

**Giving  
workers  
and families  
a break**

**Tabhair  
faoiseamh  
d'oibrithe  
agus do  
theaghlaigh**



# TIME FOR UNITY

ÉIRE AONTAITHE

LE CHÉILE

DON TODHCHAÍ





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# TIME FOR CHANGE

# TIME FOR SINN FÉIN

2020 witnesses the centenary of key events in the struggle for Irish freedom. It's timely therefore to measure the reality of Ireland in 2020 against the ideals of those who, 100 years ago fought to establish an egalitarian republic and a reign of social justice for the Irish people.

Is the ideal of that republic reflected in scenes of homeless children eating their dinner off the pavement outside the GPO?

Or in the indignity of elderly people left to suffer for days on hospital trolleys?

Is it reflected in the horror of people forced to live in tents, because they don't have a home?

Or in the reality of working couples, unable to afford a home?

Is it reflected in Irish working families unable to provide proper meals for their children or to meet domestic bills?

Or in citizens who have worked hard all their adult lives, being forced to draw the dole because they are

refused the right to a state pension?

Is it reflected in a political establishment which shamefully sticks its head in the sand in the face of the growing support for Irish reunification and which refuses to prepare responsibly for that eventuality?

This is not the vision of those who sacrificed so much for Irish freedom. Yet this is the reality of an Ireland created by those who have been in Government here for nearly 100 years.

In that time we have had Governments for the wealthy, Governments for the privileged, Governments for the property developers, Governments for the banks.

Sinn Féin believes that it's time that we had a government for the people.

A government that puts the welfare of its citizens above vested interests.

A United Ireland in which the economy serves the needs of our people and not the other way around.

A government whose aim is to make Ireland the best country in which to live, work and grow old in.





The current Fine Gael Government, supported by Fianna Fáil, has shown a complete lack of empathy and a detachment from the reality of life for most people in Ireland in 2020.

At every step over the last four years they have sided with landlords, developers, insurance companies and vulture funds. And our people have been left the poorer for it. Successive governments have delivered for their friends and cronies. They have delivered for big business, for vested interests and for golden circles.

In Government, Sinn Féin will deliver for the people.

We will deliver homes - introducing the largest public housing programme in the history of the State.

We will tackle the hospital crisis - opening 1,500 beds and hiring thousands more nurses and midwives.

We will deliver for workers and hard pressed families - by abolishing the USC on the first €30,000 earned, saving workers up to €700 per annum.

We will deliver for the environment - investing an additional €1bn in public transport.

We will deliver on pension rights - people should have the right to retire at the age of 65.

We will cut the exorbitant cost of childcare.

We will end the insurance rip off.

Sinn Féin wants to be in Government to deliver for ordinary, working people.

But we don't want to be part of the system. We want to change the system.

We are asking you to give us a chance. Vote for Sinn Féin this time. Vote for us now, in this election, and judge us on how we perform and how we deliver.

And, with the support of a growing number of people, Sinn Féin can and will transform Irish politics.

We will build a new, United Ireland where our citizens come first.



## A say in Ireland's Future

We need to start planning for a Unity Referendum to reap the economic benefits of a United Ireland. It's time the people of Ireland had their say.

### **SINN FÉIN WILL:**

- » **Seek the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement**
- » **Publish a White Paper on Irish Unity**
- » **Establish a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Irish Unity**
- » **Secure a referendum, North and South, on a United Ireland**

## A Roof over your Head

Sinn Féin will deliver the state's biggest ever public housing programme. We will cut and freeze rents, ensure the availability of affordable housing and end the scandal of homelessness.

### **SINN FÉIN WILL:**

- » **Reduce rents by up to €1,500 a year, via a refundable tax credit, and freeze them for three years**
- » **Build 100,000 homes over 5 years. This will include council housing and affordable homes for renters and first time buyers. Cost - €6.5bn**
- » **Give the Central Bank powers to cap mortgage interest rates so customers are not ripped off**

## Money in Your Pocket

Sinn Féin will give workers and families a break putting more money in their pockets.

### **WE WILL:**

- » **Abolish the USC on the first €30,000 earned, saving workers up to €700 per annum. Cost - €1.2bn per annum**
- » **End the insurance rip-off and ban dual pricing**
- » **Reduce the cost of childcare by €500 per child per month. Cost - €500 million per annum**
- » **Abolish the Property Tax, saving families an average of €244 a year. Cost - €485 million per annum**
- » **End third level fees - €243 million**

## A Right to Retire

Sinn Féin will stop the pension age increase to 67 and return it to 65. We will prohibit mandatory retirement, ensuring that those who want to continue working can do so.

### **SINN FÉIN WILL:**

- » **Return the retirement age to 65. Cost - €368million per year.**



## Healthcare When You Need it

Sinn Féin will tackle the trolley crisis - ending the recruitment ban, hiring more nurses, opening more beds and providing more Home Help hours.

We will address the fact that many communities lack access to a GP. We are committed to the delivery of a National Health Service for Ireland.

### **SINN FÉIN WILL:**

- » **End the recruitment ban, hiring 2,500 more nurses and midwives and 1,000 more doctors and consultants. Cost - €358 million per annum**
- » **Open 1,500 more beds. Cost - €480 million in annual current expenditure and €1bn for capital**
- » **Deliver 12 million additional home help hours over the term of the government to clear the waiting list. Cost - €59 million per annum for additional hours.**
- » **Increase GP training places and recruit more public health nurses**

## A Safe Community

Sinn Féin will crack down on crime, returning Garda numbers to record levels, ensuring faster response times and safer communities.

### **SINN FÉIN WILL:**

- » **Increase Garda numbers to 16,000. Cost - €142 million**
- » **Recruit 2,000 additional civilian staff freeing up Gardaí from desk duties. Cost - €80 million**
- » **Establish a Sentencing council to ensure sentences match the seriousness of the crime**
- » **Ensure more resources for DPP, Courts Service and CAB. Cost - €10 million**



# AM DON ATHRÚ

# AM DO SHINN FÉIN

Agus 2020 linn tá céad bliain ann ó tharla cuid de na heachtraí ba thábhachtaí sa streachailt ar son saoirse na hÉireann. Mar sin, is mithid dúinn an saol mar atá in Éirinn sa bhliain 2020 a mheas i gcomhthéacs ard idéil na ndaoine siúd a thug troid céad bliain ó shin le go mbainfí amach poblacht comhionannach agus go gcuirfead i réim an chóir shóisialach do mhuintir na hÉireann.

An léir idéal na Poblachta sin nuair a fheictear páistí ag ithe a ndinnéar iad suite ar an gcosán os cionn Ard Oifig an Phoist?

Nó an mbraitear é nuair a fhágtar seanóirí ag fulaingt ar throllaithe ar feadh laethanta in ospidéal?

An aithnítear é i gcás na mílte lanúin nach bhfuil in ann teach a cheannach?

An bhfuil a rian ar chás na dteaghlach a oibríonn go crua ach nach bhfuil in acmhainn a gcuid páistí a chothú nó a gcuid billí teaghlaigh a ghlanadh?

Céard faoi na saoránaigh sin a chuir isteach saol oibre iomlán agus a bhfuil orthu brath ar leas sóisialta mar gur diúltaíodh dóibh dul ar an bpinsean Stáit?

An maireann an t-idéal sin nuair a thugann an t-aicme pholaitiúil cluas bodhar don tacaíocht atá ann d'Aontacht na hÉireann atá ag méadú i gconaí agus a dhiúltaíonn ullmhúchán ceart a dhéanamh don

Ní hé seo an fhís a bhí acu siúd a thug a raibh acu ar son saoirse na hÉireann. Ach seo mar atá an saol in Éirinn faoi mar a chruthaíodh é ag an dream siúd atá i gcumhacht le céad bliain nach mór.

Le linn na tréimhse sin bhí rialtais éagsúla ar bun ar mhaithe le lucht an rachmais, na boic mhóra, na forbróirí maoiné agus leis na bainc.

Creideann Sinn Féin go bhfuil sé in am do rialtas an phobail bheith ann.

Rialtas ar mó leis leasa a chuid saoránach ná an beagán atá ina suí go te.



Éire Aontaithe a bhfreastlaíonn an geilleagar ar an bpobal in áit a mhalairt.

Rialtas a bhfuil sé mar aidhm aige Éire a bheith ar an tír is fearr maireachtáil, obair agus dul in aois inti.

Níl tuiscint ná taithí ag Rialtas Fhine Gael, arna thacú ag Fianna Fáil, ar an saol mar atá ag mórmah mhuintir na hÉireann i 2020.

Le linn na gceithre bliana seo chuaigh thart, thaobhaigh siad leis na tiarnaí talún, forbróirí, comhlachtaí árachais, agus creachchistí. Agus tá an pocal 's againne thíos leis dá bharr. Rinne rialtas i ndiaidh rialtais freastal ar a gcuid cairde is

Rinne siad an beart don lucht gnó, don bhunaíocht istigh agus do na boic mhóra.

Déanfaidh Sinn Féin sa rialtas, an beart don phobal.

Déanfaimid an beart maidir le tithíocht – ag tabhairt isteach an clár tógála tithíochta is mó ó bunaíodh an Stát.

Tabharfaimid faoin ghéarchéim sna hospidéal – osclófar 1,500 leaba agus earcófar na mílte cnáimhseach is banaltra breise.

Déanfaimid an beart d'oibrithe agus do thaeghlaigh faoi bhrú – tríd ualach an USC a bhaint den chéad €30,000 a thuiltear rud a.

Déanfaimid an beart de réir an chomhshaoil – déanfar €1 bhilliún breise a infheistiú sa chóras iompair phoiblí.

Déanfaimid an beart de réir chearta pinsin – ba chóir an ceart a bheith ag daoine éirí as an obair ag aois 65.

Déanfaimid costas milltineach ard an chúraim leaní a ghearradh.

Cuirfimid deireadh le costas ró-ard an árachais.

Tá Sinn Féin ag iarraidh a bheith sa Rialtas le go ndéanfaimid an beart do ghnáthdhaoine agis oibrithe.

Ach níl muid ag iarraidh páirt a ghlacadh sa córas mar atá. Is mian linn an córas a tahrú.

Táimid ag iarraidh ort seans a thabhairt dúinn. Vótáil Sinn Féin an uair seo. Tabhair vóta dúinn an tráth seo, sa toghcháin seo, agus dean muid a mheas de réir mar a fheidhmeimid, de réir mar a dhéanfaimid an beart.

Agus níos mó daoine ag tacú le Sinn Féin, beidh Sinn Féin ábalta polaitíocht na hÉireann a athrú ó bhonn agui

Déanfaimid Éire úr, aontaithe a thógáil mar a mbeidh ár saoránaigh chun tosaigh.



## Ag Réiteach do Thodhchaí na hÉireann

Ní mór dúinn tús a chur leis an bpleanáil a bhaineann le Reifreann ar Aontas le go mbainfear leas geilleagrach as Éirinn Aontaithe. Tá sé in am do mhuintir na hÉireann a thuairim a léiriú.

### DÉANFAIDH SINN FÉIN:

- » **Cur i bhfeidhm iomlán Chomhaontú Aoine an Chéasta a iarraidh**
- » **Páipéar Bán ar Aontacht na hÉireann a fhoilsiú**
- » **Comhchoiste an Oireachtais ar Aontacht na hÉireann a bhunú.**
- » **Reifreann thuaidh is theas ar Aontacht na hÉireann a chinntiú**

## Dídean a bheith agat

Déanfaidh Sinn Féin an clár tógála tithíochta is mó ó bunaíodh an Stát a sheachadadh. Déanfaimid cíosanna a ghearradh agus arduithe orthu a chosc. Cinnteoimid go mbeidh rochtain ar thithíocht inacmhainne agus go dtiocfaidh deireadh le scannal daoine bheith gan dídean.

### DÉANFAIDH SINN FÉIN:

- » **Suas le €1,500 a bhaint de chíosanna trí chreidmeas canach in-aisíochta agus cosc a chur ar arduithe orthu le trí bliana**
- » **100,000 teach a thógáil thar 5 bliana. Áirítear tithíocht comhairle áitiúil agus tithí inacmhainne do chíosóirí agus ceannathóirí céaduaire. Costas- €6.5 bh**
- » **Cumhachtaí a thabhairt don Bhanc Ceannais uasteorainn do rátaí úis a shocrú ionas nach dtagtar i dtír ar chustaiméirí**

## Airgead i do Phóca

Tabharfaidh Sinn Féin faoiseamh d'oibrithe agus do theaghlaigh ag cur níos mó airgid ar ais ina bpócaí.

### DÉANFAIMID:

- » **Íocaíochtaí USC ar an gcéad €30,000 a ghlanadh arb ionann é agus sábháil suas le €700 d'oibrithe in aghaidh na bliana. Costas €1.2 bn in aghaidh na bliana.**
- » **Deireadh a chur le costas ró-ard an árachais agus cosc a chur ar an déphraghsáil.**
- » **Costas cúram leanaí a laghdú faoi €500 an leanbh in aghaidh na míosa. Costas - €500 milliún in aghaidh na bliana.**
- » **Cáin Mhaoine a chealú, arb ionann é agus sábháil €244 in aghaidh na bliana ar an meán do theaghlaigh. Costas €485 in aghaidh na bliana.**
- » **Deireadh a chur le táillí tríú leibhéal - €243 mhilliún.**

## Ceart ar Scor

Cuirfidh Sinn Féin deireadh le hardú na haoise pinsin go 67 agus tabharfar ar ais í go 65. Cuirfimid toirmeasc ar an scor éigeantach a chinntiú gur ceadmhach dóibh siúd atá ag iarraidh leanúint ar aghaidh ag obair, déanamh amhlaidh.

### DÉANFAIDH SINN FÉIN:

- » **Aois phinsin a thabhairt ar ais go 65. Costas - €368 mhilliún in aghaidh na bliana**



## Cúram Sláinte in am an ghátair

Tabharfaidh Sinn Féin faoin ghéarchéim trollaithe – ag cur deireadh leis an gcosc ar earcaíocht, níos mó banaltraí a fhostú, níos mó leapacha a oscailt agus níos mó uaireanta cúram baile.

Rachaimid i ngleic leis an bhfadhb atá ag go leor pobal gan rochtain ar dhochtúir teaghlaigh. Táimid tiomanta de Sheirhís Sláinte Náisiúnta d'Éirinn.

### DÉANFAIDH SINN FÉIN:

- » Deireadh a chur leis an gcosc ar earcaíocht, 2,500 banaltra agus cnáimhseach agus 1,000 dochtúir agus comhairleoir a fhostú. Costas - €385 mhilliún in aghaidh na bliana.
- » 1,500 leaba a oscailt. Costas - €480 milliún mar chaiteachas reatha bliantúil agus €1 bh n mar chaipiteal.
- » 12 mhilliún uair cúnamh baile breise a sholáthar thar thréimhse an rialtais chun an liosta feithimh a ghlanadh. Costas €59 milliún in aghaidh na bliana do na huaireanta breise.
- » Áiteanna oiliúna do dhochtúirí teaghlaigh a mhéadú agus níos mó banaltraí sláinte poiblí a earcú

## Pobal sábháilte

Tabharfaidh Sinn Féin faoin gcoiriúlacht go dian, ag tabhairt líon na nGardaí ar ais go leibhéal nach raibh ann riamh, a chinntiú go mbeidh aga freagartha níos tapúla agus pobail shábháilte.

### DÉANFAIDH SINN FÉIN:

- » Líon na nGardaí a ardú go 16,000. Costas €142 mhilliún.
- » 2,000 serhíseach sibhialtach breise a earcú a saorófar Gardaí óna dualgais mhaoirseachta. Costas €80 milliún.
- » Chomhairle um Pianbhreith a Ghearradh a bhunú le cinntiú gurb ionann pianbhreitheanna agus tromchúis na coire.
- » Níos mó acmhainní don Stiúrtóir Ionchúiseamh Poiblí, don tSeirbhís Chúirteanna agus don Bhiúró um Shócmhainní Coiriúla Costas €10 milliún





# Irish Unity

## Planning for unity

Sinn Féin is a United Ireland party. Our core political objective is to achieve Irish Unity and the referendum on Unity which is the means to secure this.

Partition has been an abject failure and its negative effects continue to shackle the potential of citizens across this island.

Republicans believe that until national freedom is achieved and an end to British rule secured, we cannot build the Ireland envisioned in the 1916 Proclamation.

In 1998, one of our achievements in the negotiations leading to the Good Friday Agreement was securing a referendum on unity. In the Constitutional Issues section of the Agreement, it states:

*(ii) recognise that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish, accepting that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland;*

The Irish and British Governments also accept that if the people of the island of Ireland exercise their right of self-determination through a referendum and on the basis set out in the Agreement there *“will be a binding obligation on both Governments to introduce and support in their respective parliaments legislation to give effect to that wish.”*

This democratic and peaceful mechanism to achieve Irish Unity is a game-changer. No previous generation has had this opportunity to end the Union and Partition democratically and peacefully.

In recent years, the controversy and chaos around Brexit, along with the electoral and demographic changes in the North, and the refusal of the DUP to support outstanding rights for citizens, has increased interest in and support for a referendum on Irish Unity.

Sinn Féin has successfully focussed on the imperative of defending the Good Friday Agreement from the effects of Brexit. Due in no small way to our efforts, this has also become an integral part of the political debate within the European Union and in the USA.

In its negotiations with the EU, the Irish Government repeatedly emphasised the urgent necessity of protecting the Good Friday Agreement. The Government, supported by Sinn Féin’s very effective team of MEPs, was successful in ensuring that the European Commission repeatedly stated the importance of protecting the Good Friday Agreement. This is reflected in almost every statement and comment made by EU leaders. It is reflected in the outcome of the negotiations, which led to the least worst Brexit deal with the Johnson Government.

In the United States, Congressional leaders, including Speaker Pelosi and Congress member Richard Neal, Chair of the powerful Ways and Means Committee, have expressed their determination to defend the Good Friday Agreement. In December 2019, the US House of Representatives unanimously voted in favour of a resolution to reaffirm support for the Good Friday Agreement. The Bill called for strict adherence to the Agreement and warned that any trade deal between a British Government and the USA would be based on the condition that the Agreement is preserved.

The defence of the Good Friday Agreement and the issue of a referendum on Irish Unity is now centre stage. It is a matter of daily debate and conversation. It is totally inconsistent for the Irish Government, the Fianna Fáil leadership and others to laud and correctly seek support for the Good





Friday Agreement, while resiling from elements of it, including the referendum. However, it is clear that despite resistance from the Irish and British Governments and the main unionist parties, a referendum on Irish Unity will be held in the next few years.

Demographic trends suggest a nationalist voting majority in the north is close. Political unionism has lost its electoral majority in four consecutive elections and the exit poll conducted across the 26 counties in the wake of the Local Government and European elections in 2019 showed a huge majority in support of Irish Unity.

Brexit has forced many to consider their constitutional future. There are increasing contributions to the unity debate from a wide variety of people, with many citing Brexit as a catalyst for their considerations.

The future is not about a single step-change in which we go to bed one night in a partitioned Ireland and the next morning wake up in a united Ireland. It's all about process. A process of discussion. A process of persuasion. A process of change. A process of transition. A process of transformation. A process of reconciliation. It's about agreeing how we will organise our society. It's about how we share our future. It's about all of us having our say and playing our part in this.

The Irish Government has a duty and a constitutional obligation to make preparations for Unity. To examine the economic arguments. The cultural and social dimensions. The political dynamics. To take account of the significant shifts in population and identity demographics in the North in recent decades. To open this process up and in consultation with and through a process of inclusive dialogue, to persuade those – unionists, nationalists and others – who have reservations about unity - that Irish unity makes sense for them, for their families and for the future.

The Irish Government is best placed to create the space in which all of this can take place. Sinn Féin President Mary Lou McDonald TD suggested some time ago that the Irish Government establish a forum to which all are invited and none are excluded. This dialogue could discuss the political shape of a new Ireland, a new constitution, the protections needed to assuage unionist concerns, the economic positives that will benefit all, the timeframe for a transition period and how long it should last and so much more.

It could also engage with our friends and neighbours in the EU. Almost 30 years ago, the EU financially and politically supported German reunification. The EU through its negotiations on Brexit has demonstrated concern about the peace process and the future of the Good Friday Agreement. It has already accepted that, in the event of Unity, the North would automatically become part of the EU. This European goodwill can be harnessed.

The debacle arising from the Brexit chaos is evidence that you need to plan for the future. As the detrimental political, economic and social impact of Brexit plays out, the goal of Irish Unity, of the island of Ireland within the EU, will become increasingly attractive. This issue is not going away. On the contrary, it is clear that a referendum Irish Unity needs to be planned for now. That is primarily, though not exclusively, the responsibility of the Irish Government.

The Government must begin the process of planning for Irish Unity.

### **IN GOVERNMENT, SINN FÉIN WILL:**

- » **Seek the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, including the all-island institutions**
- » **Establish a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Irish Unity**
- » **Establish an all-island representative Citizens' Assembly or appropriate forum to discuss and plan for Irish Unity**
- » **Publish a White Paper on Irish Unity**
- » **Secure a referendum, north and south, on Irish Unity**



# Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Rural communities have suffered disproportionately as a result of the failed policies of successive Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Governments.

Investment, strategy and vision have all been lacking, resulting in poor provision of public services. The absence of the infrastructural development necessary to create sustainable employment and agriculture policies has undermined the Irish family farm model so important to Irish rural life and communities.

The Irish family farm is at risk. Unless urgent corrective measures and supports are provided, many farmers will be unable to remain active on their land and prospective new entrants will not be in a position to join the sector.

Sinn Féin is committed to our family farmers and we are determined to implement the radical changes necessary to reverse the decline that has been overseen by recent Governments.

In Government, we will establish a commission on the future of the family farm. The commission's membership will include representatives from farm organisations, statutory bodies, and independent experts. The commission's terms of reference will ensure that it issues a report, within a short time period, to include proposals aimed at protecting and supporting the family farm model. Its purpose will be to develop a new long-term strategy for Irish farming aimed at delivering a revitalised, new generation of Irish family farmers capable of meeting the challenges of the next decade and its recommendations will underpin the policy priorities of a Sinn Féin Government.

EU trade deals, such as that with the Mercosur trading bloc, will disproportionately and negatively impact our rural economies, making matters worse. The Fine Gael Government failed to prevent increased access of 99,000 tonnes of beef from Mercosur countries in the draft trade agreement and have not confirmed that they will abide by the adopted Sinn Féin Dáil resolution to reject this deal.

Sinn Féin in Government will inform the European institutions that Ireland will not ratify the Mercosur deal and we reject any trade deal that negatively impacts Irish agricultural interests.

Sinn Féin will take on the cartel-like beef processing sector that is pushing family farms out of business, reform the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) so that it supports the farmers who need it the most and ensure farmers are assisted in the transition towards a greener, more sustainable agriculture sector.

Sinn Féin will also continue to advocate for the establishment of an EU Brexit Relief Fund to compensate Farmers and SMEs for economic damage caused by Brexit related shocks.

## Increasing incomes on family farms

The new CAP reform provides an opportunity to address the inequalities in agriculture.

Farm income continues to be highly reliant on direct payments, with the average direct payment at €17,804 in 2016, accounting for 75% of income. Currently larger corporate farm enterprises are receiving exorbitant payments at the expense of most farmers. It is vital we see CAP reforms rebalancing payments towards lower-income family farms. Corporate enterprises, such as factory feedlots, should be excluded from receiving CAP payments.

This is about fairness. We need to move towards a more equitable and fair allocation of basic payments. Sinn Féin will work towards front-loaded uniform per hectare payments throughout the



state and an upper limit payment ceiling of €60,000 per applicant ensuring that most Irish farms will receive increased payments and become more viable.

Sinn Féin was rightly critical of the Fine Gael Government's early offer to increase its contributions to the EU budget without receiving any guarantee in respect of CAP funding. The result has been the European Commission proposal to increase the overall EU budget but cut the allocations for the CAP by 15% in real terms. Sinn Féin will work at domestic and EU level to oppose these savage proposed cuts to CAP and instead demand that the Irish Government only support an EU budget which includes increased CAP provision in real terms.

During the transition period before the implementation of the new CAP, Sinn Féin will advocate for a continuation of the full annual funding allocation rather than the reduced budget proposed by the commission and will advocate that the convergence process continues during this period.

In Government we will reform and extend the Beef Data Genomics Scheme to ensure that it is suitable for all the small suckler herds which were previously excluded. The current level of payment to the suckler farmer needs to be enhanced to encourage good husbandry and the proper weaning of calves.

We will also provide for an additional suckler cow scheme to increase the payment to €200 per cow for the first 15 cows in the herd.

All farmers should be supported through CAP payments in protecting hedgerows and other natural features of their land, which enhance the environment and biodiversity. Under current rules, livestock farmers are often encouraged to remove hedgerows to increase farm sizes. That needs to change in the next Common Agricultural Policy.

Sinn Féin will also increase the Sheep Welfare Scheme payment to €20 per ewe in order to preserve the national sheep herd.

We will invest an additional €25 million in the Areas of Natural Constraint Scheme, a scheme that provides vital income support to many farmers operating on hills and other constrained land. We will target this additional funding towards the areas of most constraint.

The lack of transparency in pricing, evident in the sheep and beef sectors, must be tackled by regulation and legislation. Sinn Féin is committed to bringing these measures before the next Dáil.

Sinn Féin supports the call for an accurate and transparent system of price reporting for finished lambs by the Department.

Sinn Féin will support reform of taxation measures to encourage new and younger farmers to remain on the land. In Government, we will increase the self-employed tax credits to €1,650 to bring it in line with PAYE workers.

We will continue to support income averaging for tax assessment purposes for farmers in recognition of the price volatility faced by farmers, which can result in dramatic year-on-year income fluctuations. A fairer taxation rate can be assessed by averaging income over three years.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Establishing a Commission on the Future of the Family Farm**
- » **Supporting beef farmers through enhanced suckler cow payments**
- » **Challenging the cartel-like nature of the processing sector**
- » **Reforming the Common Agriculture Policy to ensure farm payments are rebalanced towards lower-income family farms**
- » **Supporting sheep farmers through higher ewe payments and ANC increase**
- » **Tax relief for farmers**



## Inspections and penalties

The Department of Agriculture should, in the first instance, be a partner of family farmers.

Inspections should serve the purpose of supporting farms to become more effective and compliant with their obligations rather than a means to 'catch a farmer out', which is the current perception. Sinn Féin in Government will ensure reasonable notice is provided for inspections and introduce a mandatory Farmers' Rights Charter.

First-time minor breaches of EU rules by farmers should not result in financial penalties. Sinn Féin will press for a mandatory yellow-card system in the new CAP, protecting farmers from unfair penalties.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITY:**

#### **» Introduction of a Mandatory Farmers' Rights Charter**

## A Just Transition for family farms

Irish agriculture is among the most sustainable in the world. Farmers are willing to participate in further measures to move towards an even more sustainable, green, low carbon model. However, supports are required to provide a just transition.

Sinn Féin in Government will therefore introduce, on a trial basis, 300 spaces for an 'Environmental Basic Income' scheme for farmers currently on the Farm Assist Scheme to voluntarily transition towards more sustainable practises. Participating farmers will receive a €300 weekly payment to implement a plan which meets environmental targets to reduce carbon output and carbon intensity.

Farmers can play an important role in the production of indigenous renewable energy, which can also provide for income diversification.

The EU Commission has highlighted Ireland as one of the best countries for biofuel potential. It has been projected that Biomass and Biogas could make up as much as 14% of Ireland's renewable energy by 2030, two sources of energy, which are produced by agricultural waste.

Both Biogas and Biomass can be produced indigenously and renewably through the utilisation of food waste, feed, marginal grass, crop residues, rotation crops, and slurry.

With proper supports, many farmers can transition into renewable energy as an additional source of income alongside day-to-day farming production. Sinn Féin will work to provide those supports, in consultation with farm organisations and local communities, including through the establishment of a Co-operative Development Unit to facilitate smaller farms to collaborate in such arrangements.

Sinn Féin will support the principle of ensuring the new CAP eco-schemes apply to all farmers to ensure a level playing field. We will also work to ensure equality of payments for compliant farmers at an equal rate per hectare to all to avoid a repeat of the unfair variable greening provisions in the last CAP.

Sinn Féin is committed to prohibiting the cultivation of genetically modified organisms in Ireland in order to preserve our reputation as a green, environmentally sustainable source of food production.

Crucial to meeting our environmental obligations is the development of a comprehensive and sustainable forestry policy. The current forestry policy, supported by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, promotes the widespread growth of non-indigenous Sitka Spruce plantations, which have been detrimental to local communities, has failed to deliver any local economic benefit, and, in some cases, has actually been damaging to the environment due to planting on peatbog land.

The current forestry policies which incentivise multinational corporate interests to pursue a 'land-grab', particularly in the west, is not working. In contrast, Sinn Féin are committed to develop a



community-led agri-forestry strategy which will encourage farmers to plant in conjunction with their tillage or livestock activities thus ensuring vibrant, diverse farm operations.

