction of a new Leaving Certificate P.E. syllabus, as a full optional subject.

Conscious of the significant social and health benefits that participation in sport delivers, we will support sporting organisations in their efforts to increase sporting participation across the country. Specifically, building on the €130million investment in sports capital projects since 2011, we will aim to allocate sports capital grants on an annualised basis, and make continued progress on the National Sports Campus. We will also implement the National Physical Activity Plan and, following consultation, draw up and implement a National Sports Policy.

Developing resilience and emotional coping skills begins at an early age and schools should play a stronger role in providing guidance to young people. Such an approach will pay dividends into the future in terms of academic and social progress. We will consult on how to introduce greater awareness and prevention of mental health problems for young people. For teaching staff also, we will support SafeTALK and ASIST courses. We support the extension of services, such as Jigsaw, which is free to access and does not require GP referral, which are more informal and attractive to young people.

Excessive alcohol and drug consumption can do lasting damage to the lives of our young people. We will enact the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill. We will also strengthen regulation of alcohol advertising to children.

We will fund an expansion of Youth Services that support, in particular, Early School Leavers into employment and in recognising the value of such services and groups; we will examine the potential for greater linkages between agencies for development of wider opportunities (e.g. new and planned apprenticeships).



We support the potential opportunity for young people to benefit from supportive mentors and role models to build meaningful connections in their lives. We will fund a pilot scheme where guidance and mentoring relationships can be built at community and regional level with a focus on better outcomes and more active citizenship.

We will ensure robust protections are in place to fully protect children while online. We will also implement Child Safeguarding Statements as part of Children's First legislation. Robust and efficient vetting procedures for all positions where there is substantial access to children and vulnerable adults will be enforced.

We will review the operation of Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) to ensure that a child's view is always effectively represented in court proceedings.

#### **4. Giving Vulnerable Young People the Best Chance in Life**

The new Partnership Government has an opportunity to change our approach from expensive reactive interventions to proactive supports and long term planning starting from birth. It makes sense to intervene early in the areas of health, childcare, education and youth crime, not only in terms of value for money, but to give every person the opportunity to meet their full potential in life. Prevention will also help to alleviate pressure on our vital public services. The early years and adolescence lay down the building blocks for the future, particularly the period from birth to two years, and in adolescence, we must plan and invest accordingly. Each stage of life will affect the next.

We must plan earlier for adolescents and young adults with care needs (such as special education, disability, juvenile justice) so they too can play a valued role in our society. Likewise, we must ensure that every young person leaving school can move seamlessly to a job, training or education, no-one will graduate onto welfare.

We support the expansion of Local Drug Taskforce projects, and extend Garda Youth Diversion Programmes for young people promoting restorative justice, and other voluntary organisations that contribute to our young people's future direction.

We will also provide ongoing support to Tusla in delivering targeted intervention services. We will also support the increased use of therapeutic intervention services for children in detention within Oberstown, including psychology, speech and language therapy and where appropriate referral to addiction services to children.

We will support and continue programmes in disadvantaged areas similar to those currently supported by Atlantic Philanthropies.

We will reform the monitoring of child benefit payments by amalgamating the two existing school attendance monitoring systems, currently run by the Department of Education and Tusla, to address poor attendance within some families.

## **9. Working to Make Our Older Years Better Years**

### **Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil**

Over the next 30 years the number of people aged over 65 will double. At the same time, the number of us living to be over 80 is set to quadruple. We need therefore, to be able to cater for the needs of a more diverse ageing population who want to live independent and active lives in their communities. As we invest in services and supports for older age, we must ensure that they benefit older people in the fullness of their lives. We must look further than health and social care and recognise also the essential contribution and powerful role of older men and women in and for our society.

#### **1. Increased State Support for Older People**

We will increase the State Pension and the Living Alone Allowance above the rate of inflation.

We will also significantly reduce the cost of medicines by introducing an annual cap on the Drugs Payment Scheme and reducing prescription charges for medical card holders.

#### **2. Keeping Older People Independent and Active in their Community**

We will improve supports and services for older people to live independently in their own home, including a provision for pension increases.

Will build GP capacity to respond to patients needs through access to X-rays, ultrasound and other investigations as well as the expansion of chronic disease management in general practice. In addition to diabetes, which is already being dealt with in general practice we will seek to cover chronic pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, heart failure and a trial fibrillation, so that patients can keep their care in their community close to home.

While we will also increase the number of GP training places, we recognise the need to increase the number of therapists and other health professionals in our primary care

centres to maximise the potential of services. We will expand the role of community pharmacists in managing the health of their patients and in medicine prescription.

We recognise the role the Public Health Nurse plays in communities. We will expand the Public Health Nurse (PHN) service and provide greater administrative support for them.

To remain independent at home, some older people need the support of home help. Currently there are 10.3m hours funded by the HSE annually. We will increase funding for homecare packages and home help every year.

The provision of home care ranges from excellent to irregular for recipients across the country. We will introduce a uniform homecare service so all recipients can receive a quality support, 7 days per week, where possible.

We will invest significantly in the Housing Adaptation Scheme and the Senior Alert Scheme, which provide additional safety and peace of mind for those living at home.

We will invest in and support new technologies that offer more support, confidence and value, including through the Health Innovation Hub.

We will fully protect the Free Travel pass for all pensioners and work with private and public operators to keep services operating on as many routes as possible.

We also recognise the value and benefit of rural transport to many communities, in particular for older people vulnerable to social isolation. We will examine how best to improve integration of services in the rural bus network, including public buses, school transport and the HSE transport networks. A report will be provided to the relevant Oireachtas Committee within 6 months examining how existing routes can be made more sustainable and accessible to the public, the potential for new routes, and reflecting international best practice.

We support the community listening service and text alert services at local and national level. We will consider, with a view to funding, how to extend this and the introduction of national regional support officers in conjunction with An Garda Síochána.

We will review legislation relating to elder abuse. In 2014, there were 2,592 referrals made to the HSE Elder Abuse Service, with psychological and financial abuse the most frequently reported. Given the increase in referrals and our ageing population since the last review in 2009, it is necessary to address this.

The new Government intends to establish a Citizens' Assembly to discuss a range of constitutional and societal issues. Included in this will be a discussion on the future needs of, and the possibilities and opportunities for our ageing population.

We support the potential opportunity for young people to benefit from supportive and experienced mentors and role models to build meaningful connections in their lives. We will fund a pilot scheme where guidance and mentoring relationships can be built at community and regional level with a focus on better outcomes and more active citizenship.

### **3. Residential Care and Support in Rural and Urban Regions**

€385million in capital funding has been secured for the replacement and refurbishment of 90 public nursing homes across the country. This is one of the most comprehensive programmes of investment in public nursing home facilities undertaken by the State. We will continue to upgrade, refurbish and rebuild public nursing home facilities and district hospitals.

We will provide additional funding for the Nursing Home Support Scheme to keep the Fair Deal scheme at approximately 4 weeks. We will introduce changes as soon as practicable to remove discrimination against small business and family farms under the Fair Deal Nursing Home Scheme.

We will seek ways to incentivise private nursing home investment and new supported living/assisted living arrangements. This will include working with the Strategic Investment Fund to provide loan finance for new and additional residential options.

## 10. Education

### **Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil**

Education is the key to giving every child an equal opportunity in life. No child should be left behind in economic recovery and we should use our strengthening economy to become a leader in the provision of world-class education and skills. Ireland is recognised as having a strong education system, with a well-trained and committed teaching profession. Our rates of school completion and participation in higher education continue to rise. And yet, too many of our children still fall through the cracks, and are in danger of being left behind.

We now have an opportunity to change our approach in some aspects of education. To do this, the Government, working in conjunction with the Oireachtas must introduce measures that will modernise our education system, address the demands and pressures that face school leaders, and equip young people with key enabling skills for the future so they can meet their full potential in a fast-changing world. Every child leaving primary school should be able to read and write.

Investment in education is a prime way to grow our society and economy in tandem. Investing in educating improves human capital, thereby generating wider benefits for our economic and jobs growth and competitiveness, as well as ensuring that all our people have opportunities to achieve their potential.

We are committed to investing an extra €500million in education by 2021 through measures including childcare subventions, HSE Speech and Language Therapists, to bring the number up to 1,102 (a 25% increase) additional National Educational Psychologists (NEPs) to the bring the total to 238 (a 25% increase), reducing the pupil teacher ratio in junior and senior infants, annual increases in primary and secondary capitation rates, additional teacher CPD, a new School Excellence Fund, pay increases in accordance with the Lansdowne Road Agreement and extra third level investment.

We will also reduce primary school class sizes; reintroduce guidance counselling to secondary schools and increase financial supports for post graduate students with a particular focus on those from low income households.

With this investment we will pursue the below principles of access, excellence, transparency and innovation. We will produce a three year strategy for the Department of Education within the first 100 days and a framework for measuring its progress in consultation with stakeholders.

## **1. Prioritising Early Years**

The first five years last a lifetime. The experiences early in life are critical in establishing the foundation for learning, work and future health. We are prioritising early years' investment to reap a host of positive outcomes, including higher secondary school completion, employment rates and higher lifetime earnings. These measures underpin a targeted investment approach based on international best practice for young children.

We will target investment in children's early years by:

- Introducing a second preschool year which will help prepare young children further for starting school, raising the school starting age to 5 years
- Reduce the pupil-teacher ratio for junior and senior infants by providing smaller classes, which have the greatest beneficial impact on younger pupils. The gains from smaller class size in early years are shown to carry forward into future years. Research shows pupils are more likely to stay in school longer and earn better results
- Developing a new model of In-School Speech and Language Therapy, involving collaboration between parents, schools and primary care services
- Providing additional NEPS psychologists to support new intervention strategies for staff and pupils, and offer immediate support to schools in cases of critical incidents

## **2. Tackling Disadvantage**

We will increase mandatory schooling to age 17. We will also publish a new School Completion Strategy to further improve school completion rates, particularly in disadvantaged areas. School retention rates are increasing but more can be done to ensure



a transition to work or further education for young school leavers. Additional supports to groups working with Early School Leavers will be examined.