In line with this objective, Sinn Féin will reform the 'Forestry Scheme' to extend the payment period from 15 to 30 years.

Sinn Féin in the next Dáil will propose that the Oireachtas Committee on Agriculture, Food and the Marine committee adopt an all-party approach to consult on and develop a strategy for supporting and enhancing the Organic sector.

We will also ensure that farm systems that encourage Carbon sequestration are promoted and rewarded within the CAP payment system.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **An Environmental Basic Income pilot scheme for small farmers**
- » **Promoting renewable energy as a new income stream for farmers**
- » **Establishing Ireland as a GMO-free agricultural state**
- » **Supporting a long-term, community-led agri-afforestation policy**
- » **Oireachtas Committee to develop a plan to support the Organic Sector**

## Unfair trading practices

The lack of fair competition in the meat-processing sector in Ireland is a core reason for the crisis facing Irish farming.

The Irish processing sector is highly concentrated: the three biggest factory groups now control 65% of all meat processed in the state. This forces farmers to accept the artificially low prices offered by these corporate giants.

Sinn Féin will address this by reducing the imbalance in bargaining power in the food chain, through legislative protections for farmers. While the new EU directive on unfair trading practices falls short of what is required, Sinn Féin will ensure the speedy transposition into national law of its provisions.

Sinn Féin will also provide the necessary technical and financial supports to Farmer Producer Organisations to provide for structured collectivisation by farmers in their dealings with the large processors.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Preventing arbitrary penalties or conditions, such as the four-movement or 30-day rules, imposed on farmers by processors and supermarkets**
- » **Banning below-cost selling of fresh food products by retailers**
- » **Providing additional funding to the Irish Competition and Consumer Protection Authority to establish a unit to investigate allegations of price fixing and other cartel-like behaviour in the AGRI food sector**
- » **Enacting our 'Beef Price Transparency Bill 2019' to identify the extent of the true profits earned by retailers and processors from food and to derive the data necessary to ensure that a fair share of this profit returns to primary producers.**



## Fisheries

Waters and fish stocks are some of our most valuable strategic resources and Sinn Féin is determined to rejuvenate the fishing industry, making it environmentally sustainable and economically viable for ordinary, local fishing communities.

Years of neglect and mismanagement by successive Governments have thwarted the potential for a vibrant, sustainable and valuable fishing industry.

European regulations, rigidly and enthusiastically enforced by successive Irish Governments, have hurt fishermen, held back our fishing industry and hampered economic growth in coastal communities to the extent that people have zero confidence in the Government taking control and standing with our island and coastal communities.

Super trawlers are highly destructive, contribute nothing to the Irish economy and have a history of illegal and unethical activities. A Sinn Féin Government will fight for an EU level ban on super trawlers until that is achieved, we will work towards the strictest possible controls and monitoring of super trawlers.

Irish authorities have the power to monitor and board boats in our waters and we should be using these powers to the fullest possible extent. We advocate the compulsory installation of CCTV onboard super trawlers to monitor their fishing and processing facilities to stop illegal or unethical practices such as under-reported fishing.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Securing a ban on super trawlers with more effective controls and monitoring in the interim**

## Business, Enterprise and Innovation

The next few years will prove to be among the most difficult and challenging for businesses and exporters across Ireland as the realities of Brexit begin to take effect.

Long-standing barriers to balanced growth remain, mainly around poor infrastructure, which has left us with serious deficits around transport, housing and broadband.

Sinn Féin has listened to businesses across Ireland. We want to meet these challenges head on, providing businesses with the support they need to weather the Brexit effects and address the other persistent problems hampering their growth.

Small businesses are the engine of the Irish economy, numbering some 260,000 firms, or 98% of all business across the state.

While we recognise and value the many benefits and jobs FDI has brought, we need to rebalance our economy and ensure small businesses across Ireland receive the required assistance from central Government to help them prosper and grow.

Sinn Féin wants to enable our small business sector to modernise and innovate. We are leading the charge when it comes to tackling the rip-off premiums and abuses of power by the insurance industry, which are crippling small businesses.





## Brexit

The biggest challenge businesses across this island will face over the coming years is the threat posed by Brexit. InterTradelreland reported in August of 2019 that the level of SMEs expecting an increase in growth over the next 12 months had fallen to 2009 levels.

The Tory Government in London have no concept of the importance of free-flowing trade across the island of Ireland. It is therefore up to the Irish Government to stand up for the concerns of businesses and workers across Ireland.

We want to work with Enterprise Ireland and InterTradelreland to improve the uptake rates of existing Brexit supports. The British Irish Chamber of Commerce, IBEC and the Small Firms Association have reported their members' dissatisfaction with the schemes for being overly bureaucratic, that those most in need are excluded due to unreasonably strict qualifying criteria and that fundamentally the model is not appropriate as most small and micro-businesses do not wish to take on additional debt at a time when business is particularly vulnerable.

Sinn Féin would allocate significant investment for the agri-food sector, vulnerable SMEs (exporting and non-exporting), protecting north-south trade on the island of Ireland and the tourism industry.

Sinn Féin would also expand capital investment, ensure Irish SMEs are in the best possible position to deal with whatever post-Brexit scenario unfolds and would ensure businesses along the border are given additional supports to ensure those most vulnerable to Brexit are given adequate protections.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Providing SMEs with the supports they need to respond to Brexit impacts**

## Rebalancing our economy

A Sinn Féin Government would deliver a regionally balanced, mixed and stable economy, taking an active hand in job creation to realise secure, sustainable and high-quality employment in cities, towns and villages across our island.

In 2018, our key jobs agencies, Enterprise Ireland, the IDA, the Local Enterprise Offices, Údarás na Gaeltachta, and InterTradelreland, created over 25,000 net jobs.

We want to maintain this level of achievement by our jobs agencies and see this number rise over the next five years. To this end we would protect funding to the IDA and increase investment via the other bodies.

The IDA provides extensive advice to Government on FDI strategy and is hugely successful in attracting multinationals to Ireland. Enterprise Ireland is a strong support for Irish exporters. An equivalent agency is needed to support the growth of indigenous small businesses in our domestic market.

Sinn Féin recognise the role Local Enterprise Offices have played in regional Ireland, providing advice, information and support to businesses when starting or growing their enterprise. We want to build on the success by expanding upon and reforming the way the current system operates.

We want to establish a state-wide Irish Enterprise Agency, which would take over responsibility for the 31 offices, make best practice uniform and provide the Government with advice and guidance on what retailers and other SMEs want to help them grow business.

An increase in personnel would include new mobile business advisors who would travel to businesses and provide advice on business plans, grants and strategies on site.

Developing a worker co-operative sector is another positive way Sinn Féin would rebalance and address risks in our economy. The evidence from across Europe is clear. Worker co-operatives are more resilient, more productive and provide greater social benefits to workers and their communities when compared with traditional enterprises.



We would establish a Worker Co-operative Development Unit at a cost of €4.5 million modelled upon the successful Co-operative Development Scotland agency. The unit would provide capital and technical assistance to existing and start-up worker co-ops as well as to businesses entering succession conversion

Sinn Féin values foreign direct investment and is committed to retaining the 12.5% corporation tax rate that has been key in attracting many multinational corporations to locate in Ireland.

We would continue to support the IDA efforts to attract FDI to these shores. We are especially keen to see more of these MNCs located in regional Ireland. We would provide IDA Ireland with substantial funding to develop IDA parks and factories in counties with traditionally low levels of FDI investment.

We would also like to see the IDA target FDI from countries, with traditionally lower levels of connections to Ireland, to diversify the origins of multinationals locating here, and address the risks associated with over dependence on FDI from a very small number of countries.

Sinn Féin is committed to supporting InterTradeIreland to help small businesses across Ireland to explore new cross-border markets and develop products and services. This is particularly important as border counties are particularly vulnerable in the coming years due to Brexit.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **All-Ireland economic development and implementing an all-Ireland investment and jobs strategy working with our colleagues in the Assembly**
- » **Establishing a state-wide Irish Enterprise Agency at an annual cost of €35 million**
- » **Developing our worker co-operative sector**
- » **Greater diversity in the source countries of FDI and greater regional balance in the spread of FDI jobs**
- » **Increase funding for InterTradeIreland by 20%**

## Creating a modern and innovative economy

Remote working will play a far greater role in the lives of workers in the coming years. This will see more employees working from home or from their local town.

It will eliminate the need for some people to move or commute to a city, thereby saving them considerable time and money that they can spend with their families. It will also contribute to decreasing the traffic congestion and accommodation pressures in our cities.

Unfortunately due to the omnishambles that has been the National Broadband Plan, under Fine Gael, many rural businesses will not see high speed broadband any time soon.

With this reality in mind, Sinn Féin wants to establish digital hubs in rural towns across Ireland, replicating the success of the Ludgate Hub in Skibbereen. We believe the Ireland Strategic Investment Fund should partner with others to invest €1 billion over a decade regenerating town centres, including the creation of broadband hubs with work spaces for local businesses.

These centres will give workers access to desk space with high speed broadband. We want to see these hubs established in the middle of rural towns, which will benefit local shops and help sustain our town centres.

Sinn Féin would legislate to promote greater access to remote working, ensuring employers give due consideration to any request to work remotely made by an employee. This expansion of remote working must be accompanied by robust legal protections for workers.

Currently, just three in 10 Irish SMEs have the ability to take sales orders through their websites, despite e-commerce being worth €12.3 billion to the economy annually. Sinn Féin would treble funding for the





Trading Online Vouchers Scheme to get more Irish SMEs online, providing grants up to €2,500 to businesses so they can develop websites, social media presence and online training.

Since Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneur began in 2014, over 5,700 young people have participated and the winning entries have created 2,200 jobs and achieved some €124 million in export sales. We want to build on this success and provide more support for young entrepreneurs across Ireland.

We are proposing to increase the investment funding available in this competition from €2 million to €6 million and introduce new categories introduced to the competition, for example, best environmental or green energy business and best worker co-op proposal. In addition, new initiatives to provide assistance to entrepreneurs with disabilities should be introduced to make sure they have the full range of supports to participate.

We would also protect funding for Science Foundation Ireland and become an associate member of CERN delivering significant benefits in the areas of research and development, technology, education, training, jobs and procurement.

In keeping with our commitment to tackle climate change, we propose to fund 10,000 SEAI grants for SMEs across Ireland, allowing them to install green energy technologies to generate their own electricity for their businesses.

This scheme will be aimed at small businesses across Ireland whose margins will not currently allow them to invest in green energy.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Rolling-out digital hubs and promoting access to remote working with protections**
- » **Getting more SMEs trading online**
- » **Investing in Ireland's young entrepreneurs**
- » **Maximising research and innovation opportunities**
- » **Supporting 10,000 SMEs to transition to new green energy solutions**

## Insurance reform

Insurance costs are squeezing incomes and crippling business. Across the state, businesses and childcare providers face the threat of closure because of a broken insurance market. The insurance industry must be challenged and the sector fundamentally reformed.

Sinn Féin have been instrumental in holding the insurance companies to account for ripping off consumers to service their own profits. The Government has failed to protect consumers and tackle the pricing practices of the insurance companies.

With the Consumer Insurance Contracts Act passed in the last Dáil, Sinn Féin's reforms of the insurance market are already underway. This Act helps consumers and small businesses.

We will continue to drive radical reform of the insurance market to increase transparency and protect consumers and small businesses.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Protecting consumers and small businesses from extortionate premiums**
- » **Increasing transparency in the setting of premiums**
- » **Establishing a Garda Insurance Fraud Unit**
- » **Controlling the cost of claims**



# Children and Youth Affairs

## Early childhood education and care

The next decade affords us the opportunity to transform childcare into a fully fledged public service. When essential services for the young, for the elderly and for people with a disability are turned into businesses and when essential services are privatised or outsourced for big profit, citizens suffer. Nowhere is this more evident than when it comes to childcare, Sinn Féin are offering a radically different vision for the early years sector, putting children first.

The current system of provision is broken. It is unsustainable for staff, financially crippling for many parents and of variable quality across the sector. A new system that puts children's interests front and centre by prioritising quality and improving working conditions, while at the same time cutting childcare costs for parents, is critically needed.

There is a growing shortage of places for children and crèches are being forced to close due to staff shortages and huge overheads. Staff turnover and burnout is at an all-time high. Staff and service providers must be financially supported and encouraged to upskill and remain in the sector.

Sinn Féin believes the provision of childcare should be treated as a public service. A model that is publicly subsidised, of high quality and universally accessible is achievable if the sector is given the respect and funding it deserves. High-quality and affordable childcare must be readily accessible to all who need it.

Childcare should be recognised as a distinct phase with unique learning and developmental requirements and not merely immediate care needs. Investment into this sector needs to significantly increase year on year, working towards achieving a spend of at least 1% of GDP as recommended by the early childhood stakeholders and UNICEF. Policy must be child-centred and quality focused, not driven solely by labour markets and the economy. It must be inclusive for children with additional needs, be regulated efficiently and deliver consistent quality.

We believe our own state's previous experience of the introduction of universal entitlement to secondary school education in the 1960s and positive examples of current childcare funding and fee structures in other European countries demonstrate what is possible and should inform the transformation of provision.

We propose the introduction of a new scheme which centre-based childcare providers could opt into. Under this scheme, direct financial support for all centre-based providers would increase year on year and by half a billion euro over the five-year term of Government.

This increased investment would be accompanied by legislation containing a schedule of permissible fees. The financial support from the Exchequer would grow and the permissible fees shrink in parallel. Public funding would steadily replace fees for parents.

Our vision for the decade is to deliver childcare as a public service free at the point of use and over the course of a single term of Government, fees would be reduced by 66%.

This five-year programme of investment would commence by ensuring the entry level wage for childcare workers increases to the Living Wage, currently €12.30 per hour and implement pay scales for all staff which properly value childcare as a viable long-term career choice.

Over time, the state would take on the full operating costs of the service providers in the same manner it does for schools including the full wage and pension responsibilities of the workforce just as it does for teachers.



### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » Transforming childcare into a fully fledged public service so that workers are properly paid and fees slashed by 66% or more than €500 per month on average
- » Establishing a dedicated early years and school age care agency with responsibility for all aspects of funding, oversight, planning and administration to ensure consistency in reporting standards and minimising duplication of administrative work
- » Achieving a 60% degree-led ECCE workforce by 2025, as recommended by the EU i.e. that 60% of all supervisors, managers, etc, hold degrees and will, therefore, increase the Learner Fund by €9.6 million to encourage greater upskilling
- » Increasing funding to the Access Inclusion Model by €6.5 million to make SNA supports available to a greater number of children with consultation of parents, childcare providers, therapists and other relevant professionals
- » Introducing a system/database of support 'relief' workers supported through the County Childcare Committees who can step in on a short-term basis for those leaving services to upskill ensuring no staff deficit for services
- » Providing additional resources to tackle the continuing backlog of Garda vetting, thereby speeding up hiring of staff
- » Developing a system for a passport style Garda vetting card that will follow the employee rather than the service

## Childminders

We recognise the excellent contribution made by so many childminders across the country in terms of enabling parents to return to work and contributing to the wellbeing of children. We recognise this may be the preferred option for some parents as opposed to availing of centre-based care.

In Government, Sinn Féin would establish a task force to carry out a study of childminder-based care to develop national guidelines for the Childminder sector and identify the supports necessary to ensure high quality and the routine delivery of Aistear across the sector.

During the interim, we also propose to reinstate the Childminding Advisory Service with County Childcare Committees to aid Childminders in registering with Tusla and supporting Childminders' work.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » Reinstating the Childminding Advisory Service
- » Extending the six Childminding Development Officer positions with a dedicated officer employed by each of the 30 City and County Childcare Committees

## Supporting new parents

Evidence tells us children do better when they spend their first year of life with a parent. Maternity Benefit is currently available for just 26 weeks and Paternity Benefit for two weeks. Sinn Féin would invest an additional €366 million in order to extend this leave and increase the rate of benefit paid so that children can be with a parent for the first year of their life.



In Scotland, all new mothers are provided with a box of essentials for their new-born baby as an effort to ensure every child gets an equal start in life. This has proven to be hugely popular and beneficial, with the box itself serving as an alternative to a Moses basket.

**SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Delivering an additional 26 weeks of maternity (or paternity) leave to enable a parent to be with their child for its first year of its life and increasing the rate of benefit paid by €50 to €295 to allow mothers and fathers avail of their leave without financial hardship**
- » **Rolling out a Baby Box scheme at a cost of €15 million**

## Afterschool care

Afterschool care for school-age children would be included in the new childcare service outlined earlier.

The opportunities for afterschool care and activities must also be expanded and this should be preceded by a scoping exercise on the number of school buildings available for use after hours and the creation of guidelines for the use of schools out of hours. A comprehensive set of quality standards must also be drawn up and implemented.

This work could be done in conjunction with investment in and expansion of the Schools Completion Programme which organises afterschool activities, breakfast clubs, homework clubs, summer camps, and more.

Funding for the School Completion Programme, which assists children through school and after school supports, has been cut drastically in the last decade. Not only is additional funding required for the programme, we also think it should be expanded to assist more students.

**SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Increasing investment in the School Completion Programme by one third**
- » **Expansion of afterschool care**

## Digital Safety

Cybersecurity and cyber safety are one of the most important child protection issues of our time. The increasing use of digital technology has brought enormous benefits in terms of education and communication, but also presents new dangers. Education on the responsible use of technology - for young people, parents and teachers - is key.

Sinn Féin commits to the creation of an Office of a Digital Safety Commissioner and roll-out of a National Strategy on Children's Cyber Safety. The office would enforce a code of practice and National Digital Safety Standards on digital service providers as well as establishing an Advisory Committee, 50% of which would be drawn from Civil Society, youth and children's groups.

**SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Create an Office of a Digital Safety Commissioner and roll out a Strategy on Children's Cyber Safety**



## Tusla

Tusla has been repeatedly criticised over its handling of various child protection issues. There is a legacy of serious problems regarding accountability and efficiency. There are serious questions over its capacity to respond to concerns and carry out routine work such as inspections. There are also chronic problems in terms of staff retention, particularly among social workers and link workers.

Following from Tusla's change in senior management, it has been announced by the agency that a commitment to increased transparency and accountability will become a priority. Sinn Féin is committed to keeping the ongoing changes within Tusla under review with the aim of significantly improving the Agency's standards and capacity. This must be coupled with increased funding for recruitment, training and support services.

We will ensure the Agency has adequate staff and resources to carry out its functions to the highest level. Aftercare services build on the work that has already been undertaken by many, including foster carers, social workers and residential workers, in preparing young people for adulthood.

All young people who have had a care history with Tusla are entitled to an aftercare service. These are provided on the basis of assessment of need, age and length of time the young person was in care and aim to help them transition from care to adult life. Sinn Féin proposes hiring 40 additional Aftercare workers to enhance services available.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **The recruitment of an additional 750 social workers, 100 additional administrative support staff and 125 aftercare workers**

## Supporting NGOs working with children

In 2013, Barnardos and One Family published a final evaluation of their successful child contact centre pilot. The report emphasises 'the important role such centres can play in facilitating safe contact for children, especially in high conflict families.' The role of the centres will also extend to parents who self-refer where the relationship breakdown has become acrimonious. Sinn Féin would implement the recommendations of the Barnardos/One Family child contact centre pilot report by investing €5.7 million to establish a network of child contact centres professionally staff.

Investment in youth work was reduced from €73.1 million in 2008 to €58.9 million in 2018. Sinn Féin propose increasing funding by €14.2 million to restore 2008 levels. This sector engages over 383,000 young people across the State. A significant increase to funding is needed to sustain the sector and ensure vital services and supports, which young people can rely on to cater for their needs.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Establishing a network of child contact centres**
- » **Increasing funding for the youth work sector**



# Communications, Climate Action and Environment

## Climate Change – a Just Transition to a low carbon emission economy

This Government is failing to take crucial action to tackle climate change. This state has been ranked as the worst performing country in Europe in tackling climate change, according to the 2018 Climate Change Performance Index.

The report highlights that this state was one of the few within the EU to miss its 2020 emission reductions targets. This also results in the state having to pay substantial fines.

We have a responsibility to take urgent action by making the low carbon transition to mitigate the impact of climate change on both our own country and on developing countries, which are facing the brunt of it.

Sinn Féin will make tackling climate change a priority. We recognise the opportunity this also presents, to produce our own clean energy on this island, reducing our reliance on imports and the potential for job creation in energy. Across our manifesto are commitments to a range of measures that will target this issue.

Without a Government policy that is framed by climate justice and a just transition, the leadership and direction of climate action will become the plaything of bankers and corporate investors. They will be concerned with only one thing - how to make a buck out of the crisis. That is what they do and it is killing the planet.

We cannot allow corporate interests to push false solutions and dump the cost of climate action on to the shoulders of ordinary communities. Sinn Féin is committed to climate justice and a just transition for Ireland, north and south. This means a fairer and more democratic society one which protects workers' rights and empowers communities with more input and control over their future.

## A Just Transition

A just transition provides decent jobs, social protection and security to workers, as well as communities most affected by the transition, to a sustainable economy. It ensures all climate policies are socially and rurally proofed. No workers or communities can be left behind in the move away from peat production to more sustainable forms of energy generation.

This is of prime importance for the Midlands and Moneypoint in County Clare. To ensure a just transition for peat workers, we need to establish a national Just Transition Task Force based on dialogue with trade unions and other stakeholders. This task force should negotiate a fair deal for fossil fuel workers and their communities and should ensure an orderly exit from coal and peat as soon as possible. The people who work in these areas need to be part of that transition.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITY:**

- » **Establishing a Just Transition Task Force and provide an additional €4 million to the Just Transition Fund annual budget**





## Carbon Tax

The carbon tax increase will make people poorer, but it will not make the state greener or cleaner. It is a regressive tax, the sole purpose of which is to raise funds. Any further increase will widen poverty and inequality and will hit low to middle income households harder. All the talk of using it for climate action is a ruse because the alternatives are not in place nor will they be in place under a Fine Gael or Fianna Fáil Government.

We know the barriers to climate action in this state and the main one is the lack of investment. We are still suffering from the consequences of almost a decade of cuts in capital expenditure.

Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in our public transport system. People cannot shift from private to public transport if no alternatives are available. The pathway is clear - we need to dramatically increase our investment in public transport and renewable energy. Until we do that, increase in the carbon tax will only penalise people for not being wealthy enough to make changes.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITY:**

- » **No carbon tax increases in the absence of viable alternatives**

## A just transition away from dependence on fossil fuels

We need to stop all future exploration for fossil fuels and invest in renewables. There is simply no alternative. While it is true that Ireland will have to continue to use fossil fuels as it transitions to a sustainable environment, it is pointless to pretend that new exploration or new fossil fuel infrastructure has a role to play in this process. It does not.

More than 80% of known and proved reserves on the planet must remain in the ground if we are to limit global temperature increases to under 1.5° Celsius. Sinn Féin is opposed to new infrastructure that will lock us into fossil fuel use for decades to come and greatly impede the transition to a zero-carbon economy.

Sinn Féin is totally opposed to fracking. This has been our position for years. The Government's attempts to import fracked gas into this state are disgraceful. Fracking is an environmental disaster.

All of the Irish state's peat and coal-fuelled electricity plants are due to close by the end of 2025, if not sooner. This is a necessary move, but one that must be framed by the principles of a just transition and headed by a Just Transition Task Force.

There is a need to divest from fossil fuels by obliging public bodies such as the Strategic Ireland Investment Fund to move its money out of fossil fuel companies. There is also a need to prohibit such future investment in the industry by state or semi-state enterprises - removing the investment capital of public pension schemes in fossil fuel companies and to redirect this investment where possible into green bonds.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **No new licences for offshore fossil fuel drilling and no new fossil fuel infrastructure**
- » **A total ban on fracking across the island of Ireland, including exploratory drilling, and a ban on the importation of fracked gas**
- » **State divestment from fossil fuel projects**



## Promoting renewable energy

The best way to develop renewable energy is in conjunction with local communities and semi-state companies. Semi-state entities such as ESB, Bord na Móna and Coillte must take the lead in developing renewable energy in Ireland.

Biomass from sustainable indigenous sources, biogas, solar, offshore wind and microgeneration are areas the current Government have yet to take seriously. As peat is phased out of electricity production, Sinn Féin would redirect the funding, which currently underpins peat into clean and sustainable energy sources such as these.

Sinn Féin would amend the current legislation on planning for offshore energy projects to streamline the planning process such as for offshore wind, wave, and tidal. Currently, there are overly cumbersome and disjointed processes which are discouraging development in offshore generation.

Allowing private citizens to sell any excess energy they produce from, for instance, roof top solar panels or small-scale wind turbines would also increase the proportion of renewable energy sources. Sinn Féin published the Micro-generation Support Scheme Bill 2017 to facilitate this. This would also aid in reducing the price of a family's electricity and heating bills.

The majority of our renewable energy production has come from onshore wind, which is the cheapest source of renewable energy to produce. It is a valuable source of energy, which must continue to be utilised as part of our future energy mix.

Governments should do more to promote community engagement around proposed wind projects and opportunities for full or part-ownership by local communities should be encouraged. In these arrangements, shares of the energy and revenue generated come back to local owners and community - Templederry Community Windfarm in Tipperary is one such example of community ownership.

We need a significant increase in offshore wind by 2030. To achieve this, Sinn Féin backs the centralised model for offshore wind development. Under this model, the final network is owned, maintained and operated by Eirgrid. This will allow Eirgrid to reach 80% renewables by 2030.

Sinn Féin supports the establishment of municipal hydrokinetic power generating systems, publicly owned and operated by local authorities. Particular consideration should focus on using water outflow from sewage treatment as a power source so to prevent any environmental impact on fish stocks or ecosystems. This clean green energy can power municipal public lights and electric public transport, revolutionising energy provision in public ownership.

It is estimated that data centres could account for up to 36% of the Irish state's electricity demand by 2030. The Irish Academy of Engineering has said that the centres could increase our electricity carbon emissions by 1.5 million tonnes.

The Renewable Electricity Policy and Development Frameworks needs to be updated to deal with this potential situation by stipulating all data centres must be powered by onsite or new off-site renewable energy generated by the companies themselves. In other words, data centres must add to renewable energy infrastructure itself and not just simply purchase 'clean' energy from the grid.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Diversify renewable energy sources**
- » **A legal and structural framework for domestic microgeneration of renewable energy**
- » **Greater community ownership and public participation in renewable energy projects**
- » **All data centres to be powered through self-generated 100% renewable energy**





## Reducing emissions across all sectors including energy, transport, agriculture

A Sinn Féin Government will immediately legislate for binding sectoral targets on specific industries in terms of emissions reduction.

This would involve five and ten-year, national and sectoral targets for emissions reductions to be enforced by the state, with regular review and reporting cycles. This State cannot continue to renege on international commitments to reduce our carbon emissions. By setting out in legislation sectoral targets, we would be taking steps to protect our environment and honour our 2020 and 2030 targets.

Buildings account for approximately 40% of our energy use. A Sinn Féin Government would introduce an ambitious programme to significantly increase the number of near zero energy buildings. It would do this through amendments to planning laws and building regulations and through greater public investment to enable the retrofitting and insulating of council, private rented and owner-occupier homes at a cost of €160 million.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has described air pollution as the 'single biggest environmental health risk' and in Ireland's case much of this is driven by transport emissions.

In addition to investing in the development of a fully integrated public transport system, Sinn Féin will also prioritise targeted public investment to begin changing our transport, both public and private, away from fossil fuels. We would provide Bus Éireann with an additional €30 million to diversify its fleet away from fossil fuels.

Alternatives can be found in renewable gas, for example, with the development of a biogas industry. Positive habit formation from a young age is also critical and therefore Sinn Féin propose to begin reducing fares by making use of public transport free for everybody under 18 years old within our first budget in Government.

There is uncertainty on the future funding of charging points for electric vehicles. We will provide State support for the construction of the public infrastructure. Sinn Féin supports the recommendation of the Citizens' Assembly to increase bus lanes, cycling lanes and park and ride facilities and that much greater priority should be given to these modes over private car use. We will incorporate recommendations into our revised and increased capital plans for transport.

Ireland has a proud farming history and prides itself on producing high quality food. Currently agriculture is one of the sectors most vulnerable to climate change. Intensive farming models are not in Ireland's interests.

We would ensure agriculture is sustainable. We will support farming communities so they can continue to have a livelihood while contributing to the EU 2030 climate and energy targets.

The introduction of environmental elements to many agricultural schemes is a step in the right direction; however, much more needs to be done. Take-up of existing agri-environmental schemes, such as GLAS and the Beef Data and Genomics Programme, should be encouraged.

Grant aid from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) should be extended to cover energy efficient re-equipment in poultry, pigs and horticulture not already covered by Targeted Agriculture Modernisation scheme.

Sinn Féin is committed to a sustainable afforestation strategy and recognises the importance of increasing the percentage of land under forestry in the mitigation of carbon emissions. Whilst investment in fast growing conifers has proven commercially profitable, such planting has had limited, if any, impact on carbon sequestration. The intensive plantation of invasive species such as Sitka Spruce has had a detrimental environmental and ecological impact.