We will publish a new updated Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, within 12 months, with particular focus on DEIS schools. There are also many students outside of DEIS who could benefit from such support. In reviewing DEIS, consideration should be given to a more broad-based package of measures which encompasses all aspects of education which are impacted by disadvantage (e.g. summer programmes for children, which evidence shows, have considerable educational benefit).

The provision of relevant educational programmes, specifically aimed at early leavers and second chance learners should be made available throughout the year, on a modular basis. We will support an increase in the number of flexible courses available; giving people the opportunity to attend courses part time, during evenings, in the summer and at weekends.

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.

### **3. Diversity and Choice for Parents**

We need a dynamic and innovative education system that reflects the diversity of Twenty First Century Ireland. We will strengthen parental choice and diversity in our school system, reflecting the need in modern Ireland for new forms of multi-denominational and non-denominational education, while also safeguarding the right of parents to send their children to denominational schools that offer a distinct religious ethos, should they so wish. A road map has been agreed for a phased transfer of Catholic schools to new patrons, where the support of communities exists. We will work with all stakeholders to facilitate this process whilst also considering new approaches such as the potential of different patrons on a single site.

We will increase the number of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools with a view to reaching 400 by 2030.

We will publish new School Admissions and Excellence legislation taking account of current draft proposals (publication of school enrolment policies, an end to waiting lists, introduction of annual enrolment structures, and transparency and fairness in admissions for pupils). We will seek to enact this legislation for the start of school year 2017-18.

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 relevant Oireachtas Committee to ensure its consistency with the need to ensure better local decision making and accountability to parents.

We will ensure that no small school closes against the wishes of parents, while also facilitating those small schools who wish to amalgamate. Within 3 months, we will commence a review of the teacher appointment thresholds in schools with 4 or less teachers.

We will review the concessionary charges and rules element of the School Transport Scheme prior to Budget 2017. We will review the criteria and guidelines for the School Transport Appeals Board.

We will review the options for standardised testing so that clear information is provided to teachers and parents. Parents should be able to receive annual reports on how their school is doing. Government should also be able to assess how new investments are progressing (e.g. reductions in pupil-teacher ratio, speech & language interventions).

We will introduce a stronger complaints procedure and charter for parents, and commence the Fitness to Teach provisions of the Teaching Council Act (10 years after its enactment).

#### **4. Promoting Excellence and Innovation in Schools**

In promoting excellence and innovation, we will introduce greater flexibility in our schools and pursue measures to achieve this. This may include nurturing different ambitions through new subject choices, greater engagement with enterprise on future skills needs, and increased flexibility in the day to day management of schools in order to improve outcomes. School leadership will be supported in identifying and introducing reforms that drive up educational standards, particularly in the fundamentals of reading, writing and arithmetic.

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.

We will establish a new Schools Excellence Fund, which rewards new approaches driven by teachers and by parents themselves to the benefit of pupils' education. Applications that seek to tackle educational disadvantage will be prioritised.

We will establish a pool of experts (educators, employers, accountants, business leaders, IT specialists etc.) to assist school initiatives, promote innovation and enterprise engagement especially at second level.

As part of the Digital Strategy, we will introduce new technology bringing remote learning into classrooms, ensuring all students have access to a wider range of subject choices and consistent quality education.

We will invest in additional continuous professional development for teachers, to ensure they are supported throughout their careers, and are best placed to respond to the developing challenges that their students face. Newly appointed school principals will take a preparation course in advance of taking up their role.

In order to improve student's outcomes and school performance, we will examine the potential for measures to assist teaching principals. We will also 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.

## **5. Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students**

The curriculum is evolving. In 2016, we need to focus on the future needs, abilities and capacity of students. Focus must remain on literacy and maths, but new subjects should be introduced such as the arts, entrepreneurial education, and mental health awareness. We will further accelerate the Digital and ICT agenda in schools by including a coding course for the Junior Cycle and introducing ICT/Computer Science as a Leaving Certificate subject. We will also introduce a new Leaving Certificate P.E. syllabus as a full subject. Guidance counselling at secondary level will be enhanced.

We will evaluate transition supports available to young people at all levels of the education, with a view to promoting initiatives which support young people at critical points in their lives.

Transition Year, in particular, will be used to prepare young people with key skills before they make the transition to higher education or work. We will work with industry and colleges to open up new opportunities and programmes in transition year.

The relevant Oireachtas Committee will be requested to review the recommendations contained in the forthcoming STEM report and outline the way forward in implementing a National Strategy to develop competence in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths.

We will benchmark entrepreneurial activity in Irish higher education and work with the Higher Education Authority to ensure an ambitious and implementable plan to identify and address skills gaps, ICT and STEM needs.

## **6. Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities**

We are committed to delivering a school capital investment programme for extensions/refurbishments, additional school places, and eliminating the use of prefabs. Significant funding has been secured as part of the Capital Plan.

We support an annual application process for the Minor Works and Summer Works schemes. In addition we will introduce a new funding mechanism for low cost safety measures for primary schools such as car parks and bus lay-bys.

Schools buildings must be utilised out of hours if they are to remain at the centre of communities into the future, both throughout the day and throughout the year, including better utilisation of information technology. Afterschool care, homework clubs and other community activities should be permissible. Additional capitation funding will be linked to the availability of afterschool care options, where demand exists.

## **7. Special Needs Education**

Over €1.4billion is spent on special education annually, yet families still face anxiety in accessing services. We will examine the adequacy of current special education access and funding provision, in particular for children with Down syndrome. We will request the National Council for Special Education advice on how best to address this. Where efficiencies are made as part of this review, consideration is to be given to the extension of the July Provision Programme to support families over summer months.

We will also consult with stakeholders to see how best to progress sections of the EPSEN Act that were introduced on a non-statutory basis.

A new model of In-School Speech and Language Therapy will be established. It has been shown across the OECD as the most effective way of managing and intervening with the educational and social issues consequential to speech and language difficulties in children. It will involve greater collaboration between parents, schools and primary care services that has been proven to be effective internationally.

We will also invest additional resources in the National Educational Psychologists Service (NEPS) to ensure earlier intervention and access for young children (and also teenagers), and offer immediate support to schools in cases of critical incidents.

## **8. Meeting the Skills Needs of the Future**

A new architecture is required in education to really drive excellence and 'best in class' potential. We will change the structures of the Department of Education to ensure it operates as a dynamic policy leader focused on quality education and improving outcomes for every student.

We support the creation of Technological Universities, linked to industry and with the capacity to create and retain jobs in regions.

We will implement the National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, published in December 2015.

We will support an increase in the number of flexible courses and opportunities available; giving people the opportunity to attend courses part time, during evenings, in the summer and at weekends. We support the introduction of mid-degree “sandwich year” courses, whereby students spend their third year of university working in industry.

Together with the Apprenticeship Council, Solas, the Education and Training Boards, and industry, we will double the number of apprenticeships by 2020. We will also significantly increase the number of traineeship places. We will develop a mechanism to recognise a person’s practical work experience and expertise in order to enable them to take on an apprentice.

We will deliver a step change in our capacity to educate, develop, deploy and retain talent, setting targets for critical skill provision and competitive funding models will encourage their delivery in partnership with enterprise. 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)

Significant exchequer resources are invested in both current and capital spending in the Higher Education sector. Following the publication of the Expert Group report on the Future Funding of the Higher Education Sector, we will propose that the relevant cross party Oireachtas Committee review its recommendations and outline a proposed funding plan for this sector. We will propose an examination of the efficiency and operation of SUSI in parallel with this report, including the potential of providing SUSI liaison personnel in each region

We support new flexibility for appropriate higher education institutions within strict budgets, transparency and new accountability agreements, to set their own staffing needs, hire the best lecturers, automate routine processes and adapt work practices to staff and student needs. By allowing universities more flexibilities and ‘earned autonomy’ they can prioritise and address issues themselves for the improvement of their institution, and the creation of a new relationship with students.

There has been significant change in the Further, Adult and Community Education sector in light of the dissolution of FAS and the VECs, and the establishment of new structures inclusive of SOLAS, Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI), and Education and Training Boards (ETBs). We will ensure that these new structures and systems are empowering those who did not get an equal opportunity for education in their youth, and that implementation of educational programs and skills training for those unemployed or underemployed are effective in supporting their path to quality employment. We will do this by initiating a Review of the Further, Adult and Community Education sector by the Oireachtas Committee on Education and an implementation of reforms to ensure the effectiveness of the sector.

We will also commission an independent examination to identify the supports and barriers to accessing higher education for lone parents, and examine measures to increase participation. The recommendations of this report are to be published in advance of Budget 2017



# 11. Crime Prevention, Justice and Equality

## **Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil**

The priority for the new Partnership Government is the protection of all our citizens by preventing and reducing crime, providing investment in An Garda Síochána, creating a more efficient legal system and implementing a tougher sentencing approach for offenders. A significant programme of investment in An Garda Síochána has been prioritised; an end to the moratorium and recruitment of 1,150 new Gardaí, including 600 this year, together with €34million invested in new Garda Vehicles, ensuring more responsive and visible policing in the community. We will increase Garda numbers to 15,000, invest in CCTV and mandate the Policing Authority to oversee a review of the boundaries of Garda districts and the dispersement of Garda stations.

Maintaining and strengthening close relations between communities and the Gardaí will be central to delivering our policing objectives. By working together with local communities to address concerns, we can set priorities in tackling crime and ensure our cities, villages and towns remain safe places in which to live.

### **1. Ensuring a Strong and Visible Police Force in every Community**

Building a visible and familiar policing presence is vital to increasing community engagement, providing reassurance and deterring crime.

To build a stronger police presence, we will:

- Continue the accelerated recruitment programme with a view to increasing Garda numbers to 15,000
- Double the Garda Reserve, to act in a supportive role undertaking local patrols and crime reduction initiatives
- Increase further civilianisation to free up more Gardaí to focus on frontline policing services (i.e. delegating court attendances and release from desk work)

## **2. Provision of Resources for Effective and Responsive Policing**

Our Gardaí must have the modern technology and resources necessary to detect and investigate crimes, and to prevent loss and harm to citizens and their property on a 24/7 basis.

The Capital Plan 2016-2021 secured resources to support:

- New intelligence led policing infrastructure which will increase the ability of An Garda Síochána to detect crime and make our communities safer places for all
- Upgrade ICT infrastructure, and seek to introduce legislation, based on best practice, on the taking of statement and records, consigning outdated paper based practices to the past and equipping Gardaí for the modern era. We will prioritise a new computer aided dispatch system, increased mobile technology, an investigation management system and enhanced connectivity for Garda vehicles
- Further investment in the Garda fleet
- New and refurbished Garda Stations throughout the country, which will be critical to delivering effective policing

We will support investment in CCTV at key locations along the road network and in urban centres.

We will review the existing Proceeds of Crime legislation and we will ensure that adequate resources are provided to support the work of the Criminal Assets Bureau in tackling money laundering and to target the proceeds of crime. We will examine how communities can better engage with CAB including provision of information on the suspected local use of the proceeds of crime and the potential of a smaller CAB being established to target regional assets.

We will transfer responsibility for Criminal Legal Aid to the Legal Aid Board who will have new powers to compel criminals to pay a contribution. We will also introduce a more rigorous and objective means testing process for such applications, as well as increasing the

sanction for false declarations and improving prosecution in cases of abuse. In parallel, we will examine the feasibility of a new Public Defender system and report to the relevant Oireachtas Committee and Government within 6 months.

### **3. Building on the Successes of Rural and Community Policing**

An effective urban and rural policing plan which enhances visibility and strategically deploys resources in a manner which responds to the needs, population and crime trends in a community is the best means of reducing crime. Community policing is the embodiment of An Garda Síochána, providing a means of recognising that every community – both urban and rural - has its own concerns and expectations. We will ensure visible, effective and responsive policing in every community, including the most minimal response times possible. To support this objective (and cognisant of the findings of recent Garda Inspectorate reports), we will ask the Policing Authority to oversee a review of:

- Both the boundaries of Garda districts and the dispersment of Garda stations in rural areas and in developing urban and suburban areas with a view to ensuring both an efficient and optimum geographical distribution of stations and minimal response times, including taking account of station closures since 2012
- Deployment and rostering arrangements with a view to strengthening this vital link with communities with a view to enhancing community policing units
- As part of the review we will launch a pilot scheme to reopen 6 Garda stations both urban and rural to determine possible positive impacts that such openings will have on criminal activity, with special emphasis on burglaries, theft and public order. This will be initiated within two months

Recognising the valuable role of Joint Policing Committees, we will better resource and empower Local Joint Policing Committees (JPCs), reviewing the role of JPCs in the development of Community Policing Strategies. We will also examine the potential for greater consistency of JPCs across the country.

We will continue to support and prioritise community crime prevention schemes including Neighbourhood Watch and the Text Alert Scheme. We will strive for consistency in supports for community groups and we will examine direct funding opportunities for community schemes and groups.

#### **4. Tackling Criminal Gangs**

Serious crime requires a serious response. A national and co-ordinated response is required to target these destructive elements in our society. The establishment of a new dedicated Armed Support Unit will be prioritised for the Dublin area, operating in addition to the Emergency Response Unit and other Garda units, to tackle gangland crime.

In providing this response we will build upon the success of Operation Thor, deploying when necessary, co-ordinated crime prevention and enforcement initiatives based on detailed intelligence and crime trends.

We will ensure that in the context of increases in overall Garda strength, specialist units involved in the fight against all forms of serious crime are brought up to full strength at the earliest possible opportunity.

Encouraging communities to work with Gardaí can be an effective means of tackling crime, we will establish Garda Business Fora in urban centres allowing Gardaí and businesses to work together to improve public safety, ensure a safe night-time economy and respond to crimes against businesses.

#### **5. Stopping Repeat Offenders in their Tracks**

Tackling repeat offenders, who are responsible for disproportionate amounts of crime, is fundamental to reducing crime and reassuring communities and victims that crimes against them will be prosecuted with appropriate sanctions applied.

Together with Operation Thor, recent legislation tackling burglars who continue to re-offend has had an impact. We propose to extend the range of serious crime categories for repeat offenders who can receive these tougher sentences.

Legislation providing for stricter bail terms for repeat serious offenders is being prepared which will strengthen Garda powers to deal with breaches of bail, and to increase the use of curfews. We will seek to fast track this legislation into the Oireachtas.

We will introduce electronic tagging for those on bail, where requested by Gardaí, thereby reducing the risk of reoffending. We will seek to fast-track this legislation.

We will strengthen supervision of prolific repeat offenders after they have served their prison sentence, to reduce the risk of reoffending.

We will resource the Courts, particularly the Circuit Court, to deal with increased non-summary prosecutions of serious crimes.

We will ask the relevant Oireachtas Committee to consider the introduction of mandatory sentencing for robbery, with violence, in the home.

## **6. Extending Garda Oversight and Accountability**

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. Clear and accountable structures also ensure the confidence of the public is maintained in An Garda Síochána. Together with the new Policing Authority, we will work with An Garda Síochána to implement reforms in particular civilianisation, rostering and management structures.

We will continue to support the new Independent Policing Authority as the new public oversight body for policing in Ireland and the enhanced role of the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC) in providing independent oversight of complaints made against members of the Garda Síochána.

## **7. Implementing the EU Victims of Crime Directive**

We will publish legislation to implement in full the EU Victims of Crime Directive strengthening the rights, support and protection of victims across the European Union. We

will develop victim support services, including the Garda Victim Support Offices which provide a single point of contact in accessing support and information.

## **8. Courts and Law Reform**

A modern legal system must be able to respond to the changing values and attitudes of our society, resolve issues and promote equality. Through the implementation of a progressive law reform programme we can strengthen our Constitution, rule of law and our justice system for the benefit of everyone.

We will commission an annual study on court efficiency and sitting times, benchmarked against international standards, to provide accurate measurements for improving access to justice.

We will propose legislation to reduce excessive delays to trials and court proceedings including pre-trial hearings.

We will propose legislation to provide for convictions to be spent following the lapse of certain offences from an individual's record after a period of time.

We will implement in full 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 propose updated legislation to effectively deal with sexual offences including stronger sanctions aimed at protecting children from sexual exploitation, child abuse material and online grooming.

The post-release supervision of sex offenders has been shown to reduce instances of reoffending and to protect communities. We will further enhance the arrangements in place, providing for post-release supervisions and if necessary make further amendments to the existing legislation in the area. We will provide, in legislation, for disclosure by Gardaí, of

details on sex offenders where they believe public safety concerns exist, including disclosure in relevant circumstances to individual parents.

We will publish new legislation to introduce the regulation of the sale and purchase of precious metals, along the lines of the 2015 public consultation conducted by the Department of Justice & Equality. We will work with the Department of Environment to further strengthen the regulation of the sale and purchase of scrap metal.

## **9. Developing our National Defence and Security Policy**

The preservation of security and peace on this island is a core priority of the new Partnership Government. In a complex and changing security environment, our National Defence and Security policy is even more critical. In committing to ensuring our citizens live in a safe and secure environment we will:

- Complete a core structural review of decision-making arrangements across the common areas of security and defence
- 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
- Provide adequate resources to support the work of CAB in tackling money laundering and to target the proceeds of crime
- Implement the Schengen II information-sharing IT system and improve interoperability internationally 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

## **10. Ensuring a Balanced Migration Policy**

We will 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. We are committed to supporting a humanitarian response to the current

refugee crisis and providing a safe haven to those who come to Ireland under EU programmes.

Working with the relevant Oireachtas Committee, we will introduce a comprehensive Immigration and Residency Reform Bill, aimed at modernising Ireland's visa and residency systems.

We will offer safe haven for refugees under EU and UN resettlement and relocation programmes, while promoting the integration of refugees in our communities.

Long durations in direct provision are acknowledged to have a negative impact on family life. We are therefore committed to reforming the Direct Provision system, with particular focus on families and children.

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 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.

## **11. Equality and Inclusiveness**

As we celebrate the centenary of the 1916 Proclamation and reflect upon the vision of Ireland which the signatories expressed for future generations of Irishmen and Irishwomen, we too must set out our vision for creating an equal, fair and inclusive society. Action on equality is required by all groups in our society, but the new Government must play a role in mobilising the resources for change and enabling citizens to overcome the barriers they face.



We will develop the process of budget and policy proofing as a means of advancing equality, reducing poverty and strengthening economic and social rights.

We will ensure the institutional arrangements are in place to support equality and gender proofing in the independent fiscal and budget office and within key government departments and to draw on the expertise of the IHREC to support the proofing process. For Budget 2017 the budget and finance committee will be tasked with looking at gender and equality proofing budget submissions and proposals with independent expertise (including the IHREC) to assist where necessary

## **12. Supporting Low Income Families**

In-work support for families on low incomes is vital in assisting families to remain in work, incentivise those moving from welfare to work and to prevent families from becoming at risk of poverty. The current Family Income Supplement creates major hurdles for unemployed parents transitioning from jobseekers welfare payments into work, and also locks many parents into working fewer hours.

In addressing this we will:

- Introduce a new Working Family Payment that promotes work over welfare by supplementing, on a graduated basis, the income of a household, while at the same time incentivising more hours and full-time work
- Publish an Action Plan for Jobless Households, containing targets aimed at supporting those in jobless households into employment and reducing child poverty
- Increase the minimum wage and ensure that the interests of low-paid workers and people in precarious work situations are adequately protected

In recognition of the vital role of schemes such as the Rural Social Scheme, Community Employment Schemes, BTEA and Farm Assist in rural communities and in activating the unemployed, we will ask the Minister for Social Protection to make suitable recommendations to strengthen provision in this area.

### **13. Empowering Women**

Following the introduction of legislation encouraging increased female participation in politics, we will publish an updated National Women's Strategy by end 2016, further promoting women's participation in decision making. We will empower women to ensure that households headed by women are no longer at a higher risk of poverty. We will take measures to reduce the gender pay gap - inclusive of increasing investment in childcare, and reviewing the lower pay of women and gender inequality for senior appointments. We will also seek to promote:

- Wage transparency by requiring companies of 50 and more to complete a wage survey
- Locally delivered courses for women, comprising a series of training opportunities on self-development and work related skills, to assist a return to the labour market and promote entrepreneurship
- An increased level of female participation in our Defence Forces, with the goal of doubling the rate of participation from the current 6% to 12% in the next 5 years
- Increased female representation on state boards to 40%
- A strengthened role of the Low Pay Commission in relation to the gender pay gap and in-work poverty

### **14. Protecting our Children and Young People**

The new Partnership Government must ensure that no child is left behind in the economic recovery, and that every young person is enabled to reach their full potential. No child should have to live in poverty and no family should have to face homelessness.