A sustainable forestry policy must divert inducements to the plantation of slow-growing native



broadleaf species, which provide continuous cover, and where the purpose is to delay the harvesting of the timber, rather than accelerate it.

As well as acting as a boundary and serving to enclose livestock in fields, hedgerows act as an important factor in the habitat of various animals and plants. It is clear farmers must be a partner in mitigating the decline of the bee population and subsequent ecological consequences. Beehives should be deemed as livestock units for the purposes of CAP payments. This would have the effect of supporting bees and conserving their role in pollination and the hedgerow expansion programme should accommodate this outcome.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Setting out in legislation sectoral targets to meet our carbon emission reduction commitments**
- » **Massive public investment in state-owned electric vehicle charging points**
- » **Reducing energy requirements**
- » **Developing better fully integrated public transport system and transition to electric vehicles**
- » **A clean, green sustainable agricultural model**
- » **Greater increase in afforestation and protections for hedgerows**

## **Waste**

Policies of 'reduce, reuse and recycle' are key to reducing waste in our society. In the first instance, we need to reduce the amount of waste placed on the householder by putting obligations on manufactures of packaging. Sinn Féin would also introduce a deposit return scheme for plastics and other material collection.

Sinn Féin is committed to putting waste collection back under the control of local authorities. The privatised system is expensive, bad for the environment and lacking controls and regulations. We cannot allow profit to supersede the environment.

We are the only state in Europe with a completely privatised waste collection service and the only EU state persisting with 'side by side' competition for waste collection. This has led to multiple companies driving through residential communities adding to pollution and traffic jams.

Sinn Féin is committed to putting waste collection back under the control of local authorities. We would introduce a franchise model of waste collection as a first step, so that councils can insist on standards of delivery including affordable prices for households and waiver schemes, ending the 'side by side' waste collection system, increasing the number of recycling facilities and the range of items accepted, more public and recycling bins including dog litter bins, legislation to establish an independent regulator to oversee the domestic waste collection industry, greater employment and contract protections for waste disposal workers.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Reducing waste**
- » **Putting domestic waste collection back under the control of local authorities**



## Public broadcasting

Without public broadcasting, we will be left with billionaire media moguls pushing their own agenda, drawing up blacklists of journalists and stifling debate and investigation of economic and political power. Sinn Féin is fully committed to the future of public broadcasting.

RTÉ is experiencing funding difficulties. At the same time, it needs reform, particularly in terms of pay at the top and its own internal managerial structures.

In order to address the funding difficulties in public broadcasting, Sinn Féin proposes independent media production should be treated as a start-up industry with a new line of funding from central Government.

This would give a critical boost to a sector that currently supports nearly 17,000 full-time equivalent jobs across the state, contributes just over €1.4 billion to the Irish economy and has significant potential as an export industry.

Sinn Féin proposes to better support small indigenous media production companies in places like Limerick, Galway, and Waterford by adding to €10 million recently committed by Government to create a new fund of €40 million that is ring-fenced for independent productions commissioned by RTÉ. This would increase by €10 million a year until it reached €80 million, an overall boost to the sector of €300 million over five years.

This would be coupled with an increase of €5 million to the Sound and Vision Fund and €5 million to TG4, totalling an additional €50 million over five years.

It would also free up funds from the TV licence, which RTÉ could use to protect its regional imprint and dedicated services, including the development of digital broadcasting infrastructure.

It is clear the independence of our media needs to be protected from those who wish to curtail independence voices. It is time to tackle this issue head on and we will legislate to prohibit the blacklisting of journalists from communications media for reason or reasons of occupation, employer, company or employment status.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Sustainable funding for public broadcasting**
- » **Promotion of indigenous independent media production as an export industry**
- » **Legislation to ban the blacklisting of journalists**



# Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

The Sinn Féin Manifesto for Arts, Culture and Heritage is built on rights and guarantees. We will guarantee the rights of citizens and communities to create, celebrate, engage with and develop their culture and its artistic expression as they see fit and design a legislative and economic framework that supports the cultural economy in an appropriate and sustainable way.

Sinn Féin understands that our culture is a living, breathing phenomenon created by people working together to create communities, and by communities connecting and working together.

Culture influences our art, our sport, our heritage, our economy, our Government, our identity and our way of life. What we choose to preserve and protect in our heritage and what we choose to acknowledge and present in our art reveals, to ourselves and to the world, the kind of people we are and the shape of the society we want to build.

Sinn Féin recognises that culture, its expression through art and its preservation through heritage is neither produced or owned by the state. Culture is the product and the property of people and communities.

Our culture, arts, and heritage are used to support the inward investment and tourism so essential to our economy in its present form. But our current cultural and creative sector is built on the work of underpaid and poorly supported artists and heritage workers and the sector is crippled by legislation and funding models that are no longer fit for purpose.

The night time economy, so important to the cultural sector and to tourist sector, is being shut down by rising property and insurance costs and out of date legislation. This has the extremely negative consequence of impacting participation levels, giving fewer and fewer people access to ticketed cultural events and fewer parents able to afford the after-school activity, such as music, dance, and drama classes.

## **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Introduce a pilot national cultural currency exchanged through a digital app**
- » **Increase funding for the redevelopment of existing community properties for community and creative purposes**
- » **Introduce a designated 'night venue' classification in planning and licensing law**
- » **Support small indigenous media production companies in places like Limerick, Galway and Waterford by creating a new fund of €40 million rising to €80 million annually that is ringfenced for independent productions to be commissioned by RTÉ**
- » **Introduce a fund of €4 million to provide living wage employment to artists to be administered through Local Authorities**
- » **Increase annual funding for the Arts Council by €20 million and Heritage Council by €3.5 million**
- » **Developing and implementing a Youth Arts Strategy drawing on positive learning from Scotland**



## Saving Moore Street

The failure of successive administrations to save Moore Street, the last extant 1916 Battlefield in our capital city, is a disgrace. This area described by the National Museum of Ireland as ‘a theatre of conflict and the most important historic site in modern Irish history’ remains neglected and ignored despite having within its boundary four houses that comprise the 1916 National Monument. This heart of Dublin and home of history has become a no go area for citizens, market traders and visitors alike.

This is not acceptable.

Sinn Féin in government pledges to act immediately in declaring the 1916 terrace, it’s yards and laneways a National Monument.

We will ensure that the area is secured, fully protected and preserved through the setting up of a Battlefield Task Force that will oversee the development of a 1916 historic and cultural quarter in Moore Street as a matter of urgency. Anything else insults the very memory of those the National Monument purports to honour.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **declaring the 1916 terrace, it’s yards and laneways a National Monument**
- » **setting up a Battlefield Task Force**

## Irish Language

### Equality for Irish Language Speakers

The decline of the Irish language has accelerated under the watch of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Governments with a recent 11% decline of daily Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht. Clearly Government policies are not working.

The decline is largely due to the neglect of the national language and the Gaeltacht, the failure of the education system and a lack of any real willingness or urgency to strengthen the language.

Sinn Féin will restore and increase thereafter the slashed budgets of Foras na Gaeltachta and Údarás na Gaeltachta and ensure adequate funding for other language organisations and schemes. We will work to ensure the demand for Irish language schooling is met and that the Department of Education becomes a persuader for same, playing the fullest role in the delivery of a strategy for education through the medium of Irish from pre-school to third-level inside and outside the Gaeltacht.

We will commit to reversing the decline of Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht by giving Údarás the status and powers of the IDA and Enterprise Ireland in this region, ensuring greater investment in infrastructure, enterprise and initiatives in these areas to counter economic and social decline.

Sinn Féin’s manifesto would deliver the programme set out by Conradh na Gaeilge and others in their Irish Language and Gaeltacht Investment Plan and more.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Restoring Foras na Gaeilge Údarás na Gaeltachta funding to its pre-2007 levels and increase year on year**
- » **Reinstating elections for Údarás na Gaeltachta abolished by Fine Gael**
- » **Properly funding language planning areas and associated schemes**



## Irish medium education

The challenges of Irish medium education inside and outside the Gaeltacht must be funded to ensure its ability to compete on a level playing field with the more dominant English language schools adjacent to the Gaeltachta and throughout the rest of the country. Our overarching aim is to be able to provide Irish language education at all levels for those who would seek it.

There is a dire need for an Irish language education plan inside and also outside of the Gaeltacht where demand far outstrips places in schools. There is a need for the Department of Education to immediately draw up a plan for both responding to and encouraging demand for Irish medium education.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Establishing a unit within the Department of Education to facilitate the transition of English medium schools to Gaelscoileanna and Gaelcholáistí to meet demand for Irish medium schools**
- » **Increasing the Irish language proficiency, training and professional development of practitioners in Irish-medium early years educational settings in Gaeltacht areas as well as state-wide, including a programme of Irish to be delivered to those who work in pre-schools as part of their training modules FETAC Levels 5-8. Modules on Irish language and immersion education to be delivered for level 7 and degree courses**
- » **Accelerating Capital build budget to address the dilapidated or prefab school buildings in many of the Gaelscoileanna**
- » **Up to date production of textbooks and teaching aids in Irish for all subjects**
- » **Establishing an immersive teacher training course through Irish so that student teachers would get the full benefits of an Irish medium education**
- » **Increasing funding for the Gaeltacht costs for trainee teachers to allow for an additional week's training**
- » **Introducing a Gaeltacht bursary for eligible applicants to attend an Irish-language summer college and experience the Irish language in all aspects of daily life and also help stimulate the economy of the host Gaeltacht regions**

## Irish language and the state

Sinn Féin are committed to Irish being a living language and thus will increase the use of Irish in our state system by facilitating Irish language speakers who wish to do their business with the state in their native language.

We would appoint a senior minister with fluent Irish with responsibility for the Irish language and the Gaeltacht to ensure that the language is given due consideration in cabinet.

With the right political will and investment it is possible for 20% of new entrants to civil service to be proficient in Irish by 2025 and increasing each five years until 50% of the civil service are bilingual as would be laid out in law in amendments to the Official Languages Act, which Sinn Féin will progress in Government.

Sinn Féin would ensure that there was a full-time Irish language officer in each county and city council as well as a coordinating officer of the council's activities to promote the language and will also ensure that it is delivering its services as Gaeilge as well, while we would appoint an Irish language officer to both the Arts Council and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland.





### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Appointing a senior minister with responsibility for Irish language and Gaeltacht**
- » **Introducing legally binding targets for proficiency in the civil service**
- » **Appointing Irish language offices to a range of state bodies and agencies**

## **A living language**

Irish-language centres (Cultúrlann) should be developed or expanded as central hubs for language-related activities across the country in large urban areas including Dublin, Galway, Waterford and Cork.

Sinn Féin would increase funding for the Irish language publishing sector to assist with the production, development and marketing of Irish language material in print and online.

In addition, we would encourage Oireachtas na Gaeilge to develop four Cúige Oireachtais located annually in Gaeltacht regions before Oireachtas na Samhna to further encourage and harness the emerging talent of Irish language musicians, singers, dancers, poets and authors.

TG4, through their innovative, original broadcasting, provide a vital service for Irish speakers throughout the country and beyond. We would increase funding to support Ireland's Irish language television station to ensure TG4 is broadcasting as Gaeilge fully and continues to deliver quality programming as Gaeilge.

Finally we also propose the establishment of an Irish language radio fund to allow for the creation and promotion of Irish language programming and, in particular, to support dynamic Irish language stations such as Radío Rí Rá becoming national and also to provide for the monitoring of other stations to comply with their legal obligations, vis a vis the Irish language.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Establishing Cultúrlann**
- » **Promoting Irish language publishing, broadcasting and the arts**

## **Defence**

The Defence Forces' primary functions are to defend the State against armed aggression, provide maritime security and fishery protection, air ambulance and other cover and has also been tasked with participating in multinational peace and humanitarian relief operations across the globe in support of the United Nations.

Sinn Féin commend the lifesaving work undertaken by our navy in the Mediterranean Sea. In Government, we will ensure that the Irish navy plays an active role in search and rescue missions in the Mediterranean and will support NGO efforts in this vital work as well.

Ireland has a long and proud tradition of constructive neutrality. Unfortunately, this bedrock of Irish foreign policy has been undermined by successive Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil led Governments. Sinn Féin will ensure that our neutrality is restored and seek to have it enshrined in the Constitution, thus allowing our Defence Forces to continue its important role as peacekeepers across the globe.

In recent years, due to Government cuts, there has been a decline in Defence Forces numbers, a marginalising of the Reserve Defence Forces and a declining morale among members, due in no small measures to the lack of appropriate pay and conditions.



The untenable pay and conditions for current members of the Defence Forces must be addressed. Urgent action is required to ensure Defence Forces personnel can fully carry out allotted tasks and to do this they must receive fair pay to ensure the better retention of current members and new recruits and that they feel respected and are no longer required to sleep on ships to save rents or take out second jobs or personal loans to cover basic living requirements.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Restoring Irish neutrality and independent foreign policy**
- » **Setting up a pay review commission on defence members pay in the first six months of a new Government tasked with establishing fair remuneration for the defence forces**
- » **Roll out a plan for the implementation of the Organisation of Working Time Act (OWTA) for the Defence Forces**
- » **Giving Defence Forces unions the right to collectively bargain on pay, terms and conditions issues and affiliate to ICTU**
- » **Increasing member numbers year on year to rebuild the Defence Forces to a baseline figure of 9,500 members**
- » **Introducing a capital investment programme for upgrading of current barracks infrastructure prioritising living quarters from the outset**
- » **Allowing for a voluntary extension period of up to five years subject to a fitness to serve criteria allowing Defence Forces members to serve beyond the current age limit**
- » **Initiate a root and branch review of the current Department of Defence and instigate reforms to improve the working relationship between the Department and the defence forces structures and particularly around responsibility for budget spending**
- » **Immediately draw up a plan of action to help alleviate and address the ongoing health problems of Defence Forces personnel suffering as a result of being forced to take the anti-malaria drug Lariam**
- » **Automatically granting a medical card to any Defence Forces member who has to leave the force due to a medical condition**

## **Education**

The next decade affords us the opportunity to transform our education system into one that equips all of our children and young people for life and allows them to pursue their dreams and goals without barriers.

The next decade can deliver education that is truly free.

In Government, Sinn Féin would progress us down this road with a range of measures abolishing and reducing costs spanning primary school through to secondary, higher and further education.

### **Making Free Education a Reality**

Free Education is a myth, a concept alone. In practice, education is expensive from primary level right up to third level. That needs to change.





At primary and post-primary level, we see ever increasing costs in sending children back to school. Every summer, parents are put to the pin of their collar trying to organise uniforms, shoes, books, 'voluntary contributions', and much more.

More than any other time of year, it becomes abundantly clear that free primary and secondary education in this state is not a reality. Parents have to fork out, on average, €949 to get their children ready for primary school and €1,399 to send them to secondary school. As a result many children miss out on extracurricular activities or school trips which is a deeply unfair position to put parents in. The vast majority of parents get no assistance whatsoever with Back to School Costs.

When it comes to students studying at a third-level institution, the notion of 'free fees' is also a myth. In reality, the annual student contribution charged more than trebled over the past decade, while the cost of living, particularly rent, has grown exponentially.

In addition, the maintenance grant was cut and restricted under Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Governments during the economic downturn and no sufficient attempts have been made by either party to restore them. Our third-level education system is simply not accessible to all. It is becoming less accessible to many on the basis of financial means.

Not only does this impact on the students themselves on an individual basis, it creates a stratified education system where only those who have access to finance have the opportunity to pursue whichever career path they wish to follow.

As a party, we are committed to equal access and opportunity for all students to study whatever course they believe suits them, without financial barriers. This would mean abolishing all third-level fees across all courses and public institutions in order to give everyone the chance to further their education if they so wish.

Higher Education has been chronically underfunded for close to a decade now. This neglect must end.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Introducing a €140 Back to School Bonus Child Benefit Payment for every child paid at the start of July at an annual cost of €173 million**
- » **Introducing legislative measures to ensure schools make uniforms affordable and giving power to the Ombudsman for Children to investigate and make recommendations in that regard**
- » **Providing free school books to all children**
- » **Ending schools' reliance on so-called voluntary contributions by increasing core capitation funding to schools and legislating to end the contributions.**
- » **Abolishing third level student fees at a cost of €243 million**
- » **Increasing the student maintenance grant by 10%.**
- » **Ensuring adequate funding is provided to higher education institutions to the benefit of students, staff and the wider economy alike**

## **Prioritising Special Educational Needs**

The Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act was established in 2004, yet several of its provisions have yet to be commenced, including the right of a child with special educational needs to an assessment, the right to an independent appeals process, the right to an individual educational plan, and the delivery of education services on foot of this plan.

Sinn Féin would bring forward and enact a new rights-based Education (Overcoming the Barriers) Bill and allocate the resources necessary to implement it via increased Education and Health Budgets.



This Bill would, for example, make it mandatory for the Department's Inspectorate to report on the implementation of Individual Education Plans for children with special educational needs.

The National Council for Special Education does not have power under current legislation to designate a place for a child with special educational needs or to require sufficient classes are established to support children with complex needs or those on the autism spectrum. Sinn Féin would ensure these needs are met by providing the NCSE with the necessary statutory powers.

We would also provide for a robust appeals mechanism to allow parents and schools appeal an allocation under the new resource allocation model.

The role of the resource teacher within the school setting is fundamental to ensuring all children continue to prosper within their educational environment. We recognise this support and the support provided by SNAs are critical for children with special educational needs to access and participate in education.

Evidence shows that in-school speech and language therapy is hugely beneficial. It allows therapy to take place in a natural and comfortable environment for the child and makes attendance at appointments much easier. All schools should be able to arrange in-school appointments in conjunction with their local HSE network team.

Sinn Féin recognises the vital role Educational Psychologists play in ensuring every child has access to the supports and resources they need to gain the most from the education experience. We will increase funding for educational psychologists. This will reduce waiting lists for schools and ensure they are adequately equipped to assess and manage the additional needs of all students.

Finally, smaller class sizes are important for all children to reach their educational potential and critically so for those with special educational needs.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Providing the NCSE with greater powers to ensure that sufficient school places and classes are provided, and the needs of children are met alongside robust appeals mechanisms**
- » **Reducing waiting times for assessments and resourcing supports for students with special educational needs, including proper access to therapies.**
- » **Recruiting additional educational psychologists along with greater administrative support to make better use of their time**
- » **Providing funding for the recruitment of 500 additional SNAs and 450 additional resource teachers over and above those required to meet demographic pressures.**
- » **Establishing an initial panel of 200 speech and language therapists for schools as a shared resource**
- » **Reducing the student/teacher ratio to 20:1 at primary level**

## **Tackling Educational Disadvantage**

Sinn Féin would expand the DEIS scheme as just one of a suite of measures to tackle the postcode lottery that is educational disadvantage. This would allow increased resourcing of schools that require additional supports for principals, staff and students.

The Education Act 1998 originally provided for a statutory body to advise the Minister for Education and Skills on relevant policy initiatives to address Educational Disadvantage. The work of the committee established under this provision was critical in the design of the DEIS scheme.



It was abolished in 2012. We believe this committee needs to be re-established in order to provide research and direction to the Minister in order to address educational disadvantage in light of increased child poverty rates and the particular problems faced by minority groups such as travellers and homeless children.

In order to fund the reduction of class sizes in primary schools from which all children can benefit, Sinn Féin would phase out public subsidies to private schools.

Funding for the School Completion Programme, which assists children through school and after school supports, has been cut drastically in the last decade. Not only is additional funding required for the programme, but we also think it should be expanded to assist more students.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Increasing funding for the DEIS scheme by 20%, enabling approximately 200 additional schools to avail of supports**
- » **Re-establish the Statutory Committee to advise the Minister in initiatives to address educational disadvantage**
- » **Ending public subsidies to private schools**
- » **Ensuring full time guidance counsellor for every secondary school and an additional position for schools over 500 pupils**
- » **Increasing investment in the School Completion Programme by €8 million or almost one third**

## Free School Transport

In our Alternative Budget for 2020, Sinn Féin committed to abolishing school transport costs to all those who currently avail of the scheme at a cost of roughly €16 million.

Sinn Féin in Government would carry out a full review of the operation of the value for money recommendations of the school transport scheme from a child rights perspective.

The current scheme is grossly underfunded and completely inflexible. Sinn Féin wants to make travel to and from school free to all pupils.

In terms of congestion, emissions and quality of life, school traffic is a fixture of modern life that we could all do without.

Sinn Féin is proposing an investment of €66 million additional resources for the School Transport Scheme to help alleviate the stress and the cost of the trip to school.

Our decade-long ambition is to deliver free school transport for every child and, in our first term of Government, we would introduce free travel for the children availing of the School Transport Scheme at a cost of €16 million and invest an additional €50 million to increase the number of children who can avail of the scheme by 50,000.

We will set up a taskforce to decide in advance of next September how best this money can help. The taskforce will be given a number of priority areas to consider:

- » Where the investment will have a significant impact on congestion
- » Where the extra resources can allow siblings avail of the same services
- » Examining the distance rule to see if a reduction would be beneficial
- » The needs of rural Ireland and more sparsely populated areas



Many more children will benefit from our complementary proposal to introduce free fares on public transport for the under 18s.

**SINN FÉIN PRIORITY:**

- » **Reducing costs for families by introducing free travel for the under 18s on all public transport and the School Transport Scheme**

## Promoting Digital Literacy

Sinn Féin has proposed a Bill to establish the office of Digital Safety Commissioner. While it would not be a silver bullet that addresses all of our concerns about children being safe online, it would go a long way towards making the spaces in which they operate a more transparent and positive environment.

It is widely acknowledged that online safety in particular is the Child Protection issue of our time, and our Bill has garnered the support of the ISPCC, Cybersafe Ireland, the Children's Ombudsman and Ireland's Special Rapporteur on Child Protection.

Sinn Féin believe it is essential all children benefit from a basic standard of digital literacy and education at both primary and secondary level schools is pivotal to this.

We also believe every school needs a digital champion, an appointed a teacher or principal, who can lead on policy development, support and delivery of digital literacy and digital wellbeing education to children, parents, and teachers.

**SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Establishing an Office of Digital Safety Commissioner**
- » **Digital champions to promote digital literacy in all schools**

## Supporting Adult Literacy and Numeracy

Ireland is currently placed 17th in literacy and 18th in numeracy out of 24 countries as per the latest CSO report on Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. One in every six people have difficulties with the basics of reading and writing and one in every four people have issues with numeracy.

While successive Governments have failed to address such startling issues, a Sinn Féin Government would ensure those with difficulties in literacy and numeracy would have their needs addressed and would put an end to any stigma attached to the difficulties.

**SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **A cross-departmental approach to literacy, and the development of a Government Strategy to increase literacy and numeracy**
- » **A Plain Language Act which makes both state and public services materials more accessible to readers**
- » **Appointment of a Junior Minister with responsibility for the implementation of the strategy**

## Transitioning beyond post-primary level education

There are countless schools across the state that are underrepresented when it comes to third level and where, unfortunately, many young people miss out on opportunities due to obstacles relating to income, culture, support, and disability.



Across the state, we lack significant alternative opportunities for young people to pursue other education and training, such as limited numbers of apprenticeships.

Sinn Féin believe expanding our apprenticeship system is vital to ensure we have the highly skilled and educated workers for growing and emerging industries and also to give our young people more choice in the tertiary education sector.

Apprenticeships allow people to earn, learn, and gain work experience, all while also working towards an NFQ qualification. The rate of youth unemployment remains far too high at 12% and the National Youth Council of Ireland has said access to apprenticeships could halve youth unemployment.

Sinn Féin has an ambitious plan that aims to increase the apprenticeship population to 53,000 over the first term of Government and 60,000 subsequently, in addition to expanding the number of apprenticeship courses to 100.

We have consistently highlighted the low level of female participation and inclusion of people with disabilities in apprenticeships as a cause for concern. It is astonishing to think that, in 2018, there were just 319 female apprentices out of a total apprenticeship population of 13,921, representing a dismal 2%. In addition, just 371 people with disabilities are engaged in apprenticeships. This must be addressed.

People with disabilities in Ireland are four times less likely to gain employment than their peers without a disability. Sinn Féin would invest €5 million in rolling out the successful Walk Peer Programme nationwide, which supports young people to successfully transition into the world of work by taking steps into further education and training and paid employment.

Additionally, we would establish Disability Expert Support Persons on Education and Training Boards whose functions would include acting as key contact and support persons for students with disabilities.

When it comes to Higher Education, students with disabilities may need to be provided with supports to enable them to succeed, for example assistive technology. Sinn Féin will increase the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD) accessing higher and further education by 20%.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Increasing the number of apprentices to 53,000 over the first term of Government and 60,000 subsequently**
- » **Rolling out the Walk Peer Programme**
- » **Increasing supports for students with disabilities in further and higher education**

## Addressing Pay Inequality

Sinn Féin is committed to the principle of equal pay for equal work and we would establish a single tier pay scale for all teachers faster than the current Government has committed. Newly-qualified teachers have been penalised by the approach of previous Governments.

Schools generally have experienced cuts over recent years even as cost pressures were rising and we believe there is a need to restore greater funding. Over a term of Government, Sinn Féin will direct more funding towards better pay, terms and conditions for SNAs and school secretaries. All staff that support the education of our next generation are deserving of dignity, respect and a good wage.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Fast-tracking end of two-tier pay structures for teachers**
- » **Better pay, terms and conditions for SNAs and school secretaries**



# Foreign Affairs and Trade

We are living through a period of deep fluctuation and instability internationally.

The continued global proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the unprecedented number of refugees and internally displaced peoples, climate change, imperialism, poverty and inequality are all issues that must be tackled. As a small island, it is important we spread our diplomatic net as wide as possible in order to maximise international influence and push key foreign affairs priorities.

We must not become bound by a common EU foreign policy decided in Brussels. Sinn Féin is committed to an independent and progressive Irish international relations policy, one that will prioritise neutrality, human rights, conflict resolution, mutually beneficial trade, development, international law, and equality.

Internationalism is at the core of Irish republicanism. We will never be blind and ignorant to injustices abroad. We are not isolationists and will ensure Ireland plays a positive and effective role in international affairs.

Successive Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael Governments have eroded Ireland's neutrality and independent foreign policy. Sinn Féin will restore and enhance our international reputation.

We will lead efforts to reform and democratise the EU, we will oppose any efforts to further federalise and militarise the EU. We will also oppose trade agreements, like CETA and Mercosur, which will undermine democracy, our legal system, undermine environmental regulations, workers' rights, our agriculture industry and damage Small Medium Enterprises.

Sinn Féin priorities leading efforts to radically reform the EU, restoring Ireland's neutrality and independent foreign policy, initiating a whole of Government approach to combat climate change and global inequality and ensuring Ireland plays a lead role in conflict resolution and global disarmament.

## Positive Neutrality

Sinn Féin would ensure the State adheres to a policy of positive neutrality. Sinn Féin's support for neutrality is the product of a developed and coherent republican position stretching back over 200 years of Irish history.

We would ensure Ireland actively works to promote conflict resolution, peaceful democratic settlements, and self-determination throughout the world. To ensure that we live in a safer and more equal world, greater military expenditure is definitely not the solution. The solution is to challenge the structures that cause poverty and insecurity.

We will oppose the further militarisation of the EU and attempts to create a standing EU army. We would terminate Ireland's involvement in EU Battle Groups and the use of Irish airports by foreign armies engaged in war.

This Fine Gael Government, with Fianna Fáil support, has approved Ireland's involvement in the European Union's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which is the beginning of an EU Defence Union and the creation of an EU Army. Sinn Féin opposed the creation of PESCO and, in Government, we will ensure Ireland plays absolutely no part in PESCO.

We propose to hold a referendum on enshrining neutrality into Bunreacht na hÉireann. The referendum would decide whether to amend the constitution to ensure Ireland will not and cannot aid foreign powers in any way in preparation for a war. The proposed amendment would also affirm that Ireland is a neutral state and that the State would have a policy of non-membership of military alliances.





We would continue to support the deployment of Irish troops on UN-mandated peacekeeping missions around the world that enhance our neutrality. We would ensure the State continues to engage fully and vigorously with the UN and its structures, including peacekeeping, but we will also lead calls for a reforming of the UN, its offices and programmes, with particular emphasis on the Security Council.

We would ensure the Irish Naval Service restarts its lifesaving search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean. Sinn Féin voted against Ireland joining Operation Sophia, an EU military mission to push vulnerable people and refugees back to war-torn Libya. In Government, we will remove Ireland from this counterproductive and dangerous EU military mission, which is leading to human rights violations. We will instead begin negotiations to restart an Irish naval mission which is purely focused on search and rescue.

We would remove Ireland from NATO's Partnership for Peace. This would save the taxpayer over €520,000 a year. In 1997, the Fianna Fáil-led Government signed Ireland up to NATO's so-called Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, despite promises to the contrary and a pre-election promise that it would call a referendum on this issue. A Sinn Féin Government will remove Ireland from this NATO programme, which is a stepping stone to full NATO membership.