By targeting resources at a child's early years we can ensure that all children gain from a better start in life. We will deliver upon this commitment by extending the free preschool provision, and reducing class sizes, resulting in higher secondary school completion.

Over €1.4billion is spent on special education annually, yet families still face anxiety in accessing services. We will examine the adequacy of current special education access and

funding provision, in particular for children with Down syndrome. We will request the National Council for Special Education to advise on how best to address this. We will also consult with stakeholders to see how best to progress sections of the EPSEN Act that were introduced on a non-statutory basis.

We will publish an updated Action Plan for Educational Inclusion to narrow the gap between DEIS and non-DEIS schools, and examine how students outside of DEIS can be better supported.

### **15. Ensuring Access to Education**

We need a dynamic and innovative education system that reflects the diversity of Twenty First Century Ireland. We will strengthen parental choice and diversity in our school system, reflecting the need in modern Ireland for new forms of multi-denominational and non-denominational education, while also safeguarding the right of parents to send their children to denominational schools that offer a distinct religious ethos, should they so wish.

We will publish new School Admissions and Excellence legislation providing families with fairer access to their local schools.

### **16. New Funding**

Through Social Innovation Fund Ireland we will seek to raise a minimum of €50million to provide growth capital to Ireland's best social projects and innovators and target solutions to some of our most critical social issues.

### **17. Fostering Greater Social Inclusion and Empowering the LGBT Community**

We will develop an LGBT Youth Strategy that will encompass education, youth services, mental health and other issues. As part of this strategy, we will review implementation of the National Action Plan on Bullying in our schools.

We will publish a revised National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy, aimed at improving the lives of members of the Traveller and Roma communities by the end of 2016.

We will establish a special working group to audit the current delivery and implementation of local authorities' Traveller Accommodation plans and consult with stakeholders on key areas of concern. The group should report a plan for the delivery of safe, culturally appropriate accommodation.

### **18. Stardust**

Full regard will be had to any new evidence which emerges which would be likely to definitely establish the cause of the fire at Stardust.

## 12. Agriculture and the Marine

### **Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil**

The development of the Agriculture and Food sector is a fundamental priority for the future direction of the country. Farm families and rural communities must feel the effects of positive economic and social change. The priority for agriculture must be to reward farmers for producing quality food. Current farm incomes must be improved if we are to meet the Foodwise 2025 targets. Agriculture is the heartbeat of the rural economy and schemes must be tailored to meet the challenges of farming on all types of land, across all sectors and on all sizes of farm holdings. The next generation of farmers must be supported, to generate farm income, while positioning Ireland as the highest quality food producing nation in the world, based on innovation and sustainability. As part of this, we will fully implement Food Harvest 2020 and Foodwise 2025, secure the future of family farms and support our fishing industry.

### **1. Overarching Plan for the Agri-food sector: Foodwise 2025**

Foodwise 2025 was developed for and by the agri-food industry, with input from farm bodies, agri-business and other key stakeholders. Buy-in from all players in the industry and a clear vision and plan will be fundamental to the sector's future success. As recognition of this endorsement of Foodwise 2025, a new Government will work with industry to implement the strategy. It aims to develop all sectors including dairy, meat, prepared consumer foods, seafood, whiskey and craft beer, horticulture, forestry and tillage. It provides a roadmap for ensuring that all agri-food businesses are supported, from the largest operators in the sector to the smallest of artisan food businesses.

By 2025, Foodwise 2025 aims to:

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

## **2. Protecting Farm Incomes**

### **A) Basic Payment Scheme**

Many farmers are experiencing challenges arising out of volatility in the market and this is in some cases further impacted by difficult farming conditions. A new Government will ensure that the budget for Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) implementation is protected, with €12.5billion to be fairly distributed amongst farmers across the timeframe of the new CAP. In the context of the EU mid-term review of the CAP, we will propose a lowering of the cap on Basic Payments, from €150,000 to €100,000.

We will adopt a number of other measures designed to support farm incomes including:

- Implementation of regulations to tackle unfair practices in the grocery trade and support for further action at an EU level to deliver greater transparency and fairness in the food supply chain
- Development of new market opportunities to deliver more outlets for export of farm produce, in particular by investing in Bord Bia infrastructure at home and abroad
- Development of Producer Organisations in the beef sector to ensure farmers are not just price takers
- Strategic change in the taxation system to support farm incomes and land mobility.
- Prioritising and developing new live export opportunities to provide farmers with alternative outlets, in light of the expected increase in cattle numbers in the latter half of 2016 and 2017, with a focus on developing markets in Turkey and Egypt whilst also maintaining the existing outlets for live animals
- Continuing to explore the potential development of an all-island label to successfully address the problems associated with so-called 'nomad cattle'
- Encouraging banks from within and outside the State, including the European Investment Bank, to make competitive rates available to farmers with repayment options tailored for farm income (recognising the benefit of the development of new financial products such as the Milk Flex Fund and working with industry and the banking sector to encourage further tailor made products to make banking more affordable for farmers)

- An ex-ante evaluation of a financial measure under the RDP will be carried out and a consultation with stakeholders and financial institutions undertaken to ascertain the best approach on using this facility under the RDP to the benefit of all farmers
- We will encourage the continued availability of favourable terms for investment in primary agriculture, processing and marketing under the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland (SBCI) which includes the EIB as one of its funding partners. We will work with the agri-food sector and the financial services industry to ensure that financial products are developed for all sectors of farming across the industry
- Review of the Farm Assist Scheme, recognising the challenges facing farmers on low incomes

### **3. Farm Gate Investment**

The €4billion Rural Development Programme (RDP) will be the primary means of delivering increased investment at farm gate level. A new Government will ensure this funding is fully committed to supporting growth in agriculture and sustainability of family farming through the rollout of schemes including:

- GLAS (Agri-environment)
- TAMS (On farm capital investment)
- ANC (Areas of Natural Constraint/ Disadvantaged Areas)
- Organic Scheme
- Beef Data and Genomics Programme

A mid-term review of the RDP, commencing in late 2016, will provide an opportunity to consider the effectiveness and workability of schemes and to tailor programmes strategically for the second half of the RDP rollout.

#### **A) Areas of Natural Constraint**

We will endeavour to ensure the level of payments and eligibility involved in the ANC scheme reflect the degree of disadvantage experienced by individual farmers, within the

remit of the Rural Development Programme. We will enhance Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) payments, increasing funding in this area by €25million in Budget 2018.

## **B) TAMS**

Subject to EU amendment approval, we will expand the TAMS scheme to include measures on mats for slatted sheds and rainwater harvesting systems.

## **C) Beef**

A strong commitment to ensure sustained profitability in the beef sector will be at the heart of a new Government. Market volatility and a fair return from the market place are ongoing concerns for the industry. A new Government will focus on bringing about change by:

- Encouraging profitability through greater efficiencies
- Using the Beef Forum to bring industry and farming organisations together in positive and open engagement. The Beef Forum will continue to be chaired by the Minister for Agriculture
- Investing €300million through the Beef Data and Genomics Programme on modernising and improving efficiency in the beef herd as well as supporting farm incomes
- Engaging in a full mid-term review of the BDGP without delay to ensure it meets the aims and objectives of the scheme and is workable for farmers. The review will consider all aspects of the scheme
- Maintaining a strong and viable suckler herd is a key priority and this will be a focus of the work of the beef forum
- Introducing a framework for producer organisations
- Developing increased live export markets and working with the EU Commission to examine best practice in Europe in terms of export credit insurance models
- Using knowledge transfer schemes to assist farmers in increasing efficiency and profitability
- Continuing to support a more efficient and seamless all island market for buying and selling beef



## **D) Dairy**

The period of market volatility currently being experienced by the dairy sector is challenging and a new Government will support the sector in dealing with the difficulty this presents. Despite this period of volatility, the abolition of milk quotas continues to represent the biggest opportunity for the Irish dairy sector and, as markets stabilise, Irish producers will be 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
- Prioritise on-farm capital investment through TAMS and knowledge transfer schemes
- Investigate the development of a futures market for dairy produce and encourage price stabilisation tools to combat price volatility
- Continue to apply pressure at an EU level to ensure the EU responds effectively to the challenges facing dairy farmers

## **E) Sheep**

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. We are committed to introducing a new sheep scheme. Consultation with farm bodies on the development of a new sheep scheme will commence immediately upon the formation of a new Government, with the intention of submitting an amendment to the RDP as soon as possible so a new sheep scheme with a budget of €25million can be provided for in Budget 2017.

## **F) Poultry**

We will roll out a dedicated scheme for investment in the poultry sector, assisting producers in modernising their facilities, and increasing competitiveness and returns within the sector. The industry will also be supported in addressing animal health issues to the benefit of producers, processors and retailers.

### **G) Pigmeat**

We will provide 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. We will focus on the development of new and alternative markets to provide opportunities for certainty and growth in the sector.

### **H) Organic Sector**

Support for the Organic Farming Scheme has doubled, with €52million 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. The effectiveness of these schemes will be considered as the RDP is implemented. We will seek an amendment to the RDP which allows a greater payment per hectare for the first ten hectares for organic producers.

### **I) Horticulture**

We will prioritise capital investment for development in this area. We recognise the potential to grow the output value of this sector to over €500million in the medium term and will deliver on the actions in the Food Wise Strategy and the Bord Bia Making a World of Difference Strategy 2016-2018 to achieve this target.

### **J) Tillage Sector**

A growing and profitable tillage sector in Ireland will be a priority for a new Government. Supports and measures aimed at improving the level of production, quality and viability of the Irish tillage sector will be developed including a new TAMS scheme aimed specifically at the tillage area to improve efficiency and profitability.

### **K) Forestry**

The role of forestry in the effort to mitigate against climate change is very significant. A new Government will implement the Forestry Programme 2014-2020. The programme targets an increase in planting each year over the lifetime of the programme, commencing with 6,000ha of new forests in year one, increasing to 8,290 ha in 2020. A review of the Forestry

Programme 2014-2020 will take place in 2017 and will consider participation rates, climate change, environmental impact, rural communities and land use policy.

#### **L) Island Farming**

€15million will be invested in island communities during the course of the RDP as a special payment to assist island farmers in preserving traditional farming methods and preventing land abandonment.

#### **M) Commonage/Hill Farmers/Restricted Areas**

Some farmers are working in challenging conditions in mountainous or disadvantaged areas. These farmers will be supported by a new Government and will be given priority access to agri-environment schemes like GLAS. A number of 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, will be rolled out, supporting farmers operating in restricted areas.

#### **N) Horse and Greyhound Sectors**

The Horse and Greyhound sectors are fundamentally important to rural Ireland and a new Government will prioritise strategic investment, support and modernisation in this area. Projects such as the new Curragh racecourse, the implementation of the Indecon Report recommendations in the greyhound sector and the implementation of the 10 year strategy for the sport horse sector will be progressed, with the support of the Oireachtas.

#### **O) Sugar Beet**

As part of CAP reform negotiations, the abolition of sugar quotas was agreed and will end in 2017. This new policy measure will allow Ireland to rebuild a sugar industry should it be viable to do so. In such circumstances, State enterprise bodies will be asked to examine any substantial business plans related to rebuilding the industry with a view to considering appropriate State supports.

#### **4. Inspections and Appeals**

Fairness and transparency must be at the heart of the inspection and appeals process. A new Government will deliver on the agreed targets for processing payments, schemes and services under the newly published Farmer's Charter. We will introduce simplification measures for the inspection system without delay when finalised and we will table amendments at an EU level to the proposed 'yellow card system' to ensure its workability in the Irish context. We will adopt new systems designed to streamline the payment system such as preliminary checks. We will pursue further measures at an EU level to simplify the Basic Payment system for farmers to avoid unnecessary errors in applications.

Each year, after the inspection process is completed, Department of Agriculture inspectors will hold information meetings with farmers to highlight frequently occurring mistakes, to avoid unnecessary errors. The Department of Agriculture will work with farmers in this way to drive down the number of errors and as a result the penalty rate.

In future Basic Payment campaigns, BPS maps will indicate the date on which satellite images were taken.

We will review the Agriculture Appeals Act 2001 to ensure the independence and efficiency of the office in dealing with appeals from farmers.

#### **5. Generational Change – Farm Families**

Policies developed by the new Government in agriculture will particularly encourage the next generation of farm families. We will prioritise the rollout of the Young Farmers Scheme, the Young Farmer Capital Investment Scheme and give continued priority for young farmers and new entrants under the National Reserve. We will support the agricultural education sector in responding to the demand and ambitions of new students, to ensure the sector continues to attract high calibre entrants to the agricultural workforce. To this end, the Green Cert will be reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose. We will ensure that Teagasc adequately resources courses for students from within their overall resource allocation.

We will seek recognition from the European Commission for ‘forgotten farmers’ as a group with specific disadvantage, under the National Reserve in the same way that ‘Old Young Farmers’ are currently provided for. This category will include farmers under the age of forty, who do not currently meet the five year rule and who did not receive Young Farmers Installation Aid.

## **6. Agri-Taxation**

A new Government will be committed to using the taxation system strategically to encourage greater land mobility, increased productivity and greater profitability at farm level. Land-leasing, partnership and mobility measures will be developed further to ensure the next generation of farmers are supported and the sector is developed strategically for future growth. We will also investigate taxation measures aimed at supporting farmers through periods of volatility.

## **7. Farm Safety**

Farm safety continues to be a critical issue facing farming today. We will utilise the RDP to support farm safety and we will work with the farming community in promoting safe farm practices. In particular, we will consider the possibility of including a measure on clearing drains in the farm safety scheme, under TAMS.

We will issue information to local authorities regarding hedge cutting regulations and exemptions for road safety reasons to ensure consistency in the application of procedures across all local authorities.

We recognise the obligation to implement new EU pesticide regulations. We are committed to ensuring that the implementation of the Sustainable Use Directive in terms of training and up skilling is done in a way that is as cost effective and convenient as possible.

## **8. Climate Change and Sustainability**

Agriculture has a very 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. In that context, we will continue to use the RDP and Origin Green programmes strategically to focus on climate change strategies on farms and in food businesses.

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. We will continue to develop the audit system through the Origin Green programme, enhanced by measures under the RDP, climate change policy and the Food Wise 2025 strategy

## **9. Trade Negotiations**

A priority for a new Government will be to safeguard Ireland's defensive and offensive interests in the context of any future international trade negotiations (such as a potential Mercosur deal). We will ensure that our national interests are protected in any future trade discussions, with a particular focus on beef and food safety standards. We will work with the European Commission and colleagues across the EU to ensure the best possible outcome for Ireland in any future negotiations. In particular, we will work to ensure the principle of equivalence is maintained in negotiations in terms of food safety, traceability and production standards to ensure that producers are operating on a level playing field.

## **10. Flooding**

Many farmers were adversely affected by recent flooding conditions. Payments under the fodder aid scheme and hardship scheme for farmers in very difficult circumstances will be finalised without undue delay.

## **11. Animal Health and Welfare**

A priority for a new Government will be the development of a range of programmes across the animal health area to improve outcomes and quality across all sectors. We will publish a new Animal Health Strategy that will encompass key issues from an all-island perspective. Individual blackspots in TB eradication will be addressed and the Animal Health and Welfare Act 2013 will be strengthened and enforced.

## **12. Food Safety and Traceability**

Our success as a food producing country is fundamentally linked to food traceability and safety. Our existing systems to ensure producers and consumers can be assured of quality from farm to fork will be strengthened and maintained to the highest of standards.

## **13. Transportation of Livestock**

In consultation with the Road Safety Authority and the Irish Road Hauliers Association, we will raise the restriction on hauling cattle without tachographs from 50 kilometres to 100 kilometres.

## **14. Seafood and the Marine**

This Government recognises that the greatest national resource that Ireland has is the sea that surrounds the island. Developing the potential of the 'blue economy' will be a priority for the new Government. We will implement Harnessing our Ocean Wealth (HOOW), a blueprint for the marine sector which aims to double the value of the blue economy by 2020 and deliver 29,000 additional jobs across the various maritime sectors.

We are fully committed to the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy, which is forward looking and progressive. We will continue to work with the industry on setting quotas at Maximum Sustainable Yield and on a scientific basis, implementing the obligation to land, and an effective system of Regional decision making. We will work with the fishing industry on the implementation of the landing obligation and the wider Common Fisheries

Policy. We are ultimately committed to building a larger and more sustainable fishing and aquaculture sector, on the basis of sustainable stocks.

One of the most significant growth areas in 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. The EU co-funded Seafood Development Programme is worth €240million, which will be central to achieving our ambition for growth in the seafood sector.

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, and decommissioning, fleet improvement, mutual funds and storage aid.

We are committed to the development of the inshore fisheries sector and to ensuring that smaller inshore boats are given new opportunities for commercial fishing. We will continue to support the National Inshore Fisheries Forum and regional fora structures, which represent the sector. We will provide support under 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 a sustainable inshore fishery.

We will also explore the potential for the development of onshore close containment fish farming as an emerging technology.

We will review the Fish Assist scheme in recognition of the irregular earning patterns of fishermen, in an effort to respond to difficult financial circumstances.



Subject to legal advice and review, the Penalty Points Statutory Instrument will be amended to reflect the concerns raised with regard to the assignment of points following the completion of the prosecution process, while ensuring that Ireland is fully in compliance with its obligations under EU law.

# 13. Climate Change

## **Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil**

Climate change is the global challenge of our generation, and requires radical and ambitious thinking to respond to a changing environment. We believe that Ireland should be repositioned to give global leadership in this area. We now face a once in a generation opportunity to shape the long-term direction of Irish environmental policy that will chart the course towards our low carbon future. It will fall to the new Government and to the Oireachtas to agree Ireland's first statutory National Low Carbon Transition and Mitigation Plan. We also recognise the need to develop a comprehensive adaptation plan.

The decisions taken in the coming months will have a major impact on whether Ireland can truly emerge as a world leader in sustainability and climate change. We want Ireland's image as the green island to inform all areas of policy so that the global image of our country is transformed and we are recognised as one of the cleanest and safest environments in the world. To achieve these ambitious goals all State bodies will need to engage positively with local communities, both early and often, to manage the transition to a low carbon future.

Ireland strongly supported the Paris Climate Conference (COP21) where, in partnership with 194 other countries, we 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. The transition to a low carbon society by 2050 is an achievable and realistic goal and one that will support a more sustainable economy.

### **1. Climate Change Plans**

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act requires the new Government to produce a National Low Carbon Transition and Mitigation Plan, Ireland's first statutory low carbon strategy for the period to 2050. The first National Mitigation Plan will be published within 6 months of the new Government forming and will focus on four key sectors:

- **Electricity Generation:** 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 how 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

## **2. Foreign Aid related to Climate Change Support**

Building on Ireland's strong track record of supporting developing countries including in areas like climate justice, human rights, gender and education, Ireland recognises that vulnerable communities need very considerable assistance in adapting to climate change.

We will scale up climate finance in the following ways:

- In addition to continuing the current level of support, which from 2016 to 2020 will ensure €175million in public funding, mainly for adaptation, we will commence contributions to the Green Climate Fund in 2016 with a view to building up our support over the coming years

- Increasing our contribution to the Least Developed Countries Fund
- Examining ways to mobilise private finance from Ireland, to further contribute to the 2020 goal

### **3. Climate Change and Energy**

#### **A) Renewable Energy**

We believe 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. The new Partnership Government will comprehensively review price supports for renewable energy following the closure of the REFIT 2 scheme.