We will formally recognise the State of Palestine and assist efforts to find a lasting solution to the conflict. We will robustly challenge Israel on its continued violations of international and human rights law and hold Israel to account. In Government, we will also ban goods from Israel's illegal colonial settlements in Palestine from entering the Irish market by implementing the Occupied Territories Bill.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Restoring Irish neutrality and independent foreign policy**
- » **Formally recognising the State of Palestine**

## **Aid and development goals**

We are and will continue to be strong supporters of Irish Aid. We believe Irish people should be rightly proud that this programme is widely recognised as one of the most effective actors in the delivery of development aid worldwide.

We would increase funding on Overseas Development Aid (ODA) and ensure the State works towards its ODA targets. However, it must be noted that ODA is not a tap that can be turned on and off and such a plan would need proactive consultation, and short/medium/long-term projects and targets, rather than simple yearly targets.

A Sinn Féin Government would immediately commence work on an interdepartmental plan to increase Irish ODA and to reach the 0.7% of GNI target. In order to enhance Government accountability and transparency, we would ensure that our plans on how and when we can reach the target will be publicly available and we will regularly consult with NGOs on the issue.

Sinn Féin would initiate a whole of Government approach to development through an enhanced Policy Coherence for Development (PCD). This means all Departments of Government will collectively and coherently work towards complementing our Irish Aid programmes, rather than undermining them.

We will pursue other overarching development-friendly policies in Government to complement our ODA spend. This will include climate friendly policies, gender equality programmes, international tax justice measures, support for fair trade and advancing the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).

Sinn Féin strongly welcomes the global agreement reached on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In Government, we would establish a national action plan to implement and monitor the State's activity on reaching the targets and goals contained in the SDGs.





It will be based within the Department of An Taoiseach and involving all Government departments, to steer, implement, monitor, and report on the Goals. As the SDGs are interlinked, this will be done within a robust and overarching Policy Coherence for Development framework that will be at the core of our Government's work.

Sinn Féin welcomes the creation of Coalition 2030 by over 100 civil organisations to work towards upholding Ireland's commitment to achieving the SDGs in Ireland and beyond. A Sinn Féin Government would work with the Coalition on its shared vision "to transform our world through collaborative partnerships that will free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want, and to heal and secure our planet."

We would work with them to establish an inclusive SDG Monitoring Forum in which civil society and those vulnerable groups – both Irish and internationally – who stand to gain or lose most from Ireland's work on the Goals, are fully represented at every stage.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Greater accountability and transparency with an increased overseas development aid budget**
- » **A whole of Government and partnership approach to PCD and the SDGs**

## Improving international trade and rejecting harmful trade deals

Sinn Féin would ensure the State plays a positive role at European and global level as a champion for fair global trade rules and policies that prioritise and support, rather than undermine, the needs of poor countries. We would always prioritise the rights of people and the environment over the demands of multinational capital that seeks to trample over hard won rights and regulations.

The Lisbon Treaty bestowed dangerous new negotiating powers on the Commission, which it has used to pursue a 'New Generation' of trade agreements that further threaten public services, environmental protection and our own right to regulate. These new agreements encourage a race to the bottom and open up markets in which only the super multinationals will thrive.

They extend beyond the removal of tariffs to include the opening of markets on investment, services and public procurement by removing so-called 'barriers' to trade. These 'barriers' will include some of our most prized social standards and environmental regulations. Changes to regulations through harmonisation or abolition can have negative impacts on public policy and come at great social cost. They will lead to a race to the bottom in workers' rights, environmental regulations, consumer rights, and it will harm Small and Medium Enterprises.

The most well-known of these are the EU-USA Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the EU-Mercosur Free Trade Agreement. They will have significant negative implications for Ireland, particularly in the areas of agriculture, state sovereignty, democratic decision making, public procurement, workers' rights, environmental and food safety regulations, and many other areas.

We oppose all trade agreements that negatively affect Ireland or that include provisions for an undemocratic Multilateral Investment Court, which allows companies to sue States in private international arbitration systems.

In Government, we will remove Ireland from these disastrous agreements and oppose similar future agreements at the European Council level. We will instead work towards creating positive trade agreements which respect social standards, health and environmental regulations, workers' rights, State sovereignty, and create quality jobs and investment.



### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Promoting fair global trade rules and policies**
- » **Resisting the race to the bottom which undermines workers' rights, public services and environmental protections**
- » **Opposing trade deals that hurt Ireland and undermine our sovereignty**

## **EU reform**

For too long, a cosy consensus has existed in Irish politics. The consensus extends from economic and social policy to Ireland's relationship with the European Union. It is a consensus that looks after the few, to the detriment of the many.

Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and Labour are the yes men of Europe. Whatever Brussels and Frankfurt propose, they support. Their MEPs are the EU's representatives in Ireland, promoting the agenda of the EU institutions rather than the interests of people in Ireland in the EU.

They have endorsed wholesale the European Commission's right wing social and economic agenda, stripping back the gains of earlier battles to build a social Europe.

Sinn Féin stands against this Brussels consensus; we have highlighted the negative impact of the policies of austerity and the erosion of democracy on the lives of people across Ireland. We have opposed cuts to the EU Budget for important strategic sectors such as agriculture, regional development and investment in jobs and growth.

It is time for a new direction, in Ireland and in the EU institutions. It is time to stand up for Ireland and the interests of all of the people who share this island. It is time to end the Brussels power grab, to reign in the Commission, and return powers to the member states. It is time to halt the attack on the wages and conditions of working people and to promote a basic threshold of decency for all. It is time to rebuild our public services and defend our public utilities.

Ireland's place is in the European Union, but the European Union does need to change. The EU is far from perfect but the only way to address that and change it is from within. Our policy towards the European Union remains one of critical engagement.

Many aspects of our society, from community groups to business and education to agriculture, have been able to grow and expand as a result of the support they have received from the European Union. We acknowledge the role that the European Union played in the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement and we want to see the EU to continue in that role post-Brexit. We will support what is right and good for Ireland while challenging shortcomings wherever we find them. In doing so, we want to build a better Europe.

We will seek to return powers to EU member states and increase the influence of member state parliaments in the EU legislative process. We support reforms of the EU which are aimed at reducing the power of the European Commission, making it more transparent and accountable to the European and member state parliaments, and increasing the influence of smaller member states.

Sinn Féin will build a fairer and more democratic European Union that works for the people of Europe, not for the EU insiders, middle-men and corporate interests. Greater transparency must be introduced, the militarisation agenda halted, social protections legally bolstered and powers returned to member states.

We will seek a growth and investment-oriented policy of the EU, aimed at creating quality jobs and at defending workers' pay and conditions.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Building a better Europe through critical engagement**
- » **Returning powers to Member States and their parliaments**



# Health

The health service is our most important public service and the health of the nation is Sinn Féin's number one priority.

Sinn Féin has a vision and a commitment that healthcare should be free at the point of use and available to everyone when they need it based on need, not ability to pay.

We want a legal foundation for the health service with rights and entitlements to health care for citizens.

Sinn Féin has a plan to make the changes the health service needs. We do not seek change for the sake of change, but change to guarantee access to world class, well-resourced services. Change to end healthcare based on postcode or bank balance and change to ensure the interests of patients come first.

Sinn Féin will invest in our health service to ensure it has the capacity necessary to deliver for patients when they are in need while also reducing health costs for people. This manifesto provides an additional €4.5 billion for Current and €1.58 billion for Capital spending in our health service over and above what has already been committed for the period including for demographics.

The greatest trick ever pulled by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil was convincing the public that our health service couldn't be fixed. It certainly won't be fixed by them, but it can be fixed. Not only can our health service be fixed, it has to be fixed and Sinn Féin have the solutions to fix it.

We would create an Irish National Health service that ensures every citizen is guaranteed the health care they need.

The issues affecting our health service are severe as health has suffered from decades of underinvestment and an overreliance on expensive outsourcing and agency staff.

The Government has proved time and again that they have no real plan to address these crises and there is a complete lack of leadership at ministerial level.

By contrast, Sinn Féin has led the way in offering solutions for our broken two-tier health service. In 2015, we published 'Better 4 Health' a fully costed ten-year plan to increase the capacity of our health service, achieve equality of access and ensure it is funded on a fair and sustainable basis.

That was followed by the all-party Oireachtas Committee's Plan 'Sláintecare', heavily influenced by Sinn Féin, which similarly provided for the development of a single tier, universal public health service over ten years. However, despite the critical need for the solutions outlined by Sinn Féin and many others, the Fine Gael Government, supported by Fianna Fáil and various Independent TDs, failed to fund and action Sláintecare.

We propose that Health should be allocated a funding increase sufficient in size to provide existing services, expand people's entitlements, and commence the transformation towards a single-tier, world-class National Health Service for Ireland.

The end point will be worth the investment. It will be a service where people don't have to shout loudest, don't have to wait, and don't have to pay out of pocket.

That end point may feel very far away and even hard to imagine but we believe there are achievable steps that can be taken in the first year of Government and over a term of Government which would both start us down the right path and make a very meaningful difference to people's health in the here and now.



## **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES**

- » **Lifting the Government's recruitment freeze and hiring more nurses, doctors, and healthcare staff**
- » **Opening more hospital beds**
- » **Increasing funding for the home-help scheme to deliver for all older people**
- » **Beginning the implementation of Sláintecare**
- » **Rolling out free GP care**
- » **Providing medical cards to cancer patients**
- » **Abolishing prescription charges**
- » **Fully staffing all Primary Care Centres**
- » **Delivering dental care for under 18s**
- » **Ensuring a state-sponsored contraception scheme for women**
- » **Ensuring fair, transparent and regionally balanced healthcare planning**
- » **Reducing food waste in our hospitals and introduce mandatory food standards**
- » **Delivering free hospital car parking**

## **Investing in our health service staff**

The health service is only as good as the staff it has working in it. In essence, healthcare workers are the health service.

Sinn Féin understands that our health service staff are under severe pressure due to the recruitment and retention crisis. This crisis is having a demoralising and damaging impact on patients, nurses, midwives, doctors, healthcare professionals and wider society.

Much greater public investment is needed to make our health service an attractive place to work. The recruitment of additional staff will mean we have well resourced, world class health services, improving patient outcomes, and delivering faster treatment closer to home.

To make sure the HSE has the right skills mix, we will introduce regional workforce planning, devolving authority for hiring staff to local level. This will allow for hospitals to hire the staff they need in a quick and efficient manner.

Sinn Féin will address the concerns of health service staff and the reasonable requests unions have made for better working conditions, better facilities, more supports, increased training and professional development opportunities, and for the issue of pay to be addressed.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Recruit 2,500 more nurses and midwives at a cost of €134 million**
- » **Hire 1,000 more consultant doctors – consultants and NCHDS at a cost of €224 million**
- » **Pay restoration for new-entrant consultants and a new consultant contract**
- » **Convert agency staff into directly employed HSE staff**
- » **Full reimbursement of examination costs for all Non-Consultant Hospital Doctors**



## Primary care

Primary and community care should be the cornerstone of our health service incorporating GPs, practice and community nurses and others. It can deal with the bulk of the health needs of the population. It has lower costs than acute care and can be delivered faster and closer to home.

Due to cuts, underinvestment in staff and a lack of enthusiasm for locally delivered community care, the area of primary care has suffered significantly. This has heaped further pressure on our acute services.

There are widespread shortages of GPs across the State, with individuals and young families unable to sign up to a family practice. Existing elderly and vulnerable patients are already finding themselves without a GP as retirements occur.

Primary care centres were heralded as a one-stop shop for people's basic health needs outside of a hospital. However, this promise has not been fulfilled. There is no GP at countless HSE primary care centres.

A survey of hundreds of GP clinics across the country has shown that 66% were closed to new patients.

Sinn Féin will deliver on primary care through properly staffing primary care centres with a full complement of staff, including GPs, and other health professionals such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists and counsellors.

We will also deliver on free GP care over five years. We will start this by giving two free GP visits to everyone without a medical card or GP visit card in year one. We will also work towards this end by expanding the threshold for GP visit cards year on year.

We will invest in our GPs to ensure patients can access the care they need close to home. Many communities, rural and urban, lack the necessary access to primary care services and some lack a GP altogether. We will ensure these communities have access to the primary care services they need.

Indeed, we must also make General Practice more accessible and attractive through lifting the burden of uncertainty created by self-employment. We would do this by directly employing HSE GPs.

This would allow doctors to be doctors and not have to worry about renting a building, paying the electricity bill, employing a practice nurse, employing a secretary and all that goes with running the self-employed model.

We would directly employ GPs through the HSE with the rights which accompany HSE employment, such as maternity and paternity leave, annual leave and a pension.

We will make General Practice more attractive through a new GP contract. We will increase the number of GP training scheme places and introduce a moving home bursary for returning GPs and a similar grant for international GPs looking to set up in Ireland.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Deliver free GP care for all over a term of Government at a cost of over €455 million commencing with two free visits for everybody that is not covered by a medical or GP visit card in year one**
- » **Phased increase in the threshold for GP visit cards on road to free GP care**
- » **Negotiating a new GP contract**
- » **Increasing the number of GPs training scheme places at a cost of €25 million**
- » **Directly employing 500 HSE GPs at a cost of €82.5 million**
- » **Hiring 1,500 additional new staff for Primary Care Centres**



- » **Employing 1,000 more practice, community care and public health nurses at a cost of €58.8 million**
- » **Bursary for GPs making the move to practice in Ireland**
- » **Ensure primary care encompasses social care and mental health**
- » **Commence negotiations on a new pharmacy contracts and expand role of community pharmacy**

## Remove taxes on ill-health

Prescription charges are a tax on ill health and we believe that no sick person should be subject to such charges.

The overwhelming body of evidence shows that charges for drugs can lead to higher costs on the health budget in the medium to longer term as well as serious strain and ill-effects they can have on the health of those who need medications.

While charges were reduced in last year's budget, it is not enough, Sinn Féin would seek to reduce them further and work towards their abolition.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Abolish prescription charges and roll-out free prescription medicines for all at a cost of €330 million**
- » **Abolish the charge for the use of Emergency Departments and the per day charge for inpatient care at a cost of €48 million**
- » **Remove hospital car parking charges at a cost of €22.4 million**
- » **Medical Cards for all cancer patients**
- » **Increase income thresholds for the medical card**

## Caring for our older and vulnerable people

Getting older is not optional; we all age and when we do get older, the State should ensure we can do that with respect, dignity and as comfortably as possible.

Home care delivered in the home is the preferred form of care for most older people and their families. Indeed, the vast majority of older people want to live independently in their home for as long as possible.

Unfortunately, due to a lack of adequate step-down facilities, home care packages and home help, some older people are either left stuck in hospitals or forced into residential facilities when they could return home if the correct care was provided.

Immediate action is required to ensure people can access appropriate care and stay at home or return home. This will have huge benefits for those who receive home help and home care, their families and friends, and for the health service as a whole as it will free up beds which are occupied by those who want to, and are ready to, return home.

Home care is also needed by many people under the age of 65 who are in vulnerable positions. The Department of Health must recognise that the restrictions on the current scheme mean that services that meet the needs of all are not provided; for example, in 2015 and 2016, only 8.4% and 7.68% respectively of homecare package recipients were under 65, despite this cohort also needing home care, particularly if they are living with the effects of ill health or disability for decades.





We will increase the provision of home help by delivering 12 million additional home help hours over five years, hire home help workers directly and introduce a statutory home-care scheme.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Introduce a statutory home-care scheme**
- » **Increasing the role of the public and not-for-profit sector in the provision of home supports**
- » **Deliver an additional 12 million home help hours over five years to meet growing and unmet need at an annual cost of €59 million**
- » **Increasing step-down facilities**
- » **Increasing the number of nursing home beds by 1,250 over term of Government**

## **Tackling overcrowding and increasing capacity - more beds, new beds**

Hospital Emergency Departments (ED) are an incredibly important part of our acute health services. They currently manage major illness, minor illness, major trauma, and minor trauma.

Almost all of us will need to use ED services at some stage in our lives, and, when that is the case, we want that traumatic experience to be managed as sensitively, efficiently and professionally as possible.

But ED services have been at crisis point for some time and the number of people left on trolleys is at the highest ever recorded number since the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation started collating such figures through the 'Trolley Watch' survey in 2005.

In order for any health service to function for patients and staff, it has to have the capacity to deal with the volume of people who use it. Yet the health system in this state is continuously operating at or above capacity across most services and, in the coming years, demand will grow significantly.

The trolley and waiting list crises and cancelled surgeries are caused by the lack of capacity and they are also symptoms of wider problems in our health service.

We need to reopen all closed beds, build new beds, new wards, and new hospitals. This involves both capital spending on the infrastructure and current spending on all the medical and ancillary staff and services associated with the operation of the beds.

The Bed Capacity Review makes clear that 2,600 additional beds will be needed by 2030. Sinn Féin believes that it is possible to deliver 1,500 over the next five years. In Government, we would frontload investment accordingly and deliver the beds required along with all the associated staffing and other costs necessary.

Delayed discharges have become a significant problem with over 218,000 bed days lost in 2019 alone. There has to be better use and management of existing bed stock through proper primary care, preventing avoidable admissions, reducing variations in length of stay and improving the discharge of patients.

The ED crisis is not solely about hospital beds; therefore, Sinn Féin will also invest in other areas such as increasing staff numbers in the acute hospital system, increasing exit packages, expanding home help hours and home care packages, improving step down facilities, and increasing nursing home bed capacity, alongside other options.

By tackling these issues with real additional investment, we are confident we can resolve the trolley crisis ensuring that patients in Emergency Departments are treated sensitively, efficiently, and professionally.





### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Investing an extra €1 billion of capital and €480 million of current spending to increase the number of hospital beds by 1,500 over our first term of Government and then invest further bring up to 2,500 in subsequent term**
- » **Recruiting the additional nurses, doctor and other health professionals necessary for the operation of these additional beds**
- » **Making better use of the existing bed stock**
- » **Stopping the continuous breach of safe levels of bed occupancy**
- » **Increasing exit packages, home help and home care**
- » **Increase nursing home beds by 1,250**

## **Tackling the hospital waiting list crisis**

No matter how healthy we are, a lot of us will need an outpatient or inpatient procedure at some point in our lives. These procedures can range from simple or routine to serious and lifesaving.

Sinn Féin understands that, for patients and their families, it is critical that our health service can deal with outpatient and inpatient waiting lists in a timely and efficient manner.

Across the state, there is no crisis which affects more people than that of hospital waiting lists. Indeed, the Euro Health Consumer Index of 2017 found that Ireland has the worst hospital waiting lists in Europe.

Indeed, as of beginning of 2020, there were 553,434 on hospital outpatient waiting lists and a further 66,563 on inpatient lists, with thousands more on various other waiting lists. The excessive waiting times are an indicator of poor healthcare provision as it shows that the system does not have the capacity to meet the demand for the service.

Sinn Féin will address this lack of capacity through hiring more staff, reopening closed beds, building new beds and wards where they are needed, and having elective only hospitals. We will also approach waiting lists differently than ever before through the introduction of a new system, Comhliosta, a new and single Integrated Hospital Waiting List Management System.

The introduction of an integrated hospital management waiting list system reduced waiting times when it was introduced by the Portuguese health service and a similar system is working in this state on a smaller scale in the RCSI Hospital Group, which has six hospitals including Beaumont and Connolly Hospital.

The system Sinn Féin is advocating will work. It has been proven to work nationally and internationally. Now we need to roll it out nationwide, so patients can get the treatment they need and are entitled to on time.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Implement a new waiting list management system**
- » **E-Health**
- » **Establish elective only hospitals**
- » **Increase the number of beds in our hospitals by 1,500 over first term of Government and employ the doctors, nurses and other professionals necessary for the operation of these beds**



## Women's health

In spite of improvements, the area of health service provision is a sphere in which inequalities are particularly acute for women.

From the outrageous wrongdoings of thalidomide and symphysiotomy of the past to the more recent vaginal mesh implant and CervicalCheck scandals, we can see where inequalities have existed and continue to recur.

Sinn Féin understands that health policy needs to be aware of and reflect gender differences. This is the starting point to ensure positive change.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Funding and implementing the National Maternity Strategy with an additional €75 million**
- » **A greater focus on care and diagnosis for cardiovascular disease in women**
- » **Education and awareness programmes for breast and cervical cancer and the repatriation of screening services**
- » **Free contraceptives, in all forms, and emergency contraception**
- » **Enacting safe access zones**
- » **Free provision of female hygiene products for students, those in DP, those in emergency accommodation, and those with a medical card**
- » **Three full cycles of IVF for all qualifying couples**
- » **Effective and compassionate care to women from ethnic and other minority backgrounds, such as lesbian women, migrant women, Traveller women, Roma women, and others**
- » **Establishing dedicated healthcare pathways for women suffering from mesh complications**
- » **Implementing the recommendations made in the Scally, MacCraith and RCOG Reports, with oversight from the Cervical Check Steering Committee**
- » **Investing in Specialist After Care Clinics who are living with the lifelong aftereffects of gynaecological cancers**
- » **Implementing Assisted Human Reproduction Legislation as recommended by the joint committee on Health**

## Investing in maternity care

Ireland had the highest per capita birth rate of all 28 EU Member States in 2016. Despite this, the sector has been traditionally underfunded over the last 20 years and Ireland is lagging behind international standards.

Maternity care has been left in crisis, and a series of scandals has undermined confidence in the sector. Added to this is the fact that our maternity services are severely understaffed, lacking both midwives and obstetricians.

Ireland has the lowest number of consultant obstetricians per 100,000 women in the OECD and a consultant obstetrician in Ireland is responsible for 597 births per annum, compared to 268 in Scotland.

Indeed, the three Dublin maternity hospitals are operating at a significant deficit in the number of midwifery staff needed to run the services and most of the 19 maternity units do not offer foetal anomaly screening as prenatal ultrasound assessment by qualified sonographers and foetal medicine specialists is not available outside larger units.



Not only would Sinn Féin invest in our maternity services, increase staff, upgrade equipment and buildings, we would also put the National Maternity Strategy on a statutory footing so there is a legal obligation on the State to deliver world class maternity care for all who need it.

Sinn Féin would also ensure the new National Maternity Hospital remains entirely within public ownership and has legally guaranteed independence from all non-medical influence in its clinical operations.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Recruit an additional 250 midwives and a further 60 obstetricians and gynaecologists**
- » **Putting the National Maternity Strategy on a statutory footing and implementing it**
- » **Ensuring swift approval, dissemination and implementation of the National Maternity Standards for Safer Better Maternity services**
- » **Ensuring all maternity hospitals have access to foetal anomaly screening, with the requisite staff and equipment**
- » **Expanding new born screening programme to test for a wider range of rare diseases and conditions and introducing legislation to ensure EU standards for new born screening are exceeded**
- » **Introduce mental health assessments as part of a comprehensive maternal health check 6/8 weeks after birth**
- » **Working with nursing and medical unions in the recruitment and retention of medical staff so that all maternity hospitals meet the 'Birthrate plus' standard for midwifery staffing, as well as international standards for consultant obstetricians and gynaecologists**

## Road and air ambulance cover

The National Ambulance Service (NAS) and the ambulance service provided by Dublin Fire Brigade (DFB) is the front line of emergency medical and pre-hospital care and play a vital role in saving lives.

Unfortunately ambulance services have suffered from years of cuts, underinvestment, and privatisation of ambulance services with over €31 million being spent on private ambulances since 2011.

The result being that many communities across the State have been left with long and dangerous waiting times for ambulances.

As with many areas of the health service, the capacity of our ambulance services also needs to be increased to meet demands.

Sinn Féin knows that in order to have a responsive, functioning, world class ambulance service then you have to invest in personnel, vehicles, and technology.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Ensuring the retention of Dublin Fire Brigade's ambulance service**
- » **Recruiting more advanced paramedics**
- » **Purchasing, equipping and staffing 50 additional new ambulances to be deployed accross HSE regions at a cost of €51.6 million**
- » **Developing a model of efficient, cost-effective patient and inter hospital transfer**
- » **Phasing out the costly reliance on the private sector**
- » **Purchase and staff additional air ambulances**



## Investing in Children's health

As the health of our children predicts the health of our future adult population, proper investment in children's health needs as well as early intervention policies can improve the life outcomes for children as well as the quality of their life as older persons.

The total lifetime costs of childhood obesity in this State are estimated to be €4.6 billion, with the direct healthcare associated costs estimated at €1.7 million. Prevention is better than cure. It is easier to stop something happening in the first place than it is to repair the damage after it has happened.

We will ensure appropriate prevention strategies are adopted to prevent childhood obesity, we will prioritise parent-professional interaction throughout the child's early years, and we will fully fund and implement the National Healthy Childhood Programme. We will introduce 'no-fry zones' to not allow fast-food restaurants near schools and legislate for stricter rules for junk food advertising.

Dental care is an incredibly important strand of healthcare. The state of your teeth affects your overall health, with gum disease linked to numerous other health problems in other parts of the body. Throughout the austerity years, public-funded dental provision suffered a litany of cuts.

Children have been particularly affected by these cuts. Such failure means that situations now exist whereby children are waiting as long as 12 years for their first dental screening.

In order to ensure the public have good dental health, the Public Dental Service (PDS) needs to be properly funded and the number of dental surgeons, orthodontists, dentists, and dental nurses in the PDS needs to be increased. We will deliver free dental care for all children and young people under 18 over the course of Government.

The recurrence of highly infectious viral illness for which there are vaccinations is an indictment. Oversight of vaccination rates was not good enough and in the absence of oversight misinformation was allowed to be spread unchallenged.

We will engage in a nationwide vaccination education programme particularly targeting areas where vaccination rates are lowest. We will also increase investment for the National Immunisation Office to support them in their efforts to ensure we have a first world public health response to infectious diseases.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Tackling childhood obesity**
- » **Implementing the National Healthy Childhood Programme**
- » **Legislate for 'no-fry zones'**
- » **Delivering free dental care for all children and young people under-18**
- » **Increase funding for the Public Dental Service**
- » **Vaccination education awareness campaign**
- » **Increase funding for the National Immunisation Office**
- » **Enhancing end of life and palliative care for children**

## Rare diseases

Patients should have access to the healthcare and treatment options of their choice and preference, including complementary and alternative therapies and medicines. Unfortunately, in recent years, due to the low level of the HSE budget for new drugs and medicines and the inordinate prices demanded by pharmaceutical companies, patients are missing out on new drugs and medicines



which are routinely available in other European countries and for patients with private health insurance.

Insufficient access to essential medicinal products and high prices of innovative medicines also pose a serious threat to the sustainability of our health service.

We will ensure additional funding for medicine and will also reduce expenditure on medicines through moving to biosimilar medicines and we will improve timely access for patients to new medicines.

A rare disease is a life-threatening or chronically debilitating disease that affects no more than 5 people per 10,000. It is estimated by the HSE that 300,000 people in the State will develop a rare disease at some stage in their life.

Over the past number of years, the rare disease community has been campaigning continuously for reform of the current drug approval process as it is not fit for purpose. Indeed, there are between 6,000 and 8,000 known rare diseases, but just 5% of these have a licensed treatment option and there is a high level of unmet need.

Sinn Féin sees it as imperative that the HSE changes the way it evaluates medicines to treat very rare conditions. We believe that when it comes to approval of orphan drugs the process needs to be more transparent as well as giving patient groups and clinicians a voice and defined role in decision making.

We are also eager to explore how Ireland, working with European member States as a collective, can produce a review of the profitability of individual products under the orphan medicinal products regulation and work with other countries to negotiate prices of orphan medicines with pharmaceutical companies so as to increase bargaining power in price negotiations.

We must explore and deliver an alternative model of medicines development which puts the citizen, rather than profit motive, at its heart.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Increasing HSE drugs budget including targeted funding for new medicines**
- » **Expanding new born screening programme to test for a wider range of rare diseases and conditions and introducing legislation to ensure EU standards for new born screening are exceeded**
- » **Implementing the National Rare Disease Plan**
- » **Building sufficient Genetic Services for Ireland**
- » **Introducing a dedicated approval process for drugs for rare diseases in which patients and clinicians have a voice and defined role**
- » **Fast-tracking the establishment of the Working Group to bring forward appropriate decision criteria for the reimbursement of orphan medicines and technologies**
- » **Establishing an all island rare diseases registry**
- » **Ensuring all-Ireland representation on the Rare Diseases Technology Review Group**

## Healthy Ireland

The World Health Organisation defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.



When it comes to health, prevention is always better than cure and healthy living is integral to achieving and maintaining good physical and mental health.

But current health policy is too often focused on responding to problems. We must have more joined-up thinking when it comes to health policy and focus on disease prevention and health promotion.

To ensure we can improve the health of the nation, Sinn Féin will implement policies which support sport and health-enhancing physical activity, tackle harmful health habits such as excessive alcohol consumption, problem gambling, drug use and addiction, tackle obesity and poor eating habits, and other problem areas.