#### **B) Public Consultation on the Future of Energy Policy**

It is clear that there is a need for much better engagement with citizens and communities about the energy policy decisions that affect them. We must ensure, as part of our transition to a low carbon society, that citizens and communities are active participants in the energy transition, with robust public and stakeholder engagement in energy policy, and effective community consultation on energy infrastructure developments.

We will establish a National Dialogue on Climate Change that will involve extensive public consultation. This will incorporate the key infrastructural, land use and economic issues to be considered in our long-term transition to a new low carbon future.

#### **C) Wave, Tidal Energy and Offshore Wind**

Wave and tidal energy will have an important role in Ireland's future renewable energy mix. We will support these technologies through the research and development stage by continuing to fund further research, development and demonstration of these technologies. This will include support of research and testing facilities such as the Irish Marine and Energy Research Cluster (IMERC) and the Atlantic Marine Energy Test Site.

#### **D) Bio-Energy**

Ireland has some of the best biomass growing conditions in the world and we believe the development of a sustainable sector will play a big role in decarbonising our economy. We

will 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 seek agreement to introduce a renewable heat incentive (RHI), targeted at larger heat users, subject to state aid clearance.

#### **E) Solar**

We will facilitate the development of solar energy projects. Solar has the potential to provide a community dividend. The Department of Agriculture shall endeavour to facilitate such development while maintaining basic payment schemes, subject to EU Commission approval.

#### **F) Energy & Housing**

We will invest in the Better Energy Programme, which has already provided grants to 170,000 households.

We will also work with local authorities to improve the carbon footprint of social housing, including the replacement of oil heating with other fuels such as natural gas or woodchip where possible.

#### **G) Smart Energy Management**

We will 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.

#### **H) Energy Efficiency**

The new Government will work to achieve 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.

### **I) The Future of Moneypoint**

In anticipation of Moneypoint coming to the end of its operating life in its current configuration, the National Dialogue on Climate Change will identify, as soon as possible, the most suitable replacement low-carbon generation technology.

### **J) Liquid Natural Gas**

The new Government remains supportive of the proposal to construct a LNG terminal near Ballylongford, County Kerry. The LNG facility would bring connectivity for the first time to the global LNG market. The prospect of such a facility would be a positive step for the island of Ireland. While the regulation of the gas market is the responsibility of the Energy Regulator we will request the National Dialogue on Climate Change to examine if there are ways to facilitate liquid natural gas on the island of Ireland.

### **K) The Rights of Local Communities and Indigenous Energy Generation**

The new Government understands the divisions and distress caused in local communities who feel that new energy infrastructure, like wind farms and pylons are imposed on them. The technology and scale of wind farms has evolved significantly since the last set of planning guidelines were introduced in 2006. As a matter of urgency the new Government will update the wind farm planning guidelines, within 3 to 6 months, to offer a better balance between the concerns of local communities and the need to invest in indigenous energy projects. These new planning guidelines will be informed by the public consultation process and best international practice.

It is also important that there is community participation in renewable energy and energy efficiency projects as it is in both the national and local interest.

In order to foster and support this we will:

- Develop a framework for how communities can share in the benefits of substantial new energy infrastructure which is located in their area

- Provide support for community-led projects in the initial stages of development, planning and construction
- Establish a register of community benefit payments, and examine 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

## **4. Climate Change and Agriculture**

### **A) Sustainable Agricultural Policy**

Innovation in agriculture plays an important role in tackling climate change and we want Ireland to remain a world leader in the 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

### **B) Bord na Móna**

Bord na Móna has a significant role to play in Ireland's climate change policy. The Departments with responsibility for Agriculture and Energy policy will explore, with Bord na Móna, the potential of energy crops, which can be grown in the vicinity of Bord na Móna plants, through a national bioenergy strategy, recognising Bord na Móna's strategy of moving away from peat. From an abatement perspective, Bord na Móna has a key role to play in preventing flooding, particularly in the Shannon catchment area.

### **C) Afforestation Programmes**

Only 10% of land in Ireland is under forestry which represents the second lowest percentage in Europe. The new Government will undertake a very active afforestation programme, which will have significant carbon sink value, contributing to the grass-based system of agriculture we enjoy in Ireland. 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.

### **D) Anaerobic Digestion (Biogas)**

Bioenergy can contribute to waste recovery and rural development, as is the case with anaerobic digestion, which not only generates energy, but also gives effect to national waste policy in terms of utilising waste as a resource. It will be highlighted in waste management plans as a technology suitable for development at a local and regional level and at varying scales. The REFIT schemes, which support the generation of electricity and CHP technologies, including anaerobic digestion, will support the use of waste as a renewable energy.

## **5. Climate Change & Transport**

### **A) Public Transport Investment**

We will invest €3.6billion 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.

### **B) Electric Vehicles**

We want Ireland to become a leader in the take-up of electric vehicles. We will establish a dedicated taskforce involving relevant government departments, agencies, industry and representative groups, to work on this goal and to set ambitious and achievable targets. The



taskforce will also investigate the potential role and use of other future fuels such as hydrogen.

### **C) Public Bike Schemes**

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 have the advantage of linking up existing infrastructure while also being environmentally friendly.

### **D) Sustainable Transport**

Investment in our public transport system will uphold the principles of smarter travel policies. Under the Capital Plan, €100million 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. To aid the development of Greenways, the Minister for Transport will develop national guidelines for Greenway public consultation, planning, and construction to help guide local authorities and agencies.

### **E) Improving Goods Vehicles**

A recovering economy will see a return of increased goods traffic on our roads. The new Minister for Transport, working with the relevant Oireachtas Committee, will review the framework for the national goods fleet and if required will make recommendations on new measures to incentivise the upgrading or replacement of older vehicles.

## **6. Climate Change & Flooding**

We understand that the recent flooding has been extremely difficult for many communities across our country. The devastation of flooding doesn't have to be inevitable however. That is why we are proposing a plan for flooding that combines a short-term coordinated response with long-term planning of our cities and towns.

### **A) National Flood Plan**

We will provide €430million, as part of the Capital Plan, for flood mitigation initiatives to protect threatened localities from river and coastal flood risk. This investment means the

new Partnership Government will spend more on flood relief over the next 5 years than has been spent 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.

#### **B) Shannon Catchment Flood Risk Implementation and Coordination Group**

This new group, involving all relevant agencies, has published a work plan that will oversee the implementation of flood management plans to respond to the 66 areas along the Shannon at risk of flooding.

#### **C) Better Land Use**

We will fully explore the benefits of better land use and crop management, including the use of forestry, to prevent flooding.

#### **D) Local Improvement Schemes**

In providing adequate funding for Local Improvement Schemes we will give councils greater discretion in how they spend their money on local projects, including the cleaning and clearing of ditches.

#### **E) National Flood Forecasting**

We will set up a new national flood forecasting system to provide regular, detailed and localised information on flood forecasting.

#### **F) Flood Response**

Following the unprecedented flooding in December 2015 we will review the response protocols of the State to examine if a more rapid and coordinated response to local incidents can be achieved.

#### **G) Individual Home Protection Measures & Voluntary Property Relocation**

We believe that in some cases the best flood protection measures may involve individual protection measures for homes, such as floodgates. We will introduce a voluntary property

relocation scheme for properties, including businesses, affected by repeat flooding, based on a similar 2009 scheme.

#### **H) Flood Insurance**

Following meetings between Government and the insurance industry an interdepartmental group is examining the issue of households and businesses unable to access flood insurance. Following an examination of best international practice in other countries it will report to the new Government in May 2016, on the most effective way to ensure that all homes and businesses can access flood insurance where the State has already invested in certifiable flood defences that meet best international standards.

#### **I) Turlough Systems**

We will provide resources to the OPW to commission studies into individual problematic (prone to flooding) Turlough systems, if requested by a local authority or another relevant State agency.

#### **J) Rapid Response Unit**

The Office of Emergency Planning, will examine the potential for a Rapid Response Unit, led by the Department of the Environment, which could be deployed when necessary, to coordinate offers of help and assistance, to those experiencing hardship following a severe weather event.

#### **K) Drain Cleaning**

The Department of Environment will work with local authorities to explore the establishment of a local improvement scheme to assist with drain cleaning.

## 14. Investing in Society: Urban Regeneration

### Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil

Now is our opportunity to develop a compelling vision of how investing in society and in our communities becomes integral to the development of a strong, sustainable economy.

Our economic recovery will be stronger and more equally shared as we develop policies, programmes and social spending priorities that address the deep-rooted disadvantage of those who rely on means-tested social assistance, and develop an approach to urban regeneration that empowers people to work together to improve their communities and the quality of life for all who live within them.

We will pursue an integrated plan across Government Departments to reduce poverty, disadvantage and inequality, by enabling individuals in jobless households back into the workforce, by breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and by ensuring that our educational programmes at every level offer excellence in outcomes for all.

We want to affirm the contribution of the community and voluntary sector to building a more just and prosperous society, and its strong focus on urban and rural regeneration. Community and voluntary organisations provide the human, social and community services in all key areas of our national life. In this work they contribute to the economy as well as create value for Irish society.

We will increase funding levels to support the sector, and develop a multi-annual funding model that focuses on quality, effectiveness and efficiency. We will produce a coherent policy framework and develop a strategy to support the community and voluntary sector and encourage a cooperative approach between public bodies and the community and voluntary sector.

We will also ensure that all commissioning for human, social and community services takes place in a societal value framework (targeted at maximising the value for society).

## **1. Investing in our Communities**

Investing in a child's early years is proven to lead to 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.

### **A) Better Investment in Children**

We will fund schemes which support disadvantaged communities. For example, we will support the RAPID (Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development) programme, designed to focus attention on tackling poverty and social exclusion in certain urban areas in towns and cities across the country by identifying the needs of disadvantaged communities and developing key projects.

Due to the winding down of major philanthropic organisations, such as Atlantic Philanthropies and The One Foundation, a potential gap has opened up in the funding of social projects designed to achieve a more inclusive and fairer society. To close this gap, through Social Innovation Fund Ireland, we will seek to raise a minimum of €50million to provide growth capital to Ireland's best social innovations and to invest in ongoing innovation that improves social outcomes and contributes to world-class social infrastructure.