Navigating and fighting for access to our health services can itself take a toll. To help address this lack, Sinn Féin would establish an independent Patient Advocacy Agency and provide for an Ombudsman to take on individual cases of clinical negligence and adverse outcomes.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Increasing funding for Healthy Ireland**
- » **Promoting sport and health-enhancing physical activity**
- » **Legislating to regulate the marketing of junk foods, sugary drinks, intoxicating drinks, and gambling to children**
- » **Ensuring the sugary drinks tax is set at a rate that realises its objective of reducing obesity**
- » **Introducing legislation to regulate the sale of e-cigarettes**
- » **Increasing excise duty on cigarettes and increasing resources to tackle illicit trade and funding to be used for smoking cessation supports**
- » **Increasing supports for problem drinking, problem gambling, and drug use and addiction**
- » **Conduct short review of the gambling sector and introducing regulatory reform of the sector**
- » **Introducing a young men's health strategy**
- » **Tackling obesity, promoting healthy diets and increasing the consumption of fruit and vegetables**

## Tackling health inequalities

We have significant levels of health inequalities in this State. These inequalities became more evident than ever throughout the austerity years.

Addressing health and social inequalities is incredibly important. Sinn Féin will address these inequalities and work to improve the health of everybody who lives here, particularly those from less well-off areas. This will ensure long-term health dividends by delivering a healthier population who will have less need for expensive health interventions and social economic supports.

Race, social class, disability, culture and ethnic identity, income poverty, location and access to social and health services, sexual orientation, age, and other differences can all contribute to the vulnerability of people's lives and consequently to the status of their health and well-being. These factors have significant consequences for the effectiveness and efficiency of health policy and health care.

Travellers and other ethnic minority groups, refugees and those in Direct Provision, and the LGBTI+ community all have increased health needs. We will ensure that our health system is cognisant of and responsive to the needs of all of these peoples.





## **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Finalise, publish and ensure funding for a new National Stroke Strategy and ensure stroke survivors make the best possible recovery through improved rehabilitation services, including physiotherapy, speech and language, occupational therapy and psychology, that have been proven to reduce overall healthcare costs as well as improving patient outcomes**
- » **Commission a new National Cardiovascular Health Policy to replace the National Cardiovascular Health Policy 2010 – 2019 and to build on the work of the National Review of Specialist Cardiac Services**
- » **Deliver 24/7 Emergency Cardiac Care at University Hospital Waterford to treat patient across the Southeast**
- » **Improve cancer survival rates and increase funding for the National Cancer Strategy**
- » **Implementation of the National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) 2017-2021**
- » **Publication and Implementation of the long delayed National Traveller Health Action Plan**
- » **Effective and compassionate care to those from ethnic and other minority backgrounds cognisant of their differing situations**
- » **Appropriate training for and provision of interpreters**
- » **Providing services in a culturally sensitive manner**
- » **Ensuring proper diversity training for health professionals**
- » **Pass the Sinn Féin Bill to ban so-called “conversion therapy”**
- » **Introducing a HIV action plan and the development of an AIDS memorial on the island**
- » **Provision of a tailored range of health services for those in direct provision based on their health needs**
- » **Investigating use of Sodium Valproate and create dedicated healthcare pathways for those affected**
- » **Implement the Human Tissue Bill and deliver soft opt out organ donation**

## **Implementing Sláintecare**

The Sláintecare Report was developed by the Oireachtas Committee on the Future of Healthcare. It was heavily influenced by Sinn Féin. It offers a radical shift in the direction of healthcare from one that has been pushed in the direction of privatisation towards a truly public health service.

There can be no denying that inequality is rife throughout our health system. This inequality manifests itself in some paying more than others for the same care, or families in one part of the country getting access to necessary services denied to those in a different HSE region. Similarly, it manifests in the less well-off dying younger and living less healthy lives, and it manifests itself in those who can afford private health insurance getting to jump the queue - this is not acceptable.

We need to see the full implementation of the Sláintecare report, so we can increase investment in the health system, not simply to provide more resources and capacity but to directly challenge and eliminate these structural inequalities and deliver a truly public health service.





### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » Fully implementing Sláintecare over ten years
- » Increasing public investment in healthcare to move from a failing, two-tier health system to universal healthcare
- » Introducing a transition fund to cover the costs of moving the health system to a single tier system

## **An Irish NHS**

In 1989, the then Irish Government signed and ratified the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Article 12 of that Covenant states that signatories recognise the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

However, across Ireland today, healthcare provision is in crisis and people's needs are not being met.

In the South, people are forced to endure an inequitable two-tier system, lengthy waiting lists for routine procedures, overcrowded Emergency Departments, and overworked nurses and doctors.

In the North, Tory-imposed austerity has placed the health service under unprecedented strain with resulting hardship for patients and healthcare staff.

These problems are compounded by having two health services on the island, with wasteful duplication and illogical back-to-back development.

We need to build a National Health Service for all of Ireland freely available to everyone based on their health needs. An Irish NHS that values its health workers and ensures fair pay and good working conditions for all.

An Irish National Health Service will not be achieved overnight, but a beginning must be made.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » Continued access to citizens in North to the European Health Insurance Scheme
- » Widening the individual areas of cooperation between the jurisdictions both in border areas and in areas of specialist medical practice
- » Establishment of an Implementation Body in the areas of health promotion and healthcare provision
- » Ensuring all-Ireland recognition of health qualifications and standards
- » An all-Ireland Integration Committee to make preparations for the establishment of a National Health Service body, subsuming the functions currently carried out by the HSE in the South and the NHS in the North
- » An all-Ireland Integration Committee to make preparations for the establishment of an all-Ireland Department of Health under the auspices of an all-Ireland parliament which would have direct responsibility for the delivery of health services through the new NHS body
- » Universal provision of healthcare, accessed when needed, free at the point of delivery and funded through general taxation for all citizens across the entire island



## Mental Health

Just as everyone requires health services to provide expert care for physical ailments, we all require a system which treats our mental good health as a priority. Sinn Féin recognise that physical and mental health are inextricably linked and that any world class health service must treat our minds as well as our bodies.

Decades of mismanagement and underfunding of mental health services, despite the hard work and dedication of frontline professionals, has left us with a service which currently does not meet the needs of the people who depend on it. This is by no means irreparable. Despite the problems which exist, there is reason to be hopeful and ambitious in pursuit of a truly recovery based, accessible, flexible and effective model of mental health care in Ireland.

A Vision for Change identifies many solutions and key proposals needed to reform our mental health services. It is thirteen years old and remains largely unimplemented. Sinn Féin in Government will not allow this to continue.

We also have a great deal of professional experience to draw from coupled with the inspiring work of patients, patient advocates, and loved ones who have tirelessly campaigned for positive changes.

Through uniting these voices and placing mental health reform as a priority of Government, we can create the system we need. Sinn Féin in Government would provide that political will, drive and inclusive spirit needed for this job.

## Realising the Vision for Change

Published in 2006 after exhaustive work by an expert group on mental health, A Vision for Change (AVfC) was a bold and progressive plan for a new recovery-based model of community mental health services far removed from the old days of institutions and stigma.

Unfortunately, much of the reforms have yet to be fulfilled or even partially implemented. Past Governments preferred to prioritise the less costly recommendations leading to a reduction in Whole Time Equivalent positions in the system.

Some institutions were closed or scaled down but community services to replace them were slow to follow, too often inadequately resourced or without a full complement of staff.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Publishing an implementation plan to deliver A Vision for Change in full with additional funding of €1.2 billion**
- » **Streamlining recruitment of mental health staff and ensuring decent pay and conditions to retain staff and attract new applicants**
- » **Recruiting a minimum 2000 additional full-time mental health staff**
- » **Increasing child and adolescent mental health teams to 100 and fully staff them**
- » **Increasing community mental health teams to 50 across the state and fully staff them**
- » **Implementing recommendations of the Oireachtas Future of Mental Health Care Committee and Sláintecare**
- » **Empowering an Oireachtas Mental Health Committee to oversee implementation and hold the minister, department and HSE to account**



## 24/7 Care for a 24/7 problem

One of the major gaps in the services most commonly experienced by those in distress is the lack of care outside of office hours.

People who fear for their safety or the safety of those around them due to their mental ill health are forced to attend crowded and chaotic A&Es which in most cases have no one qualified to deal with their needs.

Others are forced to go to the Gardaí or an out-of-hours GP service which despite the best efforts of staff are not adequate in these situations. Far too often, this has led to tragic consequences with people in vulnerable positions taking their lives while in the care of the AandE department or shortly after discharge.

The solution is clear, mental ill health does not operate by office hours and neither should the services designed to treat it.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Delivering 24/7 crisis services within the first term of Government**
- » **Establishing a Crisis House in each HSE catchment area**
- » **Ensuring that every AandE, garda custody suite, and prison has a Mental Health Nurse available on a 24/7 basis**

## A patient centred model which protects rights

Despite the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in early 2018, existing legislation is not in line with the spirit of the Convention or the Vision for Change document.

There remain glaring gaps in rights legislation and many people with mental health issues continue to have their rights denied, especially involuntary patients.

Currently people receiving care in our mental health services have no statutory right to advocacy. While services such as the National Advocacy Service and Irish Advocacy Network are in place and do good work, their remit is limited and suffers from the lack of a statutory footing as well as general under funding.

Advocacy services while primarily at this time focused on those in inpatient care, should be available to all who are engaging with mental health services. Children should be a particular focus for advocacy services.

Such support can be an empowering and encouraging experience for those suffering with mental ill health and struggling to navigate the services on their road to recovery.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Legislating for a statutory right to advocacy for all patients**
- » **Increasing funding to advocacy services to meet demand, establishing a dedicated service for children in the services and initiating a campaign to raise awareness of advocacy services**
- » **Legislating for Advanced Care Directives to allow patients to have input into their future care**
- » **Ratifying the Optional Protocol of the UNCRPD**
- » **Fast-tracking a regulatory body for counsellors and therapy services to ensure best practice**



## Primary Care - accessible care where it's needed

Mental health provision at a Primary Care level is a key point for early intervention. Ireland continues to have a high rate of inpatient admissions and readmissions. This is not only a sign of the failure to properly address mental ill health at an early stage but is a much more costly and ineffective way of dealing with enduring mental illness.

Sinn Féin understand that primary care is the most viable way of close the treatment gap and ensuring that people get the mental health care they need.

Primary care can also be an excellent way to focus on particular communities which have additional need for easily accessible mental health services such as the traveller community, new Irish or areas with particularly high levels of deprivation.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Investing in Primary Care Mental Health services to ensure access for all to the care and support they need in their community regardless of income**
- » **Ensuring that all primary Care teams include at least one mental health post**
- » **Providing additional resources for primary care teams in areas with higher need or levels of deprivation**
- » **Free universal counselling services with a GP referral at a cost of €25.4 million**
- » **Issuing guidelines to allow longer term (20 sessions rather than the current limit of 8) access to primary care counselling on a case by case basis**
- » **Developing plan to address local suicide epidemics through local taskforces encompassing the Primary Care Team and other relevant community bodies to focus resources**
- » **Implementing recruitment changes recommended by Oireachtas Mental Health Committee to attract new Psychologists for the service**

## Long term support towards recovery

Mental health services in conjunction with other relevant departments must provide supports which provide the best opportunity for recovery by addressing these issues.

Finding employment which provides an income, a routine and empowers those in recovery is something the state must support. Ensuring those who are trying to overcome their illness do not have to worry about evictions or homelessness is a very basic way of assisting them in long term mental health.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Providing targeted funding to support tenancies for people with severe and enduring mental health difficulties in order to prevent homelessness**
- » **Greater support for people with mental health difficulties to enter employment and training schemes**



## Fostering good mental health at an early age

Schools present a great opportunity to teach young people the necessary coping skills for life while ending the stigma of speaking about our mental health. Through set curricula, children can learn how to express and understand their feelings and how to help others in difficult times.

Schools should also be a safe and welcoming place for children experiencing mental health difficulties or struggling generally.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Developing curriculum for positive mental health classes at Primary and Second level**
- » **Providing age appropriate suicide prevention training to all second level students through the National Office of Suicide Prevention**
- » **Ensuring full-time guidance counsellor for every secondary school and an additional position for schools over 500 pupils**

## Suicide Prevention

The tragedy of suicide is one that has touched nearly all sectors and communities in Ireland. While some groups may be more at risk, no one is immune to it. Suicidal ideation can occur to almost anyone at any stage of life. This in itself can be a very traumatic experience. A society which promotes mental good health must care and look after all its members and the state should ensure that we all have the skills and services in place to do this.

It is important also to recognise suicide and self-harm are often desperate responses to real life problems. Sinn Féin in Government will support communities and give young people hope for their future by guaranteeing a living wage, protections for workers, world class affordable public services and a secure home for all. These would be massive steps in tackling suicide and self-harm.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Building a more fair and equal Ireland**
- » **Delivering 24/7 crisis intervention services including a national 24/7 crisis hotline working with existing services**
- » **Ensure mental health posts covering all AandEs, garda custody suites and prisons and a full complement of Suicide Crisis Intervention Nurses across the state**
- » **Increasing funding for Primary Care counselling to cut waiting times**
- » **Providing suicide prevention training for frontline public sector workers such as Gardai, Nurses, Teachers and those working in public offices**
- » **Providing age appropriate suicide prevention training in schools**
- » **Increasing funding for the National Office of Suicide Prevention by €2.6 million**

## Drugs and Addiction

Drug and alcohol misuse are primarily public health issues. Harm reduction and prevention are guiding principles for Sinn Féin in the development of future drug and alcohol strategies.



Treatment and rehabilitation strategies will go hand in hand with recovery initiatives that will help to support people in recovery. Sinn Féin supports a holistic approach for prevention, rehabilitation and recovery.

Sinn Féin recognises those addicted to drugs and alcohol can have mental health disorders and vice versa. At present, mental health and addiction are treated almost exclusively as separate conditions.

According to the American Medical Association nearly half of those abusing drugs or alcohol have a serious mental illness and 29% of those with a mental illness abuse drugs or alcohol. Yet currently some people seeking mental health care are being refused that care due to an existing issue with, or even a history of substance abuse.

Current funding to tackle this issue is wholly inadequate. The wider harms caused to society by drugs and the criminal gangs that control its distribution must be tackled. The drug crisis including drug-debt related violence and intimidation of families and communities needs to become a priority of any new Government. Community engagement in conjunction with increased Garda numbers, visibility and responses are key.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Ensure a minister who sits at the cabinet table is given responsibility to tackle this crisis**
- » **Increasing investment in the Drugs Strategy and Drug and Alcohol Task Forces by 12 million and mandating all relevant agencies to fully engage in working together on the delivery of the strategy**
- » **Increase support for services which treat mental health and addiction in conjunction**
- » **Amend existing legislation and publishing guidelines for dealing with Dual Diagnosis of mental health and addiction and establishing a No Wrong Door Policy to ensure that no one goes without treatment because of their addiction**
- » **Increasing the number of medical detoxification and rehabilitation beds by 20**
- » **Ensure a structured outpatient treatment program incorporating an inter-agency partnership approach for everyone released from prison including homeless and mental health services**
- » **Commencing the biggest Garda recruitment drive in the history of the state bringing the service strength to over 16,000 Gardaí, with a focus on community policing**
- » **Recruiting 2000 civilian staff to free up Gardaí from behind desks**
- » **Increasing the number of Gardai and resources in the National Drugs Unit and the establishment of area-based Garda Drugs Units**
- » **Establishing Drug-free zones of radius of 300m of a primary or secondary school with increased penalties for illegal drug-related activities in such Zones**
- » **Establish Prescriptions Drug Monitoring Programme (PDMPs)**





# Housing Planning and Local Government

The housing crisis can be solved, but only with a radical change of policy and increased investment in public housing to meet social and affordable need. Sinn Féin plans to deliver the biggest Council-led house building programme this state has ever seen.

For thirty years, there has been a housing policy consensus shared by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. Both parties, when in Government, underinvested in council housing and over relied on the private sector to deliver housing for workers and families.

This consensus has failed. It is why we have record levels of homelessness, why rents continue to spiral upwards, why an entire generation is locked out of the prospect of ever owning their own home. Why our housing system is so utterly dysfunctional.

It does not have to be this way. The housing crisis can be ended. However, any Government which wishes to do so must break with the Fianna Fáil-Fine Gael consensus.

The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) was established a decade ago to address the crisis created by the banking and property sector, with any recouped expenditure incurred on the loans it acquired being transferred to the State. The Government's failure to address the housing crisis is one of the greatest threats facing our economy. Sinn Féin will use the projected €4 billion to be transferred from NAMA to the Exchequer as one-off capital investment in public housing.

Sinn Féin believes that housing is a right, a social good and not a commodity. We believe Government policy must be tenure neutral, allowing individuals and families to decide what tenure, public, private rental or owner occupation, best suits their needs. Housing policy must work to ensure that every person has appropriate, secure and affordable accommodation.

## **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Provide an additional €6.5 billion in order to deliver over 100,000 public homes on public land to meet social and affordable housing needs**
- » **End long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough**
- » **Reduce and freeze rents for three years**
- » **Hold a referendum to enshrine the right to housing in the Constitution**
- » **Introduce a comprehensive package of social housing reform**
- » **Introduce a comprehensive package of private rental sector reform**
- » **Make reducing house prices a policy objective**
- » **Tackle land hoarding and speculation through a stronger vacant sites tax and a new Active Land Management Agency. Sinn Féin will increase the Vacant Site Levy from 7% to 15%; penalising the hoarding of land, bringing more land into use and driving down land prices.**
- » **Transform Local Government with a programme of rolling devolution of powers to Councils from state agencies and central Government**
- » **Transform the delivery of water services through the creation of a fully public non-commercial semi-state water utility**
- » **Hold a referendum to enshrine the public ownership of water services in the Constitution**
- » **Fully implement the Recommendations of the 2019 Expert Group on Traveller Accommodation**





## The most ambitious public housing programme in the history of the state

Sinn Féin believes that the only way to end the housing crisis is to build public housing on public land. We also believe that public housing should be provided for those in need of social housing, affordable rental accommodation and affordable purchase homes.

In Government, Sinn Féin would commence a decade long Council-led house building programme to meet social and affordable need.

The central role of Local Authorities would be enhanced by Approved Housing Bodies, co-operatives and community land trusts.

New targets would be set for all local authorities to meet this ambitious programme and Council Housing Managers would be given greater flexibility in design, procurement and approval to deliver the best quality homes in the most timely manner.

### **SINN FÉIN'S PUBLIC HOUSING PROGRAMME WOULD:**

- » **Deliver on average 20,000 public homes each year to meet social and affordable need by investing an additional €6.5 billion**
- » **Prioritise the use of public land for the delivery of public housing by Local Authorities**
- » **Increase the Part V obligation on private developments to 25%**
- » **Staff Local Authorities to aggressively bring vacant private homes into use**
- » **Ensure that a minimum of 7% of all public houses are designed for people with disabilities and are fully wheelchair accessible**
- » **Restore funding for Traveller specific accommodation to its 2008 levels**
- » **End the use of PPPs, Joint Ventures and Land Initiatives in the delivery of public housing**
- » **Double funding for and improve access to housing adaptation grants for people with disabilities at a cost of €57 million**
- » **Increase the funding and targets for the retrofitting of public housing by providing an additional €12 million of annual funding**

## The right to a home

Sinn Féin believes that people should have the right to a home and that this right should be enshrined in the Constitution. This does not mean that Government would have a responsibility to give every person a set of keys to a new home. Rather, it would place a strong obligation on Government to vindicate the right to a home through its laws, policies and budgets.

### **WITHIN THE FIRST YEAR OF GOVERNMENT, SINN FÉIN WOULD:**

- » **Hold a referendum to enshrine the right to housing in the Constitution**



## Public Housing Reform

In Government, Sinn Féin would introduce a major programme of housing reform with a Public Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill. The aim of the Bill would be to reaffirm the public nature of social and affordable rental housing and end the privatisation of social housing promoted by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. The Bill would also introduce important reforms to modernise the delivery and management of public housing stock.

In addition, we would work to develop a North-South facility to enable council list transfers.

### **THE BILL WOULD INCLUDE MEASURES TO:**

- » **Define public housing as social and affordable rental units owned by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies**
- » **Define social housing supports such as ASH, RAS, and HAP as temporary supports for those waiting to secure permanent public housing**
- » **Enable all current ASH, RAS, and HAP tenants can return to the principal housing list with their full years intact**
- » **Raise the income limits for eligibility for social housing in line with inflation**
- » **Facilitate social housing applications to move from one Local Authority to another through the introduction of a social housing applicants' passport**
- » **Facilitate inter county public housing transfers and council list transfers**
- » **Provide public housing tenants with access to the Residential Tenancies Board**
- » **Allow Approved Housing Bodies access the Capital Advance Local Facility to deliver mixed social and affordable public housing schemes**

## Reforming the Private Rental Sector

A stable and affordable private rental sector is a necessary element of any functioning housing system. For decades our private rental system has been badly regulated creating enormous instability and security.

We would introduce a series of emergency measures to tackle sky high rents. We would also longer-term reform of the Residential Tenancies Act.

### **SINN FÉIN'S EMERGENCY MEASURES WOULD INCLUDE:**

- » **A three-year refundable tax credit for all existing and new tenancies that would put a month's rent back in every renter's pocket costing €301 million**
- » **A three-year freeze on rents for all existing and new tenancies**
- » **A major investment in affordable cost rental accommodation delivered by Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies**
- » **A year on year reduction in the number of private rental tenancies used for social housing tenants via HAS, RAS and HAP freeing up additional rental stock for private renters**



## **THE RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL WOULD:**

- » **Create tenancies of indefinite duration**
- » **Link rent reviews after the three-year rent freeze to the Consumer Price Index**
- » **Remove all Residential Tenancies Act Section 34 grounds for new and renewed tenancies**
- » **Introduce an NCT style certification to ensure compliance with building and fire safety standards**
- » **Ensure 25% of all private rental properties are inspected by Local Authorities every year**
- » **Place a legal obligation on estate agents and letting platforms to ensure that all long- and short-term rental properties are compliant with minimum standards and planning requirements**

## Homelessness

Homelessness can and must end. It is not the result of individual failings, but of a broken housing system that failed to meet people's needs.

A Sinn Féin Government would, in consultation with Local Authorities and the homeless NGO sector, set a date for ending long term homelessness and the need to sleep rough. Our focus would be on reducing the flow of people into homelessness and reducing the time spent in emergency accommodation.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Set a date, within the lifetime of the Government, to end long term homelessness and the need to sleep rough**
- » **Double the provision of Housing First housing allocations**
- » **Limit the length of time any person can stay in emergency accommodation to a maximum of six months**
- » **Phase out use of dormitory style emergency accommodation for homeless people within the lifetime of the Government**
- » **Place a legal obligation on Local Authorities to put in place homeless prevention plans for those at imminent risk of homelessness**
- » **End the use of vacant possession notices to quit to prevent families being evicted into homelessness**
- » **Fully implement the 2019 Joint Oireachtas Housing, Planning and Local Government Committee report on family homelessness**
- » **Increase funding for domestic violence refuge provision by €12 million to meet need within the lifetime of the Government**

## Home Ownership

Sinn Féin believes affordable home ownership is an important element of any functioning housing system. Increasingly, young people are being locked out of the prospect of ever owning their own home.



It is not enough to focus solely on increasing private sector supply in the hope that prices will come down. Making homes genuinely affordable requires specific policy interventions to ensure the homes that are built are within reach of workers modest incomes.

Home owners should not be burdened with higher mortgage interest rates than their European counterparts and the unfair Local Property Tax. In Government, Sinn Féin would reduce mortgage interest rates by introducing our Bill which would cause the Central Bank to instruct the banks to lower the rates.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Deliver a stream of affordable purchase homes through Local Authorities**
- » **Amend Home Building Finance Ireland to focus on delivering homes at prices below €250,000**
- » **Review the Local Authority home local scheme to make the criteria and decision making more transparent and extend the scheme to certain categories of second time buyer**
- » **Prioritise the placing of the Construction Industry Register on a statutory footing**
- » **Abolish the Local Property Tax and reduce mortgage interest rates**

## Planning, Building Control and Land Use

Under Fine Gael, planning policy has become increasingly centralised, undermining local democracy, and ignoring the recommendations of the Mahon Tribunal.

Sinn Féin in Government would seek to reverse these trends while at the same time promoting a planning policy that equips Local Authorities to meet the challenge of climate change and well planned, integrated, mixed use communities with proper social, economic and transport infrastructure.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Repeal the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2015 allowing Ministers to introduce mandatory planning guidelines**
- » **Repeal the mandatory ministerial guidelines on apartment design and building heights introduced in 2018**
- » **Repeal the Strategic Housing Development legislation and return all planning decisions to local authorities**
- » **Reform the planning process to impose strict statutory timelines on the pre planning process, requests for additional information and An Bord Pleanála appeals**
- » **Amend the legislation underpinning the Office of the Planning Regulator to make the office fully independent as recommended by Mahon Tribunal**
- » **Initiate a time limited review of the National Planning Framework and allow the Oireachtas to vote on the amended plan**
- » **Transform the Land Development Agency into an Active Land Management Agency with responsibility for strategically managing all public land while returning all residential development functions to Local Authorities**



- » **Develop universal design and lifetime adaptability guidelines and regulations so that all new buildings meet the needs of people with disabilities**
- » **Initiate a time limited review of land use and land value issues with a view to introducing measures to constrain land hoarding, land speculation and land price inflation**
- » **Strengthen the nZEB regulations and introduce a clear mechanism to ensure compliance**
- » **Fully implement the 2017 Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government report Safe as Housing including the creation of a Building Control Agency, a reformed BCAR process and a latent defects redress scheme for owners of Celtic Tiger properties with latent defects**
- » **Immediately introduce mandatory fire safety inspections by Local Authorities of all new build multi-unit residential developments**

## Local Government

Our system of Local Government is weak, underfunded, and under-resourced. For decades, Government has talked about reform, but little has changed. In Government, Sinn Féin would introduce the far-reaching reforms of local democracy.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Increase local Government fund by 20%**
- » **Reintroduce Town Councils and review their functions and powers**
- » **Initiate a process of rolling devolution of powers to Local Authorities from state agencies and Government departments in areas of waste management, transport and economic development**
- » **Initiate a time limited review of Local Government funding aimed at providing councils with a sustainable funding base**

## Water

Sinn Féin believes that water is a human right. We are opposed to any future privatisation of the public water system and in Government would act to bring the provision of water under full democratic control and accountability.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Within a year, hold a referendum to enshrine the public ownership of the public water system into the constitution**
- » **Open up negotiations with trade unions, local authorities and Irish Water to create a fully public non-commercial semi-state body, to deliver a world class water service**
- » **Scrap the charge for so-called excessive use of water**
- » **Initiate a time limited and fully independent review of the proposed Eastern and Midlands Water Supply Project**



# Justice and Equality

## Protecting communities from crime

Sinn Féin are determined that ordinary people in working class and rural communities must be protected from criminals.

People should have confidence that if they call the Gardaí, they will get a quick and effective response and they will be protected.

People should have confidence that criminals will be caught, convicted and face the prison sentences that they deserve.

Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil before them have abandoned working class and rural communities to organised crime gangs. They both starved the Gardaí of the resources they need to protect communities and they both failed to tackle garda corruption. They have not taken the necessary steps to ensure consistent and appropriate sentencing by judges. They are both soft on crime.

The bottom line is that we have too few Gardaí. Sinn Féin are proposing record numbers of Gardaí and the biggest Garda recruitment drive in the history of the state to protect communities and disrupt the activities of criminal gangs. We need record numbers of gardaí to sit on these criminals, so they simply can't function.

Greater and faster use should be made of the Criminal Assets Bureau to remove the profits from organised crime. We want CAB to confiscate every penny they make from the high up criminals right down to their foot soldiers. New systems are needed to ensure CAB acts quickly in response to suspicious house purchases.

The sentences being imposed on serious and repeat offenders are inconsistent and often too lenient. Longer sentences need to become the norm for serious and violent crimes. Bail conditions must be adhered to and appropriate sanctions imposed where they are not.

Furthermore, the prison service needs to be better resourced. Government underfunding of the prison service has meant that gangland criminals are actually growing their operations while in prison - low level dealers are pulled deeper into the criminal gangs during their time in prison.

Protecting people means there can be no acceptance of harassment, intimidation, or petty crime.

Protecting the public is Sinn Féin's top priority. It needs to become the priority of our judges, our prison service and senior Gardaí. For that to happen, protecting communities in rural Ireland and in urban estates needs to become a priority of the Government.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Commence the biggest Garda recruitment drive in the history of the state bringing the service strength to over 16,000 Gardaí, with a focus on community policing with an investment rising to €142 million.**
- » **Recruit 2000 additional civilian staff to free up Gardaí from behind desks costing €80 million**
- » **Put in place a new Garda Building and Refurbishment Programme prioritising stations for rural Ireland**
- » **Increase CAB's manpower and broaden its focus**
- » **Increase Prison Service annual funding by €19.5 million to enable the disruption of activities and recruitment by organised criminal gangs**
- » **Create a Sentencing Council to issue sentencing guidelines to the judiciary**





- » **Increase funding for the DPP €2.5 million to speed up the prosecution of cases and for the Courts Service by €7 million**
- » **Implement Taisceadán – the National Property Register**
- » **Establish new Garda Youth Diversion Projects**
- » **Establish a Criminal Justice Inspectorate based on the model in the North of Ireland**

## Domestic, sexual and gender-based violence

Sinn Féin believes that more must be done to tackle domestic, sexual, and gender-based violence and support victims when they engage with the justice system.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Better communication and co-operation between the criminal and family courts**
- » **Ratify the Istanbul Convention and implement the Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence**
- » **Increase funding to organisations supporting victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence and provide legal advice and support to those reporting such crime**

## Immigration

Sinn Féin is determined to avoid the failed policies that have fostered resentments and tensions in other countries. Successive Governments have failed to deliver what is needed in terms of housing and health delivery. They and they alone are responsible for their failures.

Sinn Féin does not want open borders. We believe that all states must manage migration. Every state has to have an immigration system with well-functioning rules and regulation that everyone understands and that serves the interest of the people of the country. This system must have regard to how many people are needed to meet shortfalls in the labour market and how many people can be integrated effectively with adequate support and resourcing. Where we do need migrants, such as to fill vacancies in our health system, our migration system should facilitate this.

The system must also protect people fleeing persecution and war, our international obligations must be fulfilled. We should end the Direct Provision system, treat people with dignity, process applications for asylum in a timely manner and implement the recommendations of the All-Party Oireachtas Committee Report.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Ensuring an efficient, fair and transparent immigration system is in place**

## Tackling white collar crime, challenging vested interests

The financial crisis and Mahon Tribunal report exposed the thin line separating vested interests and white-collar crime. Yet we've seen it all before. We've had the Ansbacher and Dirt scandals, the McCracken and Moriarty Tribunals, and the FÁS expenses debacle. Ethics thrown out the window and the public good kicked to the kerb.



There is no single definition for white collar crime, and there is a confusing array of agencies responsible for the prevention, detection and investigation of this insidious crime.

Sinn Féin in Government will demand probity and accountability from all who hold positions of power and responsibility. We will take on white collar crime and we will uphold the common good.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Extending whistleblowing protections to volunteers and students and removing caps on compensation for awards to workers who are found by the Workplace Relations Commission to have suffered a detriment as a result of making a protected disclosure.**
- » **Introducing a White-Collar Crime Bill to strengthen investigative, enforcement and prosecution powers and penalties contained within existing company, employment and public administration legislation**
- » **Creating a one-stop shop website and phone line for the reporting of white collar crime coupled with a public awareness campaign**
- » **Extending the power of the Comptroller and Auditor General to inspect the accounts, books and records of any organisation in receipt of public funds along with a corresponding increase to its resources**
- » **Increasing the investigative and enforcement powers of the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission**
- » **Empower the Higher Education Authority to conduct its own reviews and investigations into third level institutions**
- » **Giving COMREG the ability to issue administrative fines, as a deterrent to operators dragging disciplinary proceedings out in lengthy court actions**
- » **Give SIPO the power and resources to initiate investigations independently of a complaint having been made and on foot of anonymous complaints. In addition, providing SIPO with the power to investigate and take cases against former elected representatives in relation to abuses committed during their tenure**
- » **Introduce Sinn Féin's Bill to reduce the legal, administrative and other related costs of Tribunals of Inquiry**
- » **Introduce legislation to allow for US style 'Class Actions Suits', where a number of victims can work together to take on a corporate entity in court**
- » **Introduce legislation to make it a criminal offense for bankers to lie to the Central Bank, implementing rules so that senior individuals in financial institutions provide the Central Bank with a document outlining what they are in charge of, so when a crime takes place the individual can be held to account and making reckless management, including lending, a crime like it is in Britain**
- » **Develop a statutory framework that holds senior civil servants and public officials to account for their decisions and actions, upholds the public interest and the common good and imbeds the principle of open public administration**

## **LGBTQI Rights and Equality**

Promoting equality and human rights is at the very core of republicanism and of Sinn Féin's agenda for change. Sinn Féin has a proud record of supporting the LGBTQI community North and South.



Our record standing for LGBTQI rights stretches back to what is considered the first Dublin Pride Parade after the homophobic murder of Declan Flynn. While the mainstream parties stood to uphold a conservative agenda that repressed equality, Sinn Féin stood in solidarity with the LGBTQI community.

We believe that to achieve full LGBTQI equality, we must embed LGBTQI equality into public policy by promoting inclusion and increasing visibility in our public services and communities as well as ending all mistreatment by legislation. For example, Sinn Féin have been the only party to call for Gender Recognition for our young and non-binary communities and in March 2017 published a bill to legislate for this.

LGBT equality must be a visible objective of public policy particularly in the areas of health, education and justice.

Sinn Féin in Government will introduce inclusivity-based proposals that combat the inequality of our past and present day but also create solutions that include our LGBTQI community in an Ireland of equals.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Development and roll-out of a more inclusive Relationships and Sexuality Education curriculum**
- » **Enacting robust hate crime legislation**
- » **Enacting legislation to make the conducting of ‘conversion therapies’ illegal**
- » **Extending the Gender Recognition law to trans youth and non-binary persons**
- » **Reform our trans healthcare towards an informed consent model**

## Traveller Rights and Equality

Travellers in Ireland have historically been ill-treated and ignored by the state. The cycle of discrimination over generations has led to extreme inequalities between Travelling community and the settled population and measures are needed to address this.

Traveller pride events have shown the benefit society can and does gain from the Travelling community.

The 2016 census showed that there are over 40,000 Travellers on the island of Ireland. Yet, people from the Travelling community are underrepresented in political and decision-making life.

Sinn Féin pledge to fight inequality in society and improving the status of Travellers is key to this. We are proud of our participation in the successful campaign to recognise Traveller ethnicity.

## Traveller Accommodation

It is clear from the levels of underspend by local authorities on Traveller Specific Accommodation in recent years that the delivery of accommodation necessary is not happening.

In 2017, there was a 45% percent underspend on Traveller accommodation by local authorities; in 2018, it was 48% and, in the first half of 2019, only 18.5% of the funding available has been drawn down.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Implement the recommendations of the 2019 Expert Group on Traveller Accommodation, which makes 32 short and long-term recommendations which aim to remove the barriers to the delivery of culturally appropriate accommodation for Travellers**
- » **Restore funding for Traveller specific accommodation to its 2008 levels**



## Traveller Health

We have significant levels of health inequalities in this State. Sinn Féin will address these inequalities and work to improve the health of everybody who live here. This will ensure long-term health dividends by delivering a healthier population who will have less need for expensive health interventions and social economic supports.

Race, social class, disability, culture and ethnic identity, income poverty, location and access to social and health services, sexual orientation, age and other differences can all contribute to the vulnerability of people's lives and consequently to the status of their health and well-being. These factors have significant consequences for the effectiveness and efficiency of health policy and health care.

Travellers and other ethnic minority groups may have increased health needs. We will ensure that our health system is cognisant of, and responsive to the needs of all of everybody.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Implement the National Traveller Roma Inclusion Strategy (NTRIS) 2017-2021**
- » **Publish and implement the long delayed National Traveller Health Action Plan**
- » **Ensure effective and compassionate care to those from ethnic and other minority backgrounds cognisant of their differing situations**
- » **Provide services in a culturally sensitive manner**
- » **Ensure proper diversity training for health professionals**
- » **Roll out free universal counselling services with a GP referral**
- » **Support the roll-out of suicide prevention training through traveller community groups and services**

## Traveller education

The Education Act 1998 originally provided for a statutory body to advise the Minister for Education and Skills on relevant policy initiatives to address Educational Disadvantage. The work of the Committee established under this provision was critical in the design of the DEIS scheme.

It was abolished in 2012; however, we believe that this Committee needs to be re-established in order to provide research and direction to the Minister in order to address educational disadvantage in light of increased child poverty rates and the particular problems faced by minority groups such as Travellers and homeless children.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Re-establish the Statutory Committee to advise the Minister in initiatives to address educational disadvantage**
- » **Increase investment in the School Completion Programme by one third**



# Disability

## Making rights real for people with disabilities

Sinn Féin would allocate the promotion of inclusion and equality for people with disability an additional €120 million in Capital Funding over and above what has already been committed and €1.21 billion for Current expenditure in addition to pre-committed allocations including demographics. Sinn Féin's allocations are spread across multiple departments and relevant measures are outlined below and throughout this document.

We will mainstream making rights real for people with disabilities as a priority. From provisions to meet special educational needs, healthcare and therapies, housing adaptations, employment supports and opportunities, inclusive childcare, independent living, recognising the 'cost of disability' on households to a major capital programme making all public transport accessible.

We have detailed measures to enable equal participation by people with disabilities in every aspect of life throughout this document.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) provides the international framework to promote, protect and ensure the rights of all people with disabilities and promotes equal rights in all areas of life.

Ireland ratified the UNCRPD in March 2018. However, the Irish Government failed to ratify the Optional Protocol to the UNCRPD. The immediate ratification of the Optional Protocol is a priority to ensure there is an oversight mechanism in place to ensure the Government live up to the commitments contained in the UNCRPD.

Ultimate responsibility for actually delivering on the National Disability Strategy and its sectoral implementation plans has been passed from pillar to post for far too long with the result that no significant advances have been made. The establishment of a junior ministry in the wake of the last General Election failed to rectify this.

We propose to give the Department of An Taoiseach specific responsibility for Disability Equality. This will ensure that the head of Government has overarching responsibility for the advancement of the rights of people with disabilities and is party to all key decisions affecting people with disabilities.

Dedicated staff in the Department of An Taoiseach will be allocated responsibility for driving the cross-departmental National Disability Strategy Implementation Plans, with the Taoiseach accountable to the Oireachtas. We will also establish an Oireachtas Committee on Disability Equality.

In addition, Sinn Féin would immediately establish an all-party Oireachtas Committee on Autism which would be tasked with consulting for, developing and publishing a comprehensive Autism Empowerment Strategy within 6 months of its establishment. A particular focus would be on achieving the best and earliest interventions.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Ratifying the Optional Protocol to the UNCRPD**
- » **Implementing the many concrete measures outlined throughout this document to make rights real for people with disabilities**
- » **Giving the Taoiseach and his Department responsibility for the delivery of equality for people with disabilities and make them accountable for this**
- » **Developing an Autism Empowerment Strategy**

## Independent Living

Personal Assistance Services provide people with the opportunity to exercise control and choice in their lives. In so doing, it enables people to be active participants within their families, communities, employment and society and therefore results in an overall improved quality of life.



To address the unmet need that exists for such services, Sinn Féin would provide an additional 1.5 million hours.

The service should be delivered through the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection rather than Health. Assessments should be carried out by designated personal assistance service assessment officers with an independent appeals process.

The abolition of the Rehabilitative Training Allowance (RTA) runs completely contrary to the aim of giving as much independence as possible to those living with a disability. The RTA allows for independence and it is the individual with a disability who makes the call as to where the money is spent, an act of independence in and of itself.

Sinn Féin tabled a series of amendments during Committee Stage to the Disabilities (miscellaneous provisions) Bill with the aim of legally enshrining important rights and equality. For example, requiring local authorities to use wheelchair accessible polling stations because there is no more independent action than the casting of your vote.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Increasing Personal Assistant hours by 1.5 million hours costing €37.5 million**
- » **Reinstating the Rehabilitative Training Allowance**
- » **Legislating to require the removal of barriers to independent living**

## Accessible Transport

Access to transport is vitally important for people living with disabilities to facilitate social inclusion. Appropriate, accessible transport ensures that people with disabilities can have access to work, healthcare, other services and social activities.

A major infrastructure programme is needed to make all public transport services fully wheelchair accessible. We propose investing a total of €120 million to replace non-wheelchair accessible vehicles in Bus Éireann, construct wheelchair accessible bus stops, and undertake accessibility works to bus stations, railway stations and the train fleet over the term of Government.

Very large contracts are awarded by the state on an annual basis to Taxi operators. In the tender process for the awarding of these contracts, considerable extra weighting should be given to Taxi operators with accessible vehicles.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Rolling out Access Ireland Transport - a Sinn Féin major infrastructure programme**
- » **Using public procurement to promote accessibility across the taxi fleet**

## Accessible Housing

Many people with disabilities and older people are trapped in unsuitable accommodation and urgently need home adaptations. The existing local Government adaptation grant schemes are chronically underfunded. Sinn Féin is committed to increasing the central funding of these grant schemes.

- » **We will increase funding for the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with Disabilities scheme by 100% at a cost of €57 million**
- » **We will create flexibility in the assessment and payment of the adaptation grant to permit local authorities, where the need is great, to pay a housing adaptation grant amount above the current grant cap of €30,000**





- » **We will make the Housing Adaptation Grant for People with Disabilities payable to voluntary housing agencies and private landlords who are willing to adapt to the requirements of a long-term tenant with disabilities**
- » **We will develop Universal Design and Lifetime Adaptability Guidelines so new buildings can accommodate people with disabilities and save on future adaptation costs**

## Health

Our two-tier health service is failing people with disabilities.

The medical card system traps people with disabilities in unemployment and poverty. Sinn Féin would introduce a secure medical card for people with disabilities, immune from changes to household finances or employment status.

The Home Support Service, formerly known as home help and homecare packages, has been grossly underfunded with the effect that people who should be at home are unable to be discharged from hospitals and carers burnout.

In Budget 2020, Fine Gael, supported by Fianna Fáil, only allocated €25 million for an extra 1 million hours. This comes nowhere near clearing the waiting lists and instead means the Government decided to face into 2020 with a substantial existing waiting list and no extra resources to deal with any increased demand.

Sinn Féin's plan to clear the waiting lists will give the space and time to deal with the issue of providing long term home care. Sinn Féin would put home support entitlements onto a statutory footing and fund 2.4 million additional hours per annum, immediately clearing the waiting list at a cost of €59 million.

Respite care gives families and carers support in caring for their loved one with a disability for a short or temporary period. It can take place in their own home, in the community or in an institution. This care is provided by the HSE and by voluntary organisations or local not-for-profit care settings. Current provision is far short of what is needed. Without adequate respite, family carers are themselves left more vulnerable to ill-health. Sinn Féin would increase respite care service provision by 20%.

The under-capacity of the public system means that parents are forced to spend hundreds of euro every month on private therapy if they want to see their child talk, walk, or have any hope of realising their individual potential. For example, €65 for 30 minutes is a typical price for private Speech and Language Therapy. Sinn Féin's aim would be to increase the number of SLTs by 250, OTs by 100, PTs by 100 and psychologists by 150 over a term in Government. This is in addition to the in-school speech and language therapy service with 200 SLTs we are also proposing.

Sinn Féin would eliminate the deficits for Section 39 organisations and properly fund these services to meet need.

There are approximately 25,000 people in Ireland per year who require rehabilitation for neurological conditions such as stroke, acquired brain injury and multiple sclerosis. We know that early intervention ultimately reduces the care needed and many studies also clearly demonstrate significant cost-savings post-rehabilitation. We are currently failing to intervene early enough due to a massive gap in the services provided. We must help those with neuro-rehabilitation needs to lead full and meaningful lives by giving them quality, tailored rehabilitation and support through neuro-rehabilitation teams and transitional units.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Guaranteeing secure medical cards for people with disabilities**
- » **Clearing the home support waiting list**
- » **Increasing respite care services by 20%**
- » **Increasing the number of therapists in the public system**
- » **Developing neuro-rehabilitation teams and transitional units**



## Prioritising Special Educational Needs

The Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act was established in 2004, yet several of its provisions have yet to be commenced, including the right of a child with special educational needs to an assessment, the right to an independent appeals process, the right to an individual educational plan, and the delivery of education services on foot of this plan.

Sinn Féin would bring forward and fully enact a new rights-based Education (Overcoming the Barriers) Bill and allocate the resources necessary to implement it via increased Education and Health Budgets.

This Bill would, for example, make it mandatory for the Department's Inspectorate to report on the implementation of Individual Education Plans for children with special educational needs.

The National Council for Special Education does not have power under current legislation to designate a place for a child with special educational needs or to require that sufficient classes are established to support children with complex needs or those on the autism spectrum. Sinn Féin would ensure that these needs are met by providing the NCSE with the necessary statutory powers.

We would also provide for a robust appeals mechanism to allow parents and schools appeal an allocation under the new resource allocation model.

The role of the resource teacher within the school setting is fundamental to ensuring all children continue to prosper within their educational environment. We recognise that this support and the support provided by SNAs are critical for children with special educational needs to access and participate in education.

Evidence shows that in-school speech and language therapy is hugely beneficial. It allows therapy to take place in a natural and comfortable environment for the child and makes attendance at appointments much easier. All schools should be able to arrange in-school appointments in conjunction with their local HSE network team.

Sinn Féin recognises the vital role Educational Psychologists play in ensuring every child has access to the supports and resources they need to gain the most from the education experience. We will increase funding for educational psychologists by 4 million. This will reduce waiting lists for schools and ensure they are adequately equipped to assess and manage the additional needs of all students.

Finally, smaller class sizes are important for all children to reach their educational potential and critically so for those with special educational needs.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Providing the NCSE with greater powers to ensure that sufficient school places and classes are provided, and the needs of children are met alongside robust appeals mechanisms**
- » **Reducing waiting times for assessments and resourcing supports for students with special educational needs, including proper access to therapies**
- » **Recruiting additional educational psychologists along with greater administrative support to make better use of their time.**
- » **Providing €34 million of additional funding for the recruitment of 500 additional SNAs and 450 additional Resource Teachers over and above those required to meet demographic pressures.**
- » **Establishing an initial panel of 200 speech and language therapists for schools as a shared resource**
- » **Reducing the Student/Teacher ratio to 20:1 at primary level**



## Right to work for people with disabilities

We need appropriate employment services to enable and empower people living with a disability in Ireland to gain or retain employment.

Sinn Féin would tackle further barriers to employment for people with disabilities by opening positive mainstream jobseeker supports to people with disabilities.

We would also introduce a new facility for claimants to voluntarily suspend for a time their claim for Disability Allowance if they enter into or increase their employment, without having to make a fresh claim from scratch if they become unable to work once again.

In addition, we would issue new guidance and roll-out training to upskill and increase the capacity of staff across all Intreo Offices to better support all those with a disability who wish to work.

Sinn Féin commends the work of the WALK Peer project which provides young people with disabilities with opportunities of work experience in their dream job or the chance to access further educational opportunities in their field of interest.

We want to see its core principles and practices rolled out throughout the State so that no young person living with a disability is denied the opportunity to reach their full potential.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Training Intreo staff to better support people with disabilities who want to enter employment**
- » **Replicating the hugely successful Walk PEER programme to give young people with a disability all of the opportunities available to those without a disability in work experience and education**
- » **A new emphasis on creating opportunities for people with disabilities as part of our ambitious new apprenticeship policy**

## Older people

### Making Rights Real for Older People

Sinn Féin would allocate the promotion of equality and dignity for older people an extra €1.19 billion for Current expenditure in addition to pre-committed allocations including demographics. These allocations are spread across multiple departments and the relevant measures are outlined below and throughout this document.

Sinn Féin is committed to the development of healthcare services and social care services as a right, with equal access for all based on need and to the greatest extent that the nation's resources allow.

This right is especially relevant for older people and the provision of support for older people is becoming increasingly important as our population ages.

The Census for 2016 showed a rapid rise in the number of people aged over 65 in Ireland. Since 2011, there has been an increase of 19.1% to 637,567 people aged over 65. In addition, there has been a 15.5% increase in the number of people aged over 85 to 67,555.

This poses great challenges, but Sinn Féin believes that we should also see improved health and longevity as an opportunity, with older people continuing to contribute to our society.

In Denmark, municipalities are required by law to assess if a person in need of home care services could benefit from a reablement programme. Reablement helps older people regain confidence and skills needed to live independent and fulfilling lives.



Identifying older people at risk of becoming frail and providing them with reablement and rehabilitation programmes results in improvements in health-related quality of life. It also improves wellbeing and reduced personal home care costs. Sinn Féin would explore rolling out such a programme in Ireland.

**SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Implementing the National Positive Ageing Strategy**
- » **Explore rolling out a reablement programme**

## Care in the community

The Home Support Service, formerly known as home help and homecare packages, has been grossly underfunded with the effect that people who should be at home are unable to be discharged from hospitals and carers burnout.

In Budget 2020 Fine Gael, supported by Fianna Fáil, only allocated €25 million for an extra 1 million hours. This comes nowhere near clearing the waiting lists and instead means the Government decided to face into 2020 with a substantial existing waiting list and no extra resources to deal with any increased demand.

Sinn Féin's plan to clear the waiting lists will give the space and time to deal with the issue of providing long term home care. Sinn Féin would put home support entitlements onto a statutory footing and fund 2.4 million additional hours per annum, immediately clearing the waiting list.

Respite care gives families and carers support in caring for their loved one with a disability for a short or temporary period. It can take place in their own home, in the community or in an institution.

This care is provided by the HSE and by voluntary organisations or local not-for-profit care settings. Current provision is far short of what is needed. Without adequate respite, family carers are themselves left more vulnerable to ill-health. Sinn Féin would increase respite care service provision by 20%.

**SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Clearing the home support waiting list**
- » **Increasing respite care services by 20%**

## Care in nursing homes

Even with greatly enhanced home and community care for older people, many will still require long-term residential care and the numbers of people in nursing homes will grow with the ageing population.

It is essential that people are supported in long-term residential care and that the highest standards are maintained. Sinn Féin proposes, in tandem with increasing community services and thereby reducing demand, to increase the number of nursing home beds by 1,250.

An unacceptable situation has developed whereby some private nursing homes have been charging medical card-holding residents for care to which they would have a free entitlement where they live in the community. During the last Dáil term Sinn Féin brought forward legislation which would prohibit this practice if enacted.

**SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Increasing nursing home beds**
- » **Banning unfair charges for nursing home residents**



## Remove taxes on ill-health

Prescription charges are a tax on ill health and we believe that no sick person should be subject to such charges. Older people, who are more likely to have multiple prescriptions, are particularly affected by these unfair charges.

The overwhelming body of evidence shows that charges for drugs can lead to higher costs on the health budget in the medium to longer term, not to mention the serious strain and ill-effects they can have on the health of those who need medications.

While charges were reduced in last year's Budget, it is not enough, Sinn Féin proposes to remove them altogether.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Abolish prescription charges and roll-out free prescription medicines for all**
- » **Abolish the €100 charge for the use of Emergency Departments and the €75 per day charge for inpatient care**
- » **Remove hospital car parking charges**

## Dementia Care

The provision of health and social care services for people with dementia has become an increasingly important issue.

That is set to continue with our ageing population, longer life expectancy and the expected trebling of the numbers with dementia over the coming years.

Yet health and social care services do not match up with need and are often inconsistently provided, if provided at all. It is estimated that there are 55,000 people living with dementia in this State, 63% of them residing in their own homes.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Implementing the National Dementia Strategy and developing a follow-up strategy**
- » **Ensuring access to a timely diagnosis and appropriate post-diagnosis support, including, but not limited to, a dementia adviser as a minimum standard of follow-up support**
- » **Ensuring access to dementia-specific home care**
- » **Training throughout the health and social care services for staff dealing with people with dementia**
- » **Increasing funding for housing adaptations**
- » **Integrate dementia into the Chronic Disease Management Programme**

## Older People and their Pensions

Sinn Féin believes that everyone has the right to grow old in Ireland with dignity, security, and equality. The reality for many of our older citizens under Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is that they now face additional taxes and charges, they cannot rely on the health service, and they have to struggle daily to heat their homes and meet their bills.



At the heart of pensions should be fairness and equality for all. Under Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, this has been missing and as a result, serious inequities and issues have emerged for people at retirement. We have a gender pension gap close to 40% in Ireland, one of the highest in Europe. We view reduced pension payments awarded to women as punishment for taking time out of work to care for or rear children. It is unfair and Sinn Féin are determined to resolve this issue.

In 2011, the Labour Party and Fine Gael government introduced the legislation to increase the pension age – it increased to 66 in 2014 and will rise to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028. Fianna Fáil supported this legislation and voted for it at report stage. Sinn Féin opposed it.

Prior to that, Fianna Fáil and the Green Party in government in 2010 proposed the pension age increases. They included it in their Memorandum of Understanding with the Troika. Fianna Fáil also had it in their National Recovery Plan 2011 when they said that they would introduce legislation to give effect to the increases.

These pension age increases would mean Ireland having the fastest and furthest rising pension age in the EU. In fact, only two other EU countries plan to increase their pension age to 68 years – the Czech Republic after 2054 and the U.K sometime between 2044-2046.

In 2016, Sinn Féin brought forward a Dáil motion calling for the immediate reinstatement of the State Pension Transition for those who retire at 65. However, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael failed to back this motion, and instead voted against it.

We now have the farcical situation where a person who retires at 65 years, when they are typically contractually obliged to retire, cannot access their State Pension. Instead, they are forced onto a jobseeker's payment for the year.

Sinn Féin have consistently called on the Government to re-instate the State Pension (Transition) for 65-year olds and suspend the planned further increases to the State Pension age.

The impact of putting people on the dole instead of receiving their State Pension is a loss of €45.30 a week for a single person - €2,340 a year and a loss of €76 a week for a couple - €3,952 a year.

Sinn Féin also brought forward a Bill in the Dáil to end mandatory retirement where workers wish to remain at work beyond 65 years. In Government, we would progress this Bill and make it law.

Reintroducing the State Pension (Transition) for 65 year olds costs €150.5 million and stopping the planned pension age increase to 67 costs €217.5 million at current state pension payment rates according to estimates provided to Sinn Féin by both the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The combined cost of these measures is €368 million. Increasing the rates of these payments by €20 per week would cost a maximum additional €60 million.

Sinn Féin also proposed legislation to strengthen protections for occupational pension scheme members. This legislation would make it illegal for healthy, i.e. profitable, companies to walk away from their pension commitments.

In recognition of the overwhelming dependence of ordinary people on the State Pension system for their income in retirement, over the longer-term, Sinn Féin would like to see the roll out of a Universal Pension for every person based on age and residence. This should be set at a level that proofs against poverty and fully addresses the gender-based inequity of the past.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Protect the Free Travel Pass and increase the state pension rate by €20 over the term of government at a cost of almost €700 million**
- » **End mandatory retirement to allow workers who are able to and wish to remain at work beyond 65 years to do so if they so choose**
- » **Stop the planned pension age increase to 67 and reintroduce the State Pension for 65 year olds who choose to retire at a cost of €368 million**





# Rural and Community Development

In the North, we have recently secured a Sinn Féin Minister for Communities which demonstrates our commitment to this issue and the diverse stakeholders that make up this sector.

Sinn Féin in Government will value community. This means supporting community, it means responding to diversity while combating inequality and fostering creativity and social innovation in each community across the island of Ireland. This means supporting the people, voluntary groups and community organisations who make up these communities regardless if they live in urban or rural Ireland.

The community and voluntary sector have been decimated by successive Fianna Fail and Fine Gael led Government cuts. These bad policies have affected the well-being of our communities, they have meant the extinction of vital community supports and services and placed undue pressures on the many people and groups who depend on them.

Sinn Féin understands and recognises the importance of both Leader and Community Enhancement programmes and in Government will increase these vital funding sources to enhance communities across the State.

## **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Implement the National Development Strategy for the community and voluntary sector**
- » **Facilitate growth with the social enterprise and community co-operative sector through our newly established Co-Op Development Agency**
- » **Develop a framework for collaborative working between voluntary organisations and their statutory counterparts**
- » **Provide additional supports and guidelines for charities seeking to merge or collaborate**
- » **Convene a working group to include sector representatives and relevant Government departments to develop a multi-annual funding structure - a simplified compliance and regulatory environment and a professional enhancement support similar to that provided by small businesses by Local Enterprise Offices**
- » **Amend Charities Act to include the 'Advancement of Human Rights' as grounds for charitable tax exemption**
- » **Increase the number of Community Employment places by 1,000 at a cost of €5.4 million**
- » **Continued support and funding for Community Grants, Leader and Small-Scale Rural Projects (Clár) appropriate to the needs of our communities**
- » **Protecting and upholding the 7 core LEADER principles and putting in place adequate programme supports - including ring-fencing core Local Development Companies' budgets - for this purpose**



# Social Protection

At different stages in our lives, we all face financial worries whether we have a baby on the way, have been struck by illness or disability, are facing a stint without employment or are on route to retirement; we all need the social protection system to be there for us at some point.

Sinn Féin want to make sure that if and when these days come our social welfare system is robust enough and has payment rates that are adequate in order to offer real protection and peace of mind.

In stark contrast, during ordinary peoples' hour of need in the wake of a financial crash that they were not responsible for causing, Fianna Fáil cut social welfare payments across the board. Fianna Fáil and the Green Party cut Jobseekers Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance for those aged under 20 by half to just €100 per week, they removed the Christmas Bonus, and closed the Back to Work Allowance scheme. Fianna Fáil and the Greens cut the minimum wage. Fine Gael cut Child Benefit, Fuel Allowance, Rent Allowance, One Parent Family Payment, Disability Allowance, Carer's Allowance, and the Respite Care Grant.

In Government, Sinn Féin would invest in social protection in order to ensure that all households who rely on social welfare receive an amount that is adequate, protects against poverty and target increases at those households that need them most.