We will fund and expand existing schemes such as the Area-Based Childhood Programme, which have been successfully developing innovative services and programmes for children in areas such as Ballymun, the north inner city and Tallaght West. We will ensure the sharing and implementation of learning from such programmes to other initiatives as they expand their reach.

We will also:

- Significantly increase parental leave in the first year of a child's life, over the next five years. Research shows children benefit most from parental care in the first year

- Cut the cost of childcare, increase the number of subsidised childcare places to low income families and introduce a second free pre-school year
- Roll out free GP care for all children
- Guarantee the future sustainability of GP practices in disadvantaged urban areas

## **B) Tackling Educational Disadvantage**

Education is the key to giving every child an equal chance in life and our ambition is that every child has an opportunity to participate in creating and sharing new wealth for our country. The new Government will seek to increase mandatory schooling to age 17 and examine how we can further improve school completion rates, particularly in disadvantaged areas. We will publish a new updated Action Plan for Educational Inclusion, within 12 months, with particular focus on DEIS schools. We will also implement a national access programme for higher education to boost college numbers from families without a history of third-level education, as well as mature students.

## **C) Helping Adolescents and Young People into Employment**

The new Government will plan earlier for adolescents and young adults with care needs (such as special education, disability, juvenile justice) so they too can play a valued role in our society.

We will implement Ireland's first ever National Youth Strategy and fund schemes such as the Youth Employability Initiative which provides grants to voluntary youth services that target disadvantaged young people and improve their employability.

We recognise the need to support youth education programmes across Ireland, which assist young people in accessing education and employment opportunities.

We will provide support for the Men's Shed network.

## **D) Better Housing**

A new dedicated Minister for Housing will accelerate the delivery of the committed €3.8billion Social Housing Strategy and ramp up the supply of private housing.

The new Government will implement a range of measures to prevent families from becoming homeless and end the use of unsuitable long-term emergency accommodation, such as hotels and B&Bs, for homeless families by in part delivering rapid-delivery housing units (see Housing chapter for more detail).

### **E) Better Public Transport**

A decent public transport system is essential to the everyday lives of so many citizens in Ireland and is essential in reducing social isolation.

We will invest €3.6billion 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.

We will 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.

## **2. A Supportive Social Welfare System**

Rather than sustain a system that encourages welfare dependency, the new Partnership Government will develop a system that fosters independence through retraining and

employment. The new Government will also provide the resources to invest in services that protect the weakest and most vulnerable in our society from poverty and exclusion.

The new Government must ensure that work always pays more than welfare. This involves recalibrating our social welfare system so that jobseekers are given every opportunity to work, while at the same time protecting the most vulnerable in society with fair income supports.

We will:

- Increase the minimum wage to €10.50/hour by 2021
- Roll out a new Working Family Payment that supports low income families
- Launch an integrated plan across government to help jobless households back into employment – the most effective way to reduce child poverty

We will also carry out an immediate review of the financial supports available to the unemployed or those returning to the education system to ensure the greatest possible uptake of continuing education by eliminating current barriers.

### **3. Regeneration of our Urban Centres**

We want our urban centres to be safe, attractive and prosperous public places in which to live and work. We will fund and instigate a range of measures to achieve these objectives.

In addition, we will also strengthen the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and reactivate and increase funding to RAPID areas through the local authorities.

#### **A) Renewing Urban Centres**

In conjunction with the Oireachtas, we will examine new incentives to regenerate derelict and underused buildings in urban centres.



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.

In order to tackle the persisting problem of illegal dumping, we will work with local authorities on ways to improve new and existing deterrents, such as CCTV.

## **B) Safer Streets**

Tackling the problem of anti-social behaviour and drug and alcohol related crime 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 and better safeguard our communities.

The new Government will, amongst other measures seek to:

- Safeguard urban centres and the night-time economy by properly resourcing An Garda Síochána in targeting the sale and supply of illicit drugs on our streets
- Protect all 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
- Support the expansion of Local Drug Taskforce projects, and extend Garda Youth Diversion Programmes for young people, and other voluntary organisations that contribute to our young people's future direction

# 15. Ireland and the World

## **Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil**

As manifested in the recent 1916 centenary commemorations, the Irish people can take much pride in the State we have created. This is an opportune time to remember our shared history, reflect on both our achievements and failings as a State and also to imagine our future.

This republic has enjoyed one of the longest periods of unbroken democratic governance in the world. We owe much of this stability to the quality of our public institutions, which we must nurture and build into the future.

Not only that, we must also articulate ourselves on the world stage, contribute to peace-building initiatives across the globe and share our culture and values.

### **1. Arts, Culture & Heritage**

As highlighted during the recent 1916 Commemorations, arts and culture are intrinsic to the Irish State. We believe the arts belong to everybody and we need to increase access to, and participation in, the arts, boost our creative industries and preserve our heritage. Societies which invest in the arts and heritage are more prosperous, successful societies. The Centenary Programme is a unique opportunity to commemorate the centenaries of some of the most significant events in the history of this State in an inclusive way.

The new Government will continue to commemorate the most significant events in the history of this State, ensuring 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.

We 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. We will also 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.

Among other measures, we will:

- Work to progressively increase funding to the arts, including the Arts Council and the Irish Film Board, as the economy continues to improve
- 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
- 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 Local Enterprise Offices, to develop and promote opportunities for arts and cultural tourism
- Introduce a new small grants scheme to provide essential upgrades to existing regional arts and cultural centres around the country, including regional theatres
- Prioritise the publication of Culture 2025, the first national cultural policy. It 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
- Boost supports to regional museums and facilitate increased loans between our National Cultural Institutions and our network of regional museums
- Work with the Irish Film Board/Screen Ireland to ensure that Ireland is maximised as a location for international film production
- Support a built heritage investment scheme on an annual basis to support the conservation or heritage structures and the regeneration of urban and rural areas

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.

## **2. Defence**

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

There has been a historic underinvestment in Defence Forces infrastructure and we will provide a significant boost in capital funding to equip our Army, Naval Service and Air Corps.

Specifically, we will:

- Implement the White Paper on Defence
- Provide for moving from an eight to a nine ship naval flotilla, investment in armoured personnel carriers, logistic vehicles, modernisation of barracks including Custume Barracks Athlone, replacement of aircraft as necessary and provide for improvements at Casement Aerodrome Baldonnel
- Ensure at least 9,500 permanent Defence Forces personnel and a full-strength reserve
- Support our veterans for the public service and outstanding contribution they have made to the State
- Ensure the strength, skills base and contribution of the Reserve Defence Forces are maximised and target full participation of the RDF at 4,000 personnel
- Prioritise the need to address the gap in female participation in the Defence Forces
- Support and develop Civil Defence, update legislation governing its role, and establish a coordinated inter-agency guidance team to deal with major emergency management issues
- Develop a new Institute for Peace Support and Leadership Training in the Curragh

- Encourage partnerships between the Defence Forces and the private sector with a view to increased research, innovation and enterprise development
- Award a 1916 medal to all members of the Permanent Defence Forces who are in service in 2016 and to serving members of the Reserve Defence Forces in 2016 as part of the single force concept

### **3. Northern Ireland,**

#### **A) Agreements Implementation**

We 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.

#### **B) 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.

### **C) 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.

### **D) 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.

## **4. North-South Cooperation**

North South cooperation has strengthened significantly in recent years. We are committed to building on this momentum for the benefit of people on both sides of the border.

### **A) Economic Cooperation**

We will increase the number of joint North-South 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.

### **B) 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.

### **C) 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.

### **D) 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.

### **E) 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.

## **5. 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.

### **A) 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.

### **B) Tackling Cross-Border Crime**

We will strengthen and develop cross border bodies and services in Northern Ireland and implement the Fresh Start Agreement. 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.

## **6. Ireland in Europe**

### **A) Addressing External Threats**

We 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.

### **B) UK Membership**

We believe that UK membership of the EU is beneficial for Ireland, the UK and the EU. We will use appropriate avenues to express the Irish Government perspective on UK membership of the EU.

## **7. 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, sustained 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).

### **A) 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.

### **B) 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.

### **C) 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.

### **D) 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.

### **E) Active UN Membership**

Our active membership of the UN is an important aspect of our foreign policy. We 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.

### **F) 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.

## **8. Trade**

Ireland's strong export performance in recent years has been key to our growing economic recovery.

### **A) Trade Missions**

We will continue to deliver record numbers of minister-led trade missions. We will continue to take a robust position to defend our offensive and defensive interests in relation to trade negotiations.

### **B) New Cross-Sectoral Trade Strategies**

We 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 to enhance our relationships with countries in Central and South America and the Caribbean in particular. We will also further develop trade with countries in Africa.

### **C) 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.

## **9. Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Humanitarian Aid**

In the face of difficult economic challenges, we have 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.

### **A) 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.

## **B) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

Ireland, along with Kenya, co-facilitated agreement of the new SDGs at the UN. We will work to implement the SDGs and to promote their implementation around the world.

## **C) Funding**

We will continue to make progress towards achieving the UN target of 0.7% of gross national product for ODA, as resources allow.

## **D) Oversight**

We will ensure robust oversight of Ireland's ODA budget.

## **10. 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.

## **11. An Ghaeilge**

The Irish language is of crucial importance to our heritage and culture. The new Government needs to systematically implement the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish language, increase the number of people using Irish in their daily lives and ensure 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.

Among other measures, we will:

- Focus on job creation in the Gaeltacht, through Údarás na Gaeltachta
- Encourage the attendance by children in Irish-medium pre-schools or naíonraí in Gaeltacht areas
- Recognise the importance of the status of Irish as a full working language of the EU institutions and work towards ending the derogation, as circumstances allow
- Increase investment in the Irish language

## **16. Political and Constitutional Reform**

### **Ambition for the New Partnership Government and 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil**

The new political landscape in Ireland presents an historic opportunity to radically reform Irish politics – to fundamentally change the relationship between Government and the Oireachtas, and with it the relationship between the Irish people and their parliament.

We want to be part of this change; not only to shape it but also to help drive it. We are proposing substantive political and constitutional reform in order to create a strong and responsive political system. Greater openness, improved accountability and delivery, and more effective public participation are at the core of our vision.