Remove the political football from welfare rates and ensure all rates are adequate

Sinn Féin proposed legislation in the Dáil to establish a Social Welfare Adequacy Commission. A principle function of this Commission would be to examine the minimum income required by different types of households in receipt of social welfare to secure a Minimum Essential Standard of Living.

And make associated annual recommendations to the Minister on the adjustments to social welfare rates of payment that should be made. The commission would use evidence like the annual reports from the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice (VPSJ) in order to ensure that all social welfare rates are adequate, and its membership would include representation from those impacted by budgetary decisions.

The current payment rates on social protection schemes for people under 66 years of age, e.g. Jobseekers Allowance and One Parent Family Payment, are €42 short of what is necessary to attain a minimum, decent standard of living.

Bringing weekly working age social welfare rates in line with the MESL entails increasing the maximum personal rate to €245 and the Qualified Child Increase to €48.50 for children under 12 and €82.40 for children aged 12 and over. The estimated full year cost of implementing these measures is €1.8 billion.

That investment would also cover the restoration of full equality to young jobseekers whose current payment rates are particularly inadequate. Since 2009 young jobseekers have seen their payment rate for Jobseekers payments determined by their age. This is no way for a Social Protection system to function. These reduced rates led to mass emigration of our young people, some of whom will never come home.

Sinn Féin continually highlighted the impact that reduced payments for those aged under 26 is having in terms of securing adequate housing and accessing education and training courses and we await an official report on the matter.

While Budget 2020 saw the full rate of jobseekers' payments restored for those aged 25 years, those aged 18-24 years have only received the restoration where they are living independently. This has simply replaced the age condition with another condition. Sinn Féin will fully restore equality to young jobseekers' payments.



### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Establishing a Social Welfare Adequacy Commission to provide objective, evidence based annual recommendations on adjustments to payment rates**
- » **Increasing the main working age rates to €245 and the increase for children to €48.50 and €82.40 for those under and over 12 years respectively**
- » **Full equality for young jobseekers**

## **Child poverty**

Child poverty is one of the greatest challenges facing Ireland. It is an issue that the Government have failed to grapple with acknowledging themselves that they will not meet their own target of lifting 95,000 children out of poverty by 2020.

Figures from the Survey on Income and Living Conditions published in 2019 show that there are over 202,000 children living in poverty. The same report shows that lone parents are almost four times as likely to be living in consistent poverty as two-parent households.

One of Sinn Féin's main priorities in Government will be to lift children out of poverty. In year one of Government, we will develop a costed, cross-departmental strategy with clear aims and timeframes as to what each department will do to play their part in eradicating child poverty.

An average increase of €27 per week to the Qualified Child Increase would be necessary to wipe out income poverty amongst these children.

Sinn Féin would use targeted social welfare increases to assist us in tackling child poverty with a particular focus on the Qualified Child Increase payment. Along with this, we also propose to introduce an annual double payment of child benefit to assist all families with their Back to School costs and we propose to extend child benefit to 18 year olds in secondary school.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Increasing the Qualified Child Increase payment to €48.50 and €82.40 for those under and over 12 years respectively**
- » **Introducing an annual Back to School Child Benefit double payment at a cost of €173 million**
- » **Extending child benefit to 18 year olds in secondary school at a cost of €56 million**

## **Lone parents**

Successive Governments have made life more difficult for lone parents and their children. As a result of their policy decisions, many lone parents are either unemployed or underemployed, trapped in low paid precarious part time work, living in poverty, and struggling to afford the most basic necessities.

The absence of affordable childcare is a huge barrier for many lone parents trying to return to education or gain full time employment. In addition, financial supports for lone parents are inadequate especially since the changes to the One Parent Family Payment made by Fine Gael and the Labour Party in 2012. Research by Indecon (2017) concluded that these changes to the cut-off age for the One Parent Family Payment made lone parents and their children poorer.



Year after year, the CSO's Survey on Income and Living Conditions demonstrates that poverty rates are disproportionately high amongst lone parents and their children.

In Government, Sinn Féin would develop a cross Departmental Anti-Poverty Strategy with specific goals to be met by each Department within a specific timeframe - poverty proof all Budget measures and future policy changes and ensure that decisions on things like the criteria in place for the Working Family Payment are made in conjunction with lone parent organisations so that its effectiveness given the prevalence of low paid employment can be bolstered.

Seeking and receiving child maintenance payments from the other parent is another major challenge for many lone parents. Unlike many of our EU counterparts, Ireland has no service, statutory or otherwise, to assist lone parents with this.

Sinn Féin produced a policy paper proposing a Child Maintenance Service for Ireland. Then, in October 2019, with the support of leading lone parent organisations, we brought forward these proposals as part of a Dáil Motion which was successfully passed.

In Government, Sinn Féin would conduct research examining best international practice on determining, collecting, transferring and pursuing child maintenance payments. We would engage and include all stakeholders in this project from point of design and establishing terms of reference, to implementation.

We would establish, based on that research, a statutory Child Maintenance Service with sufficient links to Revenue and enforcement powers.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Raising the One Parent Family Payment and Jobseekers Transition Payment rate to €245**
- » **Increasing the age limit for the One-Parent Family Payment to 14 years and the earnings disregard to €175**
- » **Reducing the Working Family Payment hours threshold for lone parents**
- » **Establishing a Child Maintenance Service to assist and support lone parents and their children**

## People with disabilities

The deprivation rate amongst those who are not at work due to a disability is 51%, compared to the general population average of 29%. Having a disability gives rise to extra costs and therefore a higher income is required to achieve the same standard of living as a person without a disability.

To begin to recognise these additional costs, Sinn Féin proposes to increase the Disability Allowance payment rate to €265 which is €20 higher than the figure required to achieve a minimum essential standard of living in the absence of additional disability-related costs.

We also recognise the urgent need to eliminate barriers to employment for people with disabilities. Sinn Féin's proposed reforms to our health system include a full and secure medical card for people with disabilities that cannot be lost where a person takes up employment. We would also explore the introduction of a disability tax credit, similar to the Blind Persons tax credit.

Sinn Féin commends the work of the WALK Peer project which provides young people with disabilities in Co. Louth with opportunities of work experience in their dream job or the chance to access further educational opportunities in their field of interest.

We want to see its core principles and practices rolled out throughout the State so that no young person living with a disability is denied the opportunity to reach their full potential.



### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Increasing the Disability Allowance Payment rate to €265**
- » **Secure medical cards for people with disabilities that are not impacted by employment status**
- » **Protecting and replicating the hugely successful Walk PEER programme to give young people with a disability in every county all of the opportunities available to those without a disability in work experience and education**

## **Carers**

Carers are the backbone of our society. Every day they look after and care for some of our most vulnerable citizens. In doing so, they ensure that the person being cared for can remain in their own home – the place where they want to be. According to Family Carers Ireland, this saves the state around €10 billion annually.

Every day, the Government tells us about our improving and growing economy; yet, we are continuing to fail around 355,000 Carers across Ireland. The Government's National Carers' Strategy was published in 2012. That Strategy was never implemented by Government nor was it re-visited which they had committed to do.

In June 2019, Sinn Féin published a comprehensive policy document outlining our proposals for Carers ensuring they receive adequate supports, including a decent income while caring.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Developing and publishing a new and updated National Carers' Strategy with a dedicated budget and timeframe to ensure the implementation of all actions**
- » **Increasing the Carers Allowance and Benefit rate from €219 to €255**
- » **Ending the 15 hour rule restricting work or study outside the home and trust Carers to manage their own time**
- » **Increasing the annual Carer's Support Grant to €2,000 at a cost of €40 million**

## **Job activation**

We must look beyond the continual announcements by Fine Gael of unemployment figures and statistics and look at the actual people and the options available to them. The introduction of JobPath has seen the privatisation of job activation schemes where the onus is on numbers and profit rather than the individual.

There is a concerted effort by the Government to place an unjustified emphasis on JobPath and a move away from the Local Employment Service and Community Employment. In fact, once a person is engaged in JobPath they are disallowed from taking up relevant work within CE once it is offered.

Sinn Féin would abolish JobPath to end the privatisation agenda in job activation schemes; protect and invest in community based job activation schemes by increasing referrals of jobseekers to Local Employment Services, place a focus on apprenticeships for people who want to work and also gain an educational qualification, afford those genuinely in need of some work experience with meaningful learning opportunities, and maximise decent pay for decent work by ending job activation measures that undermine pay rates, terms and conditions, and legislating for a living wage.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Abolishing the JobPath scheme**
- » **Increase the number of Community Employment places by 1,000 at a cost of €5.4 million**





## Older people and their pensions

Sinn Féin believes that everyone has the right to grow old in Ireland with dignity, security, and equality. The reality for many of our older citizens under Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is that they now face additional taxes and charges, they cannot rely on the health service, and they have to struggle daily to heat their homes and meet their bills.

At the heart of pensions should be fairness and equality for all. Under Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, this has been missing and as a result, serious inequities and issues have emerged for people at retirement.

We have a gender pension gap close to 40% in Ireland, one of the highest in Europe. We view reduced pension payments awarded to women as punishment for taking time out of work to care for or rear children. It is unfair and Sinn Féin are determined to resolve this issue.

In 2011, the Labour Party and Fine Gael government introduced the legislation to increase the pension age – it increased to 66 in 2014 and will rise to 67 in 2021 and 68 in 2028. Fianna Fáil supported this legislation and voted for it at report stage. Sinn Féin opposed it.

Prior to that, Fianna Fáil and the Green Party in government in 2010 proposed the pension age increases. They included it in their Memorandum of Understanding with the Troika. Fianna Fáil also had it in their National Recovery Plan 2011 when they said that they would introduce legislation to give effect to the increases.

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In 2016, Sinn Féin brought forward a Dáil motion calling for the immediate reinstatement of the State Pension Transition for those who retire at 65. However, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael failed to back this motion, and instead voted against it.

We now have the farcical situation where a person who retires at 65 years, when they are typically contractually obliged to retire, cannot access their State Pension. Instead, they are forced onto a jobseeker's payment for the year.

Sinn Féin have consistently called on the Government to re-instate the State Pension (Transition) for 65-year olds and suspend the planned further increases to the State Pension age.

The impact of putting people on the dole instead of receiving their State Pension is a loss of €45.30 a week for a single person - €2,340 a year and a loss of €76 a week for a couple - €3,952 a year.

Sinn Féin also brought forward a Bill in the Dáil to end mandatory retirement where workers wish to remain at work beyond 65 years. In Government, we would progress this Bill and make it law.

Reintroducing the State Pension (Transition) for 65 year olds costs €150.5 million and stopping the planned pension age increase to 67 costs €217.5 million at current state pension payment rates according to estimates provided to Sinn Féin by both the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The combined cost of these measures is €368 million. Increasing the rates of these payments by €20 per week would cost a maximum additional €60 million.

Sinn Féin also proposed legislation to strengthen protections for occupational pension scheme members. This legislation would make it illegal for healthy, i.e. profitable, companies to walk away from their pension commitments.

In recognition of the overwhelming dependence of ordinary people on the State Pension system for their income in retirement, over the longer-term, Sinn Féin would like to see the roll out of a Universal Pension for every person based on age and residence. This should be set at a level that proofs against poverty and fully addresses the gender-based inequity of the past.





### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Protect the Free Travel Pass and increase the state pension rate by €20 over the term of government at a cost of almost €700 million**
- » **End mandatory retirement to allow workers who are able to and wish to remain at work beyond 65 years to do so if they so choose**
- » **Stop the planned pension age increase to 67 and reintroduce the State Pension for 65 year olds who choose to retire at a cost of €368 million**

# Transport, Tourism and Sport

## Clean, affordable public transport for the people, owned by the people, connecting all of Ireland

If we are serious about climate action and improving the quality of citizens' lives, then we need to see the most ambitious investment in public transport the island has ever seen. The best way to reduce car dependency is to provide alternatives, and so we need to invest in rail, bus, and active modes of transport such as cycling. This is essential as we move towards a carbon-neutral society.

Sinn Féin is the party that will invest in our public transport network and connect all 32 counties of Ireland.

Our public transport has suffered from decades of neglect and underinvestment. The plans in place now will be out of date when they are completed, if they ever are.

Sinn Féin will make the necessary investment to not just maintain our public transport but to catch Ireland up with our European neighbours through a modernisation of public transport making a system fit for the 21st century.

We need a first class, speedy, efficient, accessible and affordable public transport service.

Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann are in serious financial difficulty because the Government will not fund capital investment for the services.

If this policy of neglecting and underfunding public transport continues it is the travelling public who will lose out as both companies struggle to provide a decent service.

Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil seek to carve up our public transport for the highest bidder. Only Sinn Féin will run public transport as a public good, for the people and owned by the people.

This means making the investment necessary to expand our public transport system and make it affordable. It means investing on a far bigger scale than is currently planned. It means increasing the subvention for public transport to bring us towards comparative subventions in other EU States.

Public transport that is efficient and affordable will also be critical to tackling climate change. Sinn Féin will make our public transport greener than ever.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Increasing investment in public transport to provide real climate-friendly alternatives for commuters, expand routes, improve services, make fares more affordable and assist in resolving industrial disputes**
- » **Ending the privatisation agenda and where possible reverse these privatisations**



## Rural Ireland's transport needs will not be abandoned by Sinn Féin

In rural areas, public transport provides an important lifeline to those who are vulnerable to isolation. Sinn Féin will ensure that in rural areas profitability will no longer be the primary consideration when it comes to investment in transport infrastructure.

Investing in communities means investing in services to allow them to thrive and having a first-class public transport service connecting all of Ireland is central to that.

The Rural Transport Programme / Local Link is a vital service for the rural economy and encourages social inclusion for rural dwellers. The ongoing lack of investment in this crucial service means many communities do not have adequate transport links to local towns and villages. Sinn Féin would invest in the expansion of the service and the provision of new routes.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Increasing capital and PSO funding to Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann to increase transport services in rural areas**
- » **Introducing free fares for the under 18s on public transport at a cost of €35 million**
- » **Investing an additional €300 million in local and regional roads to ensure that people in rural areas have access to safe, good-quality roads**
- » **Doubling funding for the Rural Transport Programme/Local Link to ensure that the scheme can be expanded into more areas and play an increased role in providing evening transport for socialising especially in areas without other alternatives**

## Free School Transport

In our Alternative Budget for 2020, Sinn Féin committed to abolishing school transport costs to all those who currently avail of the scheme at a cost of roughly €16 million.

Sinn Féin in Government would carry out a full review of the operation of the value for money recommendations of the school transport scheme from a child rights perspective.

The current scheme is grossly underfunded, and completely inflexible. Sinn Féin want to make travel to and from school free to all pupils.

In terms of congestion, emissions and quality of life, school traffic is a fixture of modern life that we could all do without.

Sinn Féin is proposing an investment of €66 million additional resources for the School Transport Scheme to help alleviate the stress and the cost of the trip to school.

Our decade long ambition is to deliver free school transport for every child and, in our first term of Government, we would introduce free travel for the children availing of the School Transport Scheme at a cost of €16 million and invest an additional €50 million to increase the number of children who can avail of the scheme by 50,000.

We will set up a taskforce to decide in advance of next September how best this money can help. The taskforce will be given a number of priority areas to consider:

- » **Where the investment will have a significant impact on congestion**
- » **Where the extra resources can allow siblings avail of the same services**



- » **Examining the distance rule to see if a reduction would be beneficial**
- » **The needs of rural Ireland and more sparsely populated areas**

Many more children will benefit from our complementary proposal to introduce free fares on public transport for the under 18s.

**SINN FÉIN PRIORITY:**

- » **Reducing costs for families by introducing free travel for the under 18s on all public transport and the School Transport Scheme**

## Investing in our rail network

This Government has known since 2016 that Iarnród Éireann is on its knees from a capital infrastructure point of view. This was outlined in the NTA's rail review. The review laid out in stark terms how underfunded rail infrastructure has been and the consequences of that for safety and efficiency at present, as well as for the future of the service.

There are significant gaps in rail connectivity at present. Though some routes are under-utilised, with strategic supports, such as changes to frequency on some services, improvements in the network and a review of the cost of rail travel, it is envisaged that numbers of passengers using rail can be increased in the coming years. This is critical from a climate change perspective.

International best practice shows that a more complete railway network will bring huge benefit to the state. Sinn Féin is committed to increasing capital investment to Iarnród Éireann. Initially, this will allow the company to improve services, journey times and efficiency. In subsequent years we believe that increasing the network will bring great economic, social and environmental dividends.

In order to connect our island and respond appropriately to the climate crisis, many new rail projects are needed. Some projects will involve the reopening of existing rail links which are no longer in use such as the completion of the Western Rail Corridor and other projects need to be fast-tracked for example rail connections between Sligo, Donegal and Derry.

Our railway networks have been neglected to the point of also raising safety concerns, and the National Transport Authority (NTA) estimates that a €500 million investment is needed in the next five years to maintain the network.

**SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Investing in rail infrastructure to improve the safety, speed, and frequency of rail services to make them more attractive to intending travellers**
- » **Re-establishing a rail connection from Derry/ Donegal to Sligo and to Dublin which would significantly improve accessibility to the North West of Ireland**
- » **Completion of the Western Rail Corridor**
- » **Improving rail access for Navan and Meath**
- » **Funding the Cork Metropolitan Areas Transport strategy including a Light Rail line**
- » **Progressing the extension of the Luas to Bray, Finglas, Lucan and Poolbeg, the DART underground, and completing the Dublin Metro by 2027**
- » **Funding for the Limerick Transport Strategy including a light rail line if recommended**



## Investing in our road network

We need to rebalance the state to ensure regional and rural areas are not left to rot while Dublin is over-populated and existing infrastructure can't cope with demand.

The motorway network remains incomplete. A situation where all roads lead to Dublin, and a disproportionately high 40% of the population live in the Dublin City region must be remedied. It is not sustainable or desirable.

Continued neglect of infrastructure in regional cities, towns, and in rural areas and projected population growth in the East of the country will compound this issue.

It is important our regional cities have strong transport links between them going forward if they are to accommodate growth. Further to that, we need to ensure that we have motorways linking larger cities North and South, especially as we attempt more strategic planning in the form of improved links between smaller cities.

Sinn Féin is in favour of state investment in infrastructure. This Government and the last Government have ignored their duty to build and upgrade the country's infrastructure. In the last Budget, monies allocated for capital investment were woefully inadequate.

To make matters worse, the Fine Gael Government, supported by Fianna Fáil, have hitched their wagon to costly, risky Public Private Partnerships. This is despite the fact that we know they do not provide value for money. The Government knows this too, which is why we have no published reports on the value for money of these initiatives.

We need significant public investment in regional and local roads to ensure social cohesion and economic growth in rural areas and in towns across the state. Our regional and local road network is slowly disintegrating. For too long, rural communities have dropped down the priority list.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES**

- » **Investing in the completion of the motorway network including the Cork to Limerick motorway and A5 from Dublin to Derry/Donegal**
- » **Investing to address regional imbalance and give rural communities across the state roads that are fit for purpose and that will stand the test of time and weather.**
- » **Trebling funding for Local Improvement Schemes**

## Transitioning to electric vehicles (EVs)

The investment laid out here in affordable public transport, rail infrastructure and cycling are part of Sinn Féin's policy of transitioning to a transport system free from fossil fuels.

Another part of this is encouraging the use of electric vehicles. Unlike others, we do not see this as a magic wand, recognising that cultural change away from private cars is the best way to reduce our emissions. We will not set completely unrealistic targets for the uptake of electric vehicles.

We will however accelerate the roll-out of public EV charging infrastructure as this is critical to enable use of electric vehicles.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Accelerating the roll-out of public EV charging infrastructure by investing €50 million**



## Making cycling a safe option for commuters

Locating and developing Greenways and cycle tracks is of great importance especially in midlands and border areas, where the development of tourism will provide a much-needed boost to these areas as tourist destinations.

Infrastructure for cycle lanes must be developed to ensure that cyclists can travel safely. Having sufficient cycle lanes will increase the number of cyclists, in particular those who cycle to work which will reduce car use, improving congestion in towns and cities.

Currently a record 12,000 cyclists a day commute to Dublin City. This is the highest number since records began and yet, the infrastructure developed in recent years does not reflect this trend.

Investing in cycle lanes will increase this number further, whilst also tackling traffic gridlock, improving physical and mental health and reducing emissions from motor vehicles.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Revising the National Cycle Policy Framework to ensure that cycling is encouraged and facilitated in both urban and rural areas for commuters and leisure cyclists alike**
- » **Conducting a nationwide and cross-border review of possible Greenway and cycle track sites with input from local authorities and community and interest groups which would form an important part of a long-term national transport strategy**
- » **Investing in cycling infrastructure including the metropolitan cycle network set out in the Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network Plan and the Athlone to Galway EuroVelo network**

## Ports and airports

In light of Brexit and as an-island nation, our Ports are a crucial part of our connectivity with the wider world.

They require ongoing investment and Sinn Féin would push for maximum use of EU funding streams to make sure all our ports remain viable and add to the national and regional economies.

Our regional airports must be developed as strategically important international gateways to regional areas. Changes in European state aid rules mean that the state is now in a position to make public investments in regional airports with full legal certainty and without prior control by the Commission. It also allows public authorities to cover operating costs of small airports handling up to 200,000 passengers per year. Strategic investment in our regional airports will offer connectivity, and development potential in regional areas.

The option of reuniting Shannon with Dublin and Cork with a company policy aiming for greater regional balance across the three airports must be investigated. Shannon Airport is vital to the Mid-West region as a gateway for industry and tourism and to ensure regional development.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Developing, in conjunction with the authorities in the North, a comprehensive development plan to maximise the growth potential of our regional airports and maximise their potential into the future.**
- » **Encouraging investment in regional airports, which while boosting the connectivity of peripheral regions would also benefit the local economy and tourism of these areas.**



- » Working to establish strategic development zones around regional airports of critical sizes to boost prospects of job creation in those areas;
- » Prioritising road and rail connections in line with the ambitions of regional airports to realise the strategic potential of these airports in rural and peripheral areas.

## All-Ireland projects

Sinn Féin recognises the value of all-Ireland infrastructure and cooperation. We are determined to ensure that the commitment to the A5 Dublin-Derry road project is delivered on.

We would ensure that the entire €400 million originally committed to by the Government is adhered to. The A5 is a vital piece of All Ireland infrastructure which must be delivered.

The Ulster Canal Project is another vital piece of all Ireland infrastructure in need of development. It has the potential to transform tourism in Armagh, Tyrone, Cavan, Fermanagh, and Monaghan. Sinn Féin are committed to furthering this project.

The Narrow Water Bridge would link the Cooley Peninsula in County Louth with the Mourne District in County Down benefiting local and cross-border economies and communities. Sinn Féin remains committed to the development of this project.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » Prioritising delivery of the A5 Upgrade, the Ulster Canal Project and Narrow Water
- » An hourly Belfast-Dublin train

## Accessible transport

Access to transport is vitally important for people living with disabilities to facilitate social inclusion. Appropriate, accessible transport ensures that people with disabilities can have access to work, healthcare and other services and social activities.

A major infrastructure programme is needed to make all public transport services fully wheelchair accessible. We propose investing a total of €120 million to replace non-wheelchair accessible vehicles in Bus Éireann, construct wheelchair accessible bus stops and undertake accessibility works to bus stations, railway stations, and the train fleet over the term of Government.

Very large contracts are awarded by the state on an annual basis to Taxi operators. In the tender process for the awarding of these contracts, considerable extra weighting should be given to taxi operators with accessible vehicles.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » Rolling out Access Ireland Transport - a Sinn Féin major infrastructure programme
- » Using public procurement to promote accessibility across the taxi fleet

## Tourism

Sinn Féin recognise that tourism is an important driver of economic and social development. The sector stimulates economic growth by generating income, employment and investment in Ireland.





It helps to sustain our cultural and natural heritage, provides revenue to fund facilities and infrastructure enjoyed by visitors and residents to and from this island.

Sinn Féin believes a holistic all-island wide approach is needed taking into account the multiple impacts of the sector as well as the wide spectrum of stakeholders involved or affected by tourism. Regionally balanced investment in tourism infrastructure is key to unlocking the vast potential of this sector, especially in areas which are not traditionally strong in this regard.

Our approach to maintaining and enhancing this important sector will be underpinned by the following principles – sustainability, respect for our natural and built heritage and quality jobs with good pay and decent working conditions.

As we approach Brexit, many operators and business owners that rely on our tourism industry are feeling anxious about the possible impacts it may have on visitor numbers and tourist accessibility.

Sinn Féin wants to protect the people who rely on consistent visitor numbers to make a living. We want to counteract any impact of Brexit by boosting our abilities of Ireland as a tourist destination abroad in new markets and states while ensuring that those in the sector have the resources to compete in a fast-changing market.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Increase the capacity of the OPW and Heritage Council to maintain, protect and develop the more than 700 sites and monuments for which they are responsible and expand their operations.**
- » **Pursue increased cooperation between Tourism NI and Fáilte Ireland to cultivate tourism, particularly in border areas, with potential projects including the expansion of Ireland’s Ancient East to include northern areas, for example the Mourne Mountains in Co Down, and the expansion of the Wild Atlantic Way to include coastal counties in the North of Ireland.**
- » **Increase Tourism Ireland’s budget by €6 million in the first year of Government to open new markets and combat challenges which may arise from Brexit**
- » **Increase festival funding for national and communities’ festivals organised by local Government.**
- » **Build upon successes on the various greenway projects to create new greenways and connections to promote activity-based tourism**

## **Sport**

Ireland has long been a sporting nation. We get behind our teams and our athletes. Whether that be at grassroot, amateur level or supporting our elite athletes and teams wherever or whenever they represent Ireland in competition.

We fill stadiums, we flood the streets and we travel the globe to support our teams and sportspeople. Sport is a large part of our culture, a part of who we are and what we do. Sport in Ireland is reflective of the society that we have created and brings with it multiple benefits to each individual and communities that is part of this tradition and culture.

A recent report for the Federation of Irish Sport shows that every euro invested in Sport returns up to €1.95 in value for the country. This clearly shows the benefit of the sporting economy. But there is simply no monetary value that can be placed on the health, well-being, and social benefits that sport delivers to us all.

Sinn Féin believe that sport and exercise are key elements of building a healthier Ireland and tackling obesity, especially amongst our youth. We recognise that by promoting healthy lifestyles through sport and exercise, we can enable people to live long and active lives.



Investment in sports can be recouped through preventative spending capacity in other areas, such as health and mental health.

Sport has a proven role both in post-conflict situations, and as a targeted programme of intervention that contributes to social cohesion.

Sinn Féin has long called for all-Ireland leagues and teams wherever possible. Not only would this improve our competitiveness on the international stage but would be an important step in terms of the process of reconciliation that is required right across our island.

We acknowledge the link between investment in sport and the reduction of child poverty and believe that it can also play an important role in crime and anti-social behaviour reduction.

In Government, we would seek to tackle the most prominent sources of inequality in sports participation; namely class, gender, and geography. Without tackling these three issues, there is a real risk of masking the growing polarisation in the consumption of sport between the classes.

We recognise the potential of the sporting economy, especially in terms of job creation and increased sports tourism. We will boost sport in local communities and at grassroots level through increased funding of the Sports Capital Programme and the delivery of a Large-Scale Sports infrastructure Fund.

Sinn Féin insists that sport can and should be for all, regardless of ability, gender, geography or class and to achieve this we would include the following as priorities for Government.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **€1.35m of Sugar Tax to pay for anti-obesity campaign**
- » **Host Homeless World Cup (Irish Homeless Street Leagues)**
- » **Increase public expenditure on Sports and Recreation Services by €7 million or 10%**
- » **Support for the 20x20 campaign meaning a 20% increase in media coverage of women in sport, a 20% increase in female participation at all levels of sport and a 20% increase in attendance at women's games and events**
- » **Reduce by €50 to €200 the eligibility threshold for capital reliefs on individual donations to sports capital projects**
- » **€9 million or 20% increase for the Sports Capital Programme making it an annual grant scheme**
- » **Work with all sports bodies to support the creation of all-Ireland teams and leagues wherever possible**
- » **Aim for 20 Olympic/Paralympic medals in Paris 2024 through support for elite athletes meaning a Top 50 performance in the Olympics and a top 20 in the Paralympics**



# Political reform

Irish society has changed considerably and very quickly over recent years. The political structures that are tasked with building and developing Irish society have not changed to reflect this as they should.

Reform to the way we conduct politics is needed across the three structures of our Oireachtas; the Office of the President, the Dáil and the Seanad.

In the previous Oireachtas term, public confidence in the political system was rocked by various scandals such as unethical expenses claims, voting when not in attendance and clocking in when not present.

Sinn Féin in Government would not tolerate such abuse of political power and our proposals set out to restore confidence in politics and ensure that those in power are working for the people and not for money or the vested interests of the golden circle establishment.

## **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Delivering speaking rights for elected representatives from the north**
- » **Lowering the voting age to 16 and extending voting rights in Presidential elections to people living in the North and to the Irish diaspora**
- » **Establishing an independent Electoral Commission that registers all political parties, regulates electoral standards including around financial donations and interests, runs elections and referenda, is in charge of the Electoral Register and voter registration and takes proactive measures to increase voter participation**
- » **Overhauling voter registration by automatically registering voters as soon as they become eligible to vote and using PPS numbers to avoid fraud. This would be complimented by an information and education program in all schools to ensure students are aware they are registered and how to go about exercising their vote**
- » **Building incrementally on the gender quota in Dáil elections towards 50% and ensuring at least 30% of Ministers and Junior Ministers are female in line with gender quotas**

## The Dáil

The public have lost confidence in the Dáil, this must be a priority focus for political reform.

## **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Ending the unvouched expenses system currently operating, making all expenses payments open to public scrutiny and examination, ending all additional allowances for TDs who chair Oireachtas Committees, and reduce excessive pension payments to Taoisigh, Ministers and top civil servants**
- » **Removing the constitutional restriction on bills or amendments with financial impacts or reference to being tabled by Opposition TDs**
- » **Changing the law to allow for the impeachment or removal from the Dáil of any TD involved in corruption, deliberate misuse of public money or fraud**
- » **Establishing a new joint Oireachtas committee which would scrutinise the Department of An Taoiseach comprising Opposition Party leaders, TDs and senators**
- » **Introduce family-friendly sittings in common with modern and best parliamentary practice in other jurisdictions**



## The Seanad

The public voted to retain the Seanad, but it is badly in need of reform.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » Opening up election to the Seanad to all members of the public and ensuring 50% of its make-up is through popular vote
- » Holding elections to the Seanad on the same day as Dáil elections
- » Ensuring a wide representation of Senators from across society including all minority groups delivering a diverse Seanad
- » Ensuring gender quotas are also met in the Seanad working towards a 50/50 representation
- » Implementing the previously commissioned Manning report in full

## The Office of President

The Office of the President adds to our democracy. Sinn Féin believes however that changes can be made to its functions to strengthen its relevance to modern day Ireland.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » Reducing the term of the Office of the President from the current seven years to five years, matching the term of a sitting Oireachtas
- » Making the office subject to freedom of information requests and available to Oireachtas committees to examine spending, procedures and operations
- » Opening voting in Presidential elections to citizens across the island of Ireland and our diaspora



# Workers' Rights

## A Living Wage for workers

Sinn Féin believes in a Living Wage for workers.

The minimum wage has failed to take into account the day-to-day costs that the Government has let spiral out of control, such as the massive increase in rents, the price of education, the enormous cost of insurance, or the huge monthly childcare costs that are putting strain on families across the state.

Many workers currently earning the minimum wage are living hand to mouth each month. That is unacceptable. Workers should not be living on the breadline.

We believe now is the time to introduce the Living Wage of €12.30 per hour for workers while also putting appropriate safeguards in place for those financially vulnerable businesses who may not be able to afford this change immediately.

Workers should be able to earn an income that's enough to pay for the basic necessities of life, to live with dignity and to participate as active citizens in our society. That is not too much to ask.

The State as an employer should also show leadership on this issue, and that is why Sinn Féin would make the civil service and public sector a living wage employer at a cost of €3.8 million.

Raising the minimum hourly wage is not enough. We must simultaneously strengthen collective bargaining so that workers can secure fair wages, greater security, decent career pathways and the strongest possible terms and conditions of employment.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Legally obliging those employers that can afford to pay the Living Wage to do so**
- » **Strengthening collective bargaining**

## Gender pay gap

Everyone, without discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

According to figures from Eurostat, women's gross hourly earnings were 16% below those of men in the European Union, while the gender pay gap here was 13.9%. This is completely unacceptable and must be addressed.

We support legislation that would see employers being required to publish information relating to the gender pay gap in their organisations, engage and agree measures with their trade unions and show the measures they will take to eliminate or reduce the gender pay gap.

Unfortunately, this legislation has progressed at a snail's pace under the current Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil Government.

There are other structural inequalities that will not be addressed by a reporting mechanism but will benefit from reporting in terms of awareness and data. For example, women take more time out of the labour market over their lifetime due to caring responsibilities.

These gaps negatively impact career progression, earnings and pension entitlements. Occupational and educational segregation also result in lower wages for women, for example retail, hospitality and nursing. The promotion of collective bargaining is absolutely critical to address these causes of the gender pay and pensions gap.



The majority of workers who currently earn the minimum wage are female. Our plan to introduce the Living Wage of €12.30 per hour will benefit tens of thousands of female workers.

We believe the Living Wage will not just tackle the low pay economy, but also help address the unacceptable gender pay gap that remains in Ireland.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Enacting the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill and strengthening it by also including fines for those companies who fail to take measures to reduce the gender pay gap in their organisation**
- » **Amending the National Minimum Wage (Low Pay Commission) Act 2015 to enable the Commission to examine structural pay inequalities for women and in-work poverty**
- » **Promoting collective bargaining**

## Overhauling our industrial relations legislation

Sinn Féin would overhaul the state's industrial relations legislation, recognising that the current voluntarist system has been undermined by the union busting behaviour of some employers and has effectively provided an opt-out for many big employers in the State.

Refusal to recognise trade unions or their representatives, the inability of trade unions to access their members in their workplace, and the outright disregard for decisions of the Labour Court show the urgent need to revamp our current industrial relations laws in order to protect workers.

The best way to avoid industrial disputes is to have genuine engagement and respect for all sides. A legal framework for collective engagement is required to make voluntary engagement meaningful.

Sinn Féin recognises the Workplace Relations Commission as a vital piece of our industrial relations architecture. Its role in arbitration and dispute resolution is critical and the long waiting times for those using their services must be tackled.

Stronger legislation including a right to collective bargaining has the potential to transform Ireland, to shrink the gap between the rich and those with less, to ensure workers secure a fair share of profits in the form of higher wages, and to bring about a more productive and stable economy.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Creating a legal requirement on employers to recognise authorised trade unions in receipt of a negotiating licence, for the purposes of collective bargaining and individual representation**
- » **Introducing legislation that would see employers and trade unions work out a reasonable time for union representatives to access their members in their place of work and protections against penalisation comparable to protections contained in the Protected Disclosures Act 2014**
- » **A right to access for trade unions to meet workers who are not yet organised into a trade union**
- » **Introducing a domestic Trade Union Rights Act that includes the right to collective bargaining and advocating for an EU Directive including same**
- » **Access for members of our Defence Forces to the industrial relations machinery of the state**
- » **Increased funding for the Workplace Relations Commission by 50% at a cost of €7.6 million**





- » **Appointing a Super Junior Minister for Labour Affairs to bring the workers' rights agenda to the heart of cabinet**
- » **Restoring tax relief on trade union dues at a cost of €39.5 million**
- » **Legal protection for at source deduction of union subscriptions**
- » **Reform of strike laws to reduce legal interference in the rights of workers taking collective action**
- » **Introducing reforms to enhance the operation of JLCs and remove the employer veto, to ensure where representatives of workers and or employers cannot be established, the Labour Court can then proceed and appoint representative members to a JLC, or where it proves impossible to organise a JLC, the Labour Court may then formulate its own draft Employment Regulation Order, with due regards for both sides, for sign-off by the Minister**
- » **Outlawing the black listing of trade unionists by making it unlawful to compile, use, sell or supply blacklists containing details of people who are or have been union members or who are taking part, or have taken part, in trade union activities, an industrial action or strike**
- » **Enabling workers to take action promptly where a unionised colleague is sacked**

## Further protecting and enhancing workers' rights

Bogus self-employment arises when an employer wrongly treats an employee as a self-employed contractor, in order for the business to avoid paying PRSI and allowing them to avoid key employment obligations for their workers.

The use of bogus self-employment means workers are not protected by some key pieces of employment legislation. Their employment can be ended at will and employees are not entitled to benefits such as sick pay, maternity leave and holiday pay.

In line with legislation that Sinn Féin has already proposed in the Dáil, we will ensure employers can no longer avoid an employer-employee relationship by drafting contracts, explicitly or implicitly, that do not accord with the reality of the employment relationship.

Sinn Féin recognise that with advances in technology, many workers, whether wanted or not, find themselves bringing work related issues home with them. This can have a negative effect on workers' mental health and work-related stress.

Research from the Financial Services Union found that 25% of respondents to their survey said their boss expected them to answer calls or emails outside of normal work hours.

For some professions, work outside the normal nine to five is the norm, while other businesses already have policies in place to ensure their workers' rights are protected.

However, due to the absence of legislation in this area, some workers are being exploited, and the lack of legal protections means they are reluctant to speak up. Sinn Féin would legislate for a right to disconnect.

In 2017, it was uncovered through an extensive survey in the Galway hospitality sector that 33% of workers experience the regular withholding of their tips by an employer. This is happening because workers in Ireland do not currently have a statutory right to take home the tips which they earn. We cannot allow this exploitation of workers to continue.



In Government, Sinn Féin would legislate to give workers a legal right to keep any tips that they receive in the workplace - making it an illegal offence for an employer to unlawfully withhold or deduct a worker's tips. Sinn Féin would also introduce a regulated 'Tronc scheme' to facilitate workers who wish to equitably re-distribute their tips amongst one another.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Ending the 'bogus self-employment' abuse of employment law, in order to protect workers and ensure businesses are paying their pay related social insurance contribution**
- » **Introducing legislation that will give workers a right to disconnect from work outside of normal work hours, and require employers, in consultation with employees and their trade union representatives, to put in place a right to disconnect policy for their workers**
- » **Banning the theft of workers' tips by employers**
- » **Making use of social clauses in public procurement to bolster workers' rights**
- » **Amending the Worker Participation Act to extend the Elected Worker Director Model to all public and commercial semi-state boards**
- » **Stopping tactical insolvencies and protecting redundancy payments by implementing proposals from the 2016 Cahill Duffy Report on the Clery's lockout**

## **Public Expenditure and Reform**

### **A new deal for public service staff**

Sinn Féin are committed to improving our public services and striking a new deal for frontline staff and those on low pay. The problems of our public services are a result of mismanagement and underinvestment by Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael.

We are committed to improving the pay and conditions of our frontline staff and lower paid workers. They are the biggest assets of our public services.

Sinn Féin will make sure that increases in public pay put frontline staff and lower paid workers first. We will phase out the costly and wasteful use of agency staff, improving the conditions of the people who deliver public services and do so much for all of us. We will allocate funding for this new deal that would rebalance our public services and improve pay and conditions for frontline workers.

#### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Striking a new deal on public sector pay that is aimed at improving the pay and conditions of our frontline staff, making sure increased funding goes where it is needed to recruit and retain the people who deliver on the frontline. We will also ensure that it delivers for low and middle-income workers**
- » **Immediately making the public sector a Living Wage employer, so that every worker in our public sector earns no less than €12.30 per hour**



- » **Delivering full pay equality for post-2011 entrants in our public sector who earn less than their colleagues for equal work. This would benefit 60,000 public sector workers, including nearly 5,000 Special Need Assistants and 10,000 nurses**
- » **Recognising the value of the 2,000 Section 39 organizations that are publicly funded to provide healthcare and disability services in our communities. We will restore their pay**
- » **Re-establishing the Public Service Pay Commission to provide recommendations on the pay and conditions of frontline staff, with a focus on recruitment, retention and outcomes for patients, pupils and communities. It will also review levels of pay and pensions for senior management in the public sector**
- » **Reducing politicians' pay to ensure that funding for our public services is spent where it is needed. We will reduce TD salaries to €75,000 and Senators' salaries to €60,000. We will reduce the salary top-ups of An Taoiseach and Government Ministers by 50 percent, and use these savings to invest in frontline public services**

## Ending waste and reforming procurement

The State is one of the biggest buyers in the economy, purchasing goods and services to deliver public services and infrastructure.

Fine Gael have been unable to manage expenditure or spend taxpayers' money efficiently. Unable to manage big infrastructure projects such as the National Children's Hospital and National Broadband Plan, taxpayers have been ripped off by a Government that is unable to deliver projects on time or on budget.

Sinn Féin will reform how the State buys goods and services. This will enable Government to deliver value for money for the taxpayer while leveraging procurement to build community wealth.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Delivering better value for the taxpayer by disqualifying contractors who have demonstrated bad performance in previous public contracts and by excluding abnormally low bidders from the tendering process. Sinn Féin would ensure that contractors who have ripped off the taxpayer in the past aren't awarded public contracts in the future**
- » **Encouraging our SMEs and indigenous businesses to apply and win public contracts through advice and training; making sure procurement is not just about buying at the cheapest price but offering opportunities to our SMEs and indigenous businesses**
- » **Using public procurement to promote trade union recognition and good jobs for marginalized groups such as longer term unemployed and people with disabilities**
- » **Reforming public procurement to stop wealth flowing out of our communities, villages and towns. We will build local wealth and regeneration in communities and regions by leveraging the use of procurement and investment from local anchor institutions such as Institutes of Technology and hospitals, encouraging them to buy from local supply chains**
- » **Ending the outsourcing of policy decisions to unaccountable private consultants, saving resources and increasing accountability**
- » **Ending the privatisation of our public services and infrastructure. Instead we will promote public ownership of vital infrastructure and public service**



# Finance

## Giving workers and families a break through fair taxation

Public services and affordable housing are the building blocks of a fair society.

Badly run and poorly funded public services are failing too many families and communities. Workers and families are feeling the strain of unaffordable costs. With the high cost of living, many are unable to look ahead or plan for the future.

The provision of housing, universal access to healthcare and investment in our communities must be funded through a taxation system that is fair, sustainable and just. How we tax should reflect the society we want to build.

We will ensure that all workers will receive a tax cut while only the top 3% of individual earners will see any increase in their net income tax and guarantee no increase in VAT which hits those on low and middle incomes hardest.

Sinn Féin will give workers a break, by making our tax system work for them and putting money back in their pockets in the face of rising costs. We will protect our public finances and increase funding for our frontline public services by broadening the tax base and making sure those who benefit most from our economy pay their fair share.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Making all income below €30,000 exempt from USC, benefitting all workers. This will mean no USC is paid on the first €30,000 you earn**
- » **Abolishing the Local Property Tax (LPT), replacing it with direct Exchequer funding for local authorities. The LPT hits low and middle incomes and, for many, acts as a tax on debt as they struggle with negative equity or high mortgage interest payments**
- » **Increasing the Earned Income Credit for the Self-Employed to €1,650, a promise Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil failed to keep. Together with making the first €30,000 earned exempt from USC, we will lift the tax burden on self-employed workers on modest incomes**
- » **Ensuring that those who benefit most from our economy pay their fair share, funding our public services and protecting the public finances. We will introduce a 5% levy on individual incomes above €140,000, and remove tax credits from individual incomes above €140,000, tapered at a rate of 2.5% for every €1,000 above €100,000**
- » **Abolishing the Special Assignee Relief Programme (SARP). SARP is a tax break given to the richest multinational employees but denied to ordinary workers and families.**

## Tackling the insurance rip-off

Insurance costs are squeezing incomes and crippling business. Across the state, businesses and childcare providers face the threat of closure because of a broken insurance market.

Motorists, for whom insurance is a legal requirement, are facing extortionate premiums that are hitting their pay packets. The insurance industry must be challenged and the sector fundamentally reformed.



A recent Central Bank report found that, despite the cost of claims reducing by 2% in the past decade, the average motor premium has gone up by 42%.

For years, the insurance industry has pursued an aggressive campaign to portray sky-high premiums as the result of claims and fraud. Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil have served the industry by peddling their spin.

Sinn Féin have been instrumental in holding the insurance companies to account for ripping off consumers to service their own profits. Our Consumer Insurance Contracts Bill became law at the end of 2019, increasing protections for consumers and shifting the balance of power in their favour. We also won the agreement of the Central Bank to investigate dual pricing by the insurance industry.

Fine Gael have failed to protect consumers and tackle the pricing practices of the insurance companies. We will drive radical reform of the insurance market, banning unfair pricing practices, increasing consumer protections and intervening in a broken insurance market.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Establishing a stand-alone Garda Insurance Fraud Unit made up of a dedicated team of detectives, garda staff and financial investigators. This unit will be funded with reserves built up by the Personal Injuries Assessment Board (PIAB)**
- » **Introducing legislation to ban unfair pricing in the insurance market. Insurance companies are using big data to target loyal customers and vulnerable groups with artificially high premiums. We will end price discrimination in the insurance market**
- » **Enforcing all parts of our Consumer Insurance Contracts Bill, which became law at the end of 2019. This legislation increases transparency and shifts the balance of power away from insurance companies and in favour of consumers in their insurance contracts**
- » **Putting €230 million back in the pockets of policyholders by abolishing levies paid on non-life insurance policies, reducing premiums for consumers by 5%. We will ensure that our reforms of the insurance market are followed by lower insurance costs for consumers**
- » **Increasing transparency in the market by forcing companies to show how they set their prices to the Central Bank and extending the National Information Claims Database to public and employer liability**
- » **Delivering certainty around the cost of claims by funding the Judicial Council as it establishes personal injury guidelines for the courts and by strengthening the role of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board**
- » **Establishing a review of the common duty of care, seeking input from a range of specialists and voices, to ensure that there is a fair and proportionate balance between the responsibilities of individuals, small businesses and community groups**
- » **Intervening in a broken insurance market and providing stability to our small business and community/voluntary sector. Our policy proposal to transform childcare into a public service will guarantee insurance cover for childcare providers under Irish Public Bodies, just like our schools and hospitals**



## Holding the banking sector to account

It is only a decade since the banks of this state crashed our economy. Poor regulation, an arrogant banking class, and a parasitic relationship between the banks and Government of the time created a dangerous climate for customers, taxpayers, and our democracy.

While our economy and banking system has recovered due to the efforts of the Irish people, it was done at great social cost to citizens and huge financial cost to taxpayers.

The Irish public bailed out the banks at a cost of €42 billion. It will cost the taxpayer over €1 billion a year to service this debt in the decades ahead. Despite making combined profits of over €2.2 billion in 2018 alone, Permanent TSB, Bank of Ireland, and AIB pay nothing in corporation tax. It is time the banks gave something back to the Irish people.

Government must be vigilant and hold the banks to account.

The tracker mortgage scandal has shown how the culture in our banks hasn't changed, with the Chief Executive of KBC recently describing compensation paid to those who were subject to the scandal as an administrative burden. Only recently, the Deputy Governor of the Central Bank criticised the banks for being too slow and unwilling to put their customers first.

Sinn Féin will challenge the arrogance and contempt for customers that persists at the core of our banking system. We do not believe that banks should exist only to increase their profits and deliver handsome dividends and bonuses for their managers. Banks should exist to support Irish society, its customers and businesses.

In 2017, Sinn Féin's Central Bank and Financial Services Authority Bill became law. This legislation removed a rule that prevented the Financial Services Ombudsman from hearing complaints about financial products that had been sold six years before the time of complaint.

It has allowed customers and families to seek redress and receive compensation from banks during the tracker mortgage scandal.

The banks are also charging excessive mortgage interest rates and selling off family homes to vulture funds without putting the needs of their customers first. We will make sure the banks pay their fair share, price their products fairly and put the interests of their customers first.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Giving the Central Bank power to cap mortgage interest rates. In 2015, Sinn Féin brought forward legislation that would allow the Central Bank to cap mortgage interest rates charged by Irish banks. While Fine Gael defeated the Bill, we would give the Central Bank the power to follow its words with actions and cap mortgage interest rates set by banks**
- » **Capping the interest rates charged by moneylenders; protecting borrowers and the financially vulnerable. In 2018, Sinn Féin introduced legislation that would cap interest rates at 36% and ease the burden for 330,000 people who borrow from moneylenders in the State. We will regulate moneylenders and loan sharks to protect those who have no choice but to borrow to make ends meet**
- » **Keeping the salary cap and ban on bankers' bonuses in place, ensuring that those banks bailed out by the taxpayer do not return to the excessive pay and reckless culture of the past**
- » **Introducing legislation that would require senior personnel at our banks to identify key areas for which they are responsible, and empower the law and our Central Bank to sanction, disqualify or jail those culpable for failings in financial institutions**





- » **Basing any decision to sell State assets on the interests of our citizens. We will keep the State's 71% ownership of AIB, ensuring that the State remains an important player in the banking sector and that decisions made at board level are made in the interests of mortgage-holders, borrowers and customers**
- » **Ending the corporation tax break for the bailed-out banks. In 2014, Fine Gael and Labour allowed these banks to write off their past losses against future profits to reduce their corporation tax bill to zero. We will end this tax break for the bailed-out banks and increase the banking levy**
- » **Widening the remit of the Central Bank to enforce better standards and fair pricing by banks, financial institutions and insurance companies**
- » **Reviewing the credit options available to SMEs and regions, including the viability of a local public banking model based on the German Sparkassen model**

## Supporting our credit unions

Credit unions are a vital part of our credit system. Without credit unions, many families and communities would be unable to borrow or invest. While the banking sector was instrumental in destroying the economy, credit unions helped many families survive the consequences.

With an asset base of €16 billion, credit unions have the capacity to deliver a greater range of financial services. Their community ethos and social capital base means our credit unions are different from the banking sector. Sinn Féin will support the development of a credit environment that best serves communities, SMEs and regions.

### **SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Encouraging the reform of restrictive lending rules to allow credit unions to play a more active role in the mortgage market and the delivery of social housing**
- » **Reversing planned increases in the Industrial Funding Levy that will be applied to credit unions, recognising their social ethos and social capital base**

## Taking on vultures and ending the great Irish sell-off

The effects of the economic crisis and property crash still live with us today. Our housing and property sector should have been rebuilt in the interests of citizens, renters and homeowners.

Instead, Fine Gael rolled out the red carpet to vulture funds and international investors, allowing them to Hoover up assets from distressed families and buy up commercial property in our towns and cities. They have allowed these vultures and funds to transfer wealth out of Ireland to hidden international investors using low-tax arrangements.

Vulture funds have entered the Irish market to buy up distressed assets at knock-down prices. This has seen thousands of family homes sold off to vulture funds with no protections for distressed mortgage-holders. Sinn Féin will stand up for families by making it illegal for banks to sell these homes to vulture funds without the consent of the mortgage-holder.

Since 2013, Fine Gael has put in place a low tax regime for international funds and their investors to buy up commercial property in our cities and towns.

These funds have been able to buy up Irish property and real estate, avoiding tax and transferring wealth out of Ireland to their shareholders abroad. Sinn Féin were instrumental in introducing anti-avoidance measures against these property investment funds.



Sinn Féin will end the sell-off of Irish wealth and property to vulture funds and international investors. We will close tax loopholes that allow these funds to avoid paying their fair share and clamp down on vulture funds that are preying on distressed families and homes.

**SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Making it illegal for banks to sell homes to vulture funds without the consent of the mortgage-holder, by making our No Consent, No Sale Bill law**
- » **Increasing the Dividend Withholding Tax (DWT) for REITs and IREFs from 25% to 33%**
- » **Applying a rate of 33% Capital Gains Tax on all property disposals by REITs and IREFs**
- » **Applying the full rate of commercial stamp duty on REITs and IREFs**
- » **Increasing the rate of commercial stamp duty from 7.5% to 12.5%, responding to a potential property bubble and encouraging our construction sector to focus its resources on house building**

## Tax sovereignty and transparency

Sinn Féin will defend the sovereignty of the Irish tax system. This includes our corporation tax rate. In recent years, our corporation tax rate and how it is applied has come under close scrutiny.

Fine Gael has damaged Ireland's reputation by opposing moves towards greater transparency in the international tax system and in its legal battle with the EU Commission in the Apple case. We will uphold Ireland's sovereignty, while supporting greater transparency in the international tax system.

**SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES:**

- » **Maintaining a corporation tax rate of 12.5%**
- » **Cooperating with the OECD's Base Erosion Profit Shifting (BEPS) initiative and supporting greater transparency regarding where multinationals make their profits and pay their taxes**
- » **Introducing an 80% cap on profits offset by capital allowances for intangible assets that were onshored between 2015 and 2018 by multinationals. This follows a recommendation made by the Chair of the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council in a report commissioned by the Department for Finance but ignored by the Government**
- » **Ending the Government appeal against the EU Commission finding that Apple owes the Irish people €14.3 billion. To date Fine Gael have cost the Irish taxpayer more than €7 million in legal fees. We will end this appeal and use the available resources that could arise to tackle climate change, transform our public services and upgrade our infrastructure for the betterment of our citizens**



## Investing in the Future and Protecting the Public Finances

*Sinn Féin's tax and spending plans have been costed by the Department of Finance and Department of Public Expenditure & Reform. Their impact on the public finances, including their affect on the General Government Balance, has also been verified by the Department of Finance.*

Our policies are underpinned by a sustainable fiscal strategy that will protect our economy and safeguard the public finances from risks that may arise in the future.

We will fund day-to-day spending through sustainable tax revenue and ensure budgetary surpluses from 2021 to 2025, protecting us from any sudden decline in tax receipts. Our tax and spending plans take account of the implementation of the OECD BEPS initiative and the expected decline in our corporation tax revenue that will follow. By running surpluses, we will be in a position to withstand any sudden drop in corporation tax receipts.

Our tax and spending plans will deliver on the priorities of workers and families. It will ensure that our tax base is resilient and our economy secure. This will be achieved through a sustainable and progressive fiscal policy:

- » **We will provide for an additional €12.2 billion in current spending and €9.9 billion in capital investment;**
- » **We will run a budgetary surplus every year, reaching a surplus of €3.4 billion by 2025 to protect against any shock to our tax base or decline in revenue;**
- » **Sinn Féin will make sure that our public finances are in a strong position to withstand any shocks to our tax base, while reducing our public debt level as a proportion of national income every year.**



## APPENDIX 1: Investing in the Future

The tables below provide the additional allocations that Sinn Féin would make to improve public services, and deliver for workers and families. These allocations are in addition to what has already been pre-committed for the period 2021 -2025, including funding for demographic pressures.

### ADDITIONAL CURRENT SPENDING MEASURES

	€ million
Agriculture, Food and the Marine	90
Business, Enterprise and Innovation	85
Children and Youth Affairs	980
Communications, Climate Action and the Environment	245
Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	45
Defence	15
Employment Affairs and Social Protection	3,332
Education and Skills	1,142
Foreign Affairs and Trade	50
Health	4,514
Housing, Planning and Local Government	227
Justice and Equality	272
Public Expenditure and Reform	982
Rural and Community Development	4
Transport, Tourism and Sport	265
Irish Unity Forum and Referendum Preparation	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12,249*</b>

### ADDITIONAL CAPITAL SPENDING MEASURES

	€ million
Communications, Climate Action and the Environment	30
Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	35
Defence	15
Education and Skills	225
Health	1,579
Housing, Planning and Local Government	6,500
Rural and Community Development	75
Transport, Tourism and Sport	1,393
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9,852</b>

\*Numbers may not add due to rounding



## APPENDIX 2: Funding Public Services and Protecting Public Finances

Our public services must be funded through a taxation system that is fair, sustainable and just. Sinn Féin would also ensure that our tax base is sustainable, improves our public services, delivers for workers and families, and protects the public finances.

### GIVING WORKERS AND FAMILIES A BREAK – Tax Spend

- Abolish USC on the first €30,000 earned
- Abolish Local Property Tax
- Increase Earned Income Credit to €1,650
- 1 month rent relief
- Retain Mortgage interest relief
- Restore tax credit for trade union membership
- End Motor tax surcharge for quarterly and 6-month payments
- Abolish 3% stamp duty on non-life insurance policies
- Abolish 2% levy on non-life insurance policies

**€2.4 BILLION**  
**€1,219 million**  
**€485 million**  
**€35 million**  
**€301 million**  
**€35 million**  
**€40 million**  
**€43 million**  
**€160 million**  
**€69 million**

### FUNDING REAL CHANGE AND A BETTER FUTURE – Tax Revenue

- End the corporation tax break for the banks
- Increase income from the annual bank levy
- Tax intangible assets onshored by multinationals
- Introduce a 5% high income levy on individual incomes above €140,000
- Taper out tax credits on individual incomes over €100,000 to €140,000
- Introduce a wealth tax for the wealthiest 1% in the State at a rate of 1% on the portion of net wealth held over €1 million with a number of exemptions including farms
- Abolish the Special Assignee Relief Programme
- Increase Capital Acquisition Tax by 3% to rate of 36%
- Reduce subsidies to gold-plated pensions by reducing the earnings limit and reducing the Standard Fund Threshold to €1.2 million
- Introduce a 15.75% rate of employer’s PRSI on portion of salaries over €100,000
- Increase excise duty on a packet of cigarettes over 5 years
- Increase Stamp Duty on commercial property to 12.5%
- Increase the Dividend Withholding Tax on REITs and IREFs to 33%
- Increase the Vacant Site Levy to 15% to prevent land hoarding
- Introduce a 2nd home charge at a rate of €400
- Replace Help-to-Buy scheme with public and affordable homes

**€3.8 BILLION**  
**€175 million**  
**€50 million**  
**€722 million**  
**€452 million**  
**€260 million**  
**€89 million**  
**€23 million**  
**€45 million**  
**€494 million**  
**€532 million**  
**€175 million**  
**€440 million**  
**€20 million**  
**€107 million**  
**€104 million**  
**€102 million**



## Nótaí





## Nótaí