We recognise that in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil, the challenge of change will not fall to any one party, nor will it be the responsibility of the Government alone. Achieving political and constitutional reform will be the responsibility of every member elected to Dáil Éireann. Reform will require constant pursuit throughout the lifetime of the next parliament.

#### **1. Reform of the Dáil and the work of the new Reform Committee**

Fundamental reform of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil began with the election of the Ceann Comhairle by secret ballot and continues with the now established all-party committee on Dáil reform.

In tandem with the Committee's work and recognising the role to be played by all TDs in a reformed Dáil and a new partnership between Government and parliament, we will work with all parties and groups to relax the application of the party whip system.

The Committee is working to an ambitious timeframe and we hope to see, and will work for and support in good faith, agreement reached at the Committee in the following areas:

### **A) The Oireachtas Committee Structure, Resources and Responsibilities**

Committee chairs will be on a proportional basis using the D'Hondt system. Each member of the Oireachtas would, preferably, serve on one committee and a committee of selection will be established for determining same. There should be a new, more focussed committee structure, with exclusive time for committee meetings in the weekly agenda of the Dáil. Panels of outside experts will also be made available to assist committees in their work.

We support the establishment of a new Parliamentary Investigations Unit and an independent office to assist members and Committees on budgetary matters. We will also look to introduce a strengthened independent legal advisor to the Oireachtas.

We will support mandatory pre-legislative scrutiny for all new bills and post enactment review of legislation by Oireachtas Committees. We will seek to prioritise committee reports in the Dáil and Seanad chambers and to introduce an improved system for monitoring committee attendance and participation.

### **B) The Conduct of Dáil Business**

We agree to measures to facilitate the establishment of more technical groups to allow the smaller parties and independents to play a fuller role in the Dáil and on Oireachtas Committees (with proportional allocation of speaking time).

We believe there is a need for a complete overhaul of the current order of business. We are in favour of establishing a Dáil Business Management Committee, chaired by the Ceann Comhairle, where representatives from each Political Party and Group will meet and agree the Dáil's weekly agenda. We will also support programmes for enactment for each Bill setting out a timeline for their passage through the Oireachtas (helping to avoid use of the guillotine). Any proposal to guillotine a debate on a Bill will require a certification from the Attorney General asserting the urgency of a Bill. It would then have to be approved by the Ceann Comhairle and would automatically trigger a Dáil vote.

We would also like to see the grouping of votes at fixed times in support of family friendly working arrangements and the introduction of abstentions. Finally, we are committed to the continuation of the Dáil reform committee throughout the lifetime of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil.

## **2. Seanad Reform**

We recognise that the substantial changes being made to the Oireachtas Committee system will naturally involve a change to the work of the Seanad and Senators given their participation on committees.

However, significant reform of the Seanad itself is now long overdue. We will pursue the implementation of the Manning Report, as a priority.

## **3. Reforming the Budget Process (further detail available in chapter 1)**

For a true partnership to work in our democracy – in government, but also in working with the Oireachtas – an evolution of the budget process is essential. One key reform that is needed is to give a greater role and say in the development of Budgets to the Dáil and to individual Deputies. This will require enhanced transparency and cooperation on the part of the Government.

While the details of the new process need further development, the new cycle could involve:

- A new Budget and Finance Committee
- An Independent Budget and Finance Office as a resource for the Oireachtas
- The possibility for individual TDs to propose substantive changes and to propose amendments to legislation that incur a cost on the Exchequer
- The Spring Economic Statement to set the capacity for spending and taxation changes
- Creation of Competitive Funds for which Government will hold competitive calls for enhanced delivery in key areas of strategic priority

- Committees given a full opportunity to scrutinise expenditure options in each Government Department, with the Budget and Finance Committee teasing out different taxation options with the Minister for Finance
- Presentation of draft allocation of new expenditures with the projected impact of policy change for consideration by Dáil
- Presentation of Tax Strategy, Reports and costs of tax breaks

#### **4. Strengthening Cabinet Accountability**

We support an enhanced approach to government, by Ministers of State playing a more substantive role in decision making (for example, through cabinet sub-committees).

We will examine the roles and responsibilities of Ministers of State, including how they function within the Departmental structure and with Cabinet Ministers. We will also consider the creation of an unpaid role of parliamentary private secretary, and examine the balance of power and responsibility between the Government and Civil Service.

All government ministers will appear before their relevant Oireachtas Committee on a quarterly basis, at a minimum. The Taoiseach will also appear before the Working Group of Committee Chairpersons twice a year to discuss matters of public policy.

#### **5. Strengthening the Powers of Parliamentary Enquiries**

The establishment of a new Parliamentary Investigation Unit will greatly enhance the ability of Oireachtas Committees to conduct investigative work and allow the Oireachtas to better hold relevant actors to account.

On foot of the recommendations of the Banking Inquiry, we will seek a review of the powers of Oireachtas Committees in conducting inquiries and, based on this review, will consider whether there should be a new Constitutional Referendum to strengthen Committees' powers.

## **6. Political and Judicial Appointments**

### **A) Judicial Appointments**

We will introduce legislation to replace the Judicial Appointments Advisory Board with a new Judicial Appointments Commission. The new structure will include a reduction in its membership, an independent chairperson selected by the Public Appointments Service and approved by an Oireachtas Committee, and a lay majority including independent people with specialist qualifications.

We will reform the judicial appointments process to ensure it is transparent, fair and credible. We will reduce the number of suitable candidates proposed by the Judicial Appointments Commission for each vacancy to the lowest number advised as constitutionally and legally permissible by the Attorney General, but in any event not more than three candidates to be shortlisted by the Judicial Appointments Commission for any vacancy.

The new Chair of Judicial Appointments Commission will be asked to attend the relevant Oireachtas Committee on an annual basis to report on implementation of its statutory remit.

### **B) Reform of Appointments to State Boards**

In November 2014, a new system for appointments to state boards, including an independent, centralised application and short-listing process run by the Public Appointments Service was introduced. In the first year of operation, over 4,200 applications were submitted.

Under this system, in making board appointments, ministers can only appoint applicants who have been vetted and shortlisted by the Public Appointments Service. The PAS will be asked to take account of diversity and balance, including gender, geography, etc.

The Government will now strengthen this system by putting it on a statutory footing by the end of 2016.



In addition, the process will be extended to require ministerial nominees for the role of chairs of boards to be vetted and have their suitability for appointment confirmed by the Public Appointments Service.

Furthermore, nominees for chairs of state boards will, following confirmation of their suitability by the Public Appointment Service, be required to have their nomination ratified by the relevant Oireachtas Committee prior to their appointment being made by Government.

The operational effectiveness of the new arrangements will be reviewed after 12 months.

## **7. Political Funding**

We will seek to extend state funding, on the same basis on which political parties are funded, to political groups who stood on a common policy platform in the general election.

## **8. New Initiatives**

### **A) Establishing an Electoral Commission**

We believe that Ireland needs an independent electoral commission, as a matter of priority.

The new commission should examine the voter registration process and in particular the possibility of the PPS system being used to automatically add people to the electoral register once they reach voting age. It should also look at ways to increase participation in our political process through voter education and turnout.

The new commission could also:

- Assume the role of Registrar of political parties
- Regulate political funding and election expenditure
- Oversee the Referendum Commission, which would be a sub-section of the commission

The newly established Electoral Commission would be independent of Government and directly accountable to the Oireachtas.

## **B) Constitutional Reform**

We propose that a number of referenda be held. These include referenda on:

- Article 41.2.1 of Bunreacht na hEireann regarding a “woman’s life within the home”
- The question of amending Article 40.6.1(i) of the Constitution to remove the offence of blasphemy
- Ireland’s participation in the Universal Patent Court
- Giving the Office of the Ceann Comhairle constitutional standing, as recommended by the Constitutional Convention

We will establish a Citizens’ Assembly, within six months, and without participation by politicians, and with a mandate to look at a limited number of key issues over an extended time period. These issues will not be limited to those directly pertaining to the constitution and may include issues such as, for example how we, as a nation, best respond to the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population. That said, we will ask the Citizens’ Assembly to make recommendations to the Dáil on further constitutional changes, including on the Eighth Amendment, on fixed term parliaments and on the manner in which referenda are held (e.g. should ‘super referendum days’, whereby a significant number of referenda take place on the same day, be held).

None of this, of course, subverts the right, and the ability of an elected member of Dáil Eireann to have a referendum on any issue, provided that member can secure majority support in parliament.

## **C) Public Service Reform**

The New Partnership Government will need to work closely with the Oireachtas to deliver on its ambitious agenda for the country. To make a new style of government work effectively, new approaches will be needed in terms of agreeing work programmes, sharing

information openly on performance and delivery and recommitting to work schedules based on constant review and renewal.

The political and parliamentary system will need to embrace these new approaches and, for a new government to be truly effective, the public service will need to embrace these new working arrangements too. After a period of significant challenge where the public service responded and rose to the challenge of an economic and fiscal crisis the challenge of working in new ways with a new government will offer a different, and one hopes, an exciting challenge for the public sector.

Furthermore, as part of this reform, we will empower frontline service providers to make more decisions, encourage more collaboration between public service bodies, and between the public and private sectors, and reward public service innovation and change. We will also reform the public sector, more generally, to ensure more accessible public services.

#### **D) Local Government Reform**

As part of the next wave of local government reform the relevant Minister, having consulted widely with all relevant stakeholders, will prepare a report for Government, and for the Oireachtas, by mid-2017 on potential measures to boost local government leadership and accountability. We will also 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. We will also examine the possibility of extending the remit of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee to include expenditure by local authorities. We will ensure that local government funding, structures and responsibilities strengthen local democracy.

We will also consider:

- Directly elected mayors in cities
- Devolution of new powers to local authorities
- Reducing the size of local electoral areas
- Establishing town and borough councils subject to a local plebiscite and local funding

There will be a review, involving consultation with AILG and LAMA, of the supports provided to councillors to enable them to do their important work.

### **E) Public Consultations**

Public consultations provide an important opportunity for the public to input directly into matters which affect them and their communities. Currently there is no single mechanism by which individuals can access information on consultations local, regional and national. We will establish an easily accessible portal to provide details of all such public consultations.