

# DUBLIN

## A New Deal for the New Millennium

- A Fine Gael Manifesto for Dublin's Local Election's - May 1999

foreward\_

Introduction : Public Squalor Amidst Private Opulence

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### Foreword

*by John Bruton T.D.  
Leader of Fine Gael*

Dublin is well on the way to becoming a world class capital city. It is one of the most popular cities to visit in Europe. It is home to many multinational companies and the globally important International Financial Services Centre. Many of Ireland's great economic success stories are based in the city and its surroundings.

As a centre for culture, music and the arts, the city has reached a level of vibrancy that was unimaginable even ten years ago. Dublin is the home and host of a growing number of major professional and amateur sporting

organisations and events.

Yet despite all this success the city is clearly failing to cope. Why? Fine Gael believes that a failure of vision and an acceptance of second best has left the city's citizens trapped by ever worsening public services. Chaotic queuing has replaced proper planning.

In this manifesto Fine Gael sets out its plans for restoring the city to its citizens and allowing communities to take back control of their lives. Proper planning of transport, housing and services is the first step. We have people of the ability and drive to make Dublin a world class capital. This document sets out the way in which harnessing that ability can make Dublin's infrastructure and services as outstanding as its citizens.

**John Bruton T.D.**  
**Leader of Fine Gael**

### Foreword

*by Senator Joe Doyle*  
*Lord Mayor of Dublin*

As Lord Mayor of Dublin I have witnessed at first hand Dublin's greatest asset - its people.

Dublin has the youngest population of all the European Capitals and a cultural vibrancy matched by few cities anywhere. It is one of the leading centres for today's new technologies. Now as we approach the New Millennium we are witnessing a new patriotism which encompasses diversity and respects difference.

All of these factors mean that Dublin has the potential to become one of the great global multicultural cities of the future. But in order to realise this potential, we must tackle some pressing problems.

One of the most recent problems to come to public attention is racism. It is my dearest wish that Dublin should be a welcoming city. For this to happen, all of us living in Dublin need to examine our attitude towards newcomers, recognise diversity and promote awareness and openness. Neither can the housing and traffic crises be allowed to hold the city back. Until the citizens of Dublin have access to affordable housing, we cannot fully enjoy the city's economic prosperity and social stability. Effective co-ordinated action must be taken to tackle the city's serious traffic congestion. A congested city is an inefficient city - Dublin cannot be allowed to become such a city.

But I believe this will not happen if we allow Dubliners to use their own initiative and creativity in meeting the challenges that now face us. This manifesto is Fine Gael's plan to give Dubliners the power they need to shape the future of their own city. And I am confident that with power returned to its citizens and communities, Dublin will fulfil its great potential.

**Cllr. Senator Joe Doyle**  
**Lord Mayor of Dublin**

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## **introduction**

### **Public Squalor Amidst Private Opulence**

Successful cities are built on viable communities living within easy access of their needs. While Dublin has seen a transformation in the past decade it now risks being choked by the anarchic development that has accompanied its undoubted success. For many, the apparent opulence is an illusion as they try to cope in the face of many unmet needs for basic services.

- young families can no longer afford to raise their children in the community where they were born and reared, rather they are driven out on to the city's margins where basic services are poorly provided.
- at a time when both partners are able and often have to work, no proper child care system has been developed.
- while education has allowed many of our people to staff some of the most advanced enterprises in the world, side by side are communities where one-third of the children leave school with insufficient literacy skills to read the back of an aspirin package and many are at risk of drifting into substance abuse or crime.
- at times of sickness, public patients face interminable waiting for diagnosis, for treatment, and for nursing home care.

*In too many areas of our life, the potential of technology seems to be dictating to us rather than serving our needs:*

- although armed with amazing medical technology that can enhance care, we see beds closed,

its use prevented and people deprived of any care at all as they suffer inexcusable waiting and are refused even the basic comforts of home help

- car sales are at record levels but never has it been so hard to make your journey – more transport is delivering less travel;
- we risk passing on a degraded environment as we build mountains of waste and litter;
- the potential of information technology to make public service more accessible to the community is only available to a small few.

These failings are not inevitable. They stem from a failure of vision and an acceptance of second best, which leave the ordinary Dubliner trapped. Chaotic queuing has replaced proper planning in crucial areas of public life – from the taxi rank to the casualty trolley, from the creche to the drug clinic. We are repeating the worst errors of failed models of urban development elsewhere – public squalor amidst private opulence.

Fine Gael's New Deal for Dublin will allow communities take back control over their lives. Sound principles will underpin public policy. Public service providers will be challenged regarding the standards they offer. Poor planning and abuse of their privileges by monopoly providers will not be accepted.

### **Dublin – A Region of Sustainable Villages**

Community solidarity can only be built in neighbourhoods. Some developments in Dublin have destroyed neighbourhoods. Others have overlooked the investment needed to build viable communities in suburban dormitory landscapes. Dublin will only thrive if it has neighbourhoods and villages that offer a good quality of life to their communities. Fine Gael aims to rebuild the city and county's neighbourhoods into sustainable urban villages.

*There are a number of elements that are necessary to build successful neighbourhoods:*

**1. Sustainable communities must have local access to a wider range of services so that for most ordinary needs they are self-sufficient. People should not need to travel outside their neighbourhood, except for specialist services. This means:**

- developing new services in community health centres and developing the concept of step down or cottage hospitals
- developing a wide range of shopping, cinemas, restaurants, theatres and clubs available locally
- developing education and employment opportunities that are accessible locally

These require physical location policies that promote a healthy and balanced mix of activities as well as focused policies that harness the potential for remote access through information technology.

**2. New Settlement policies that provide affordable homes with high occupancy and high density close to the centre of the urban village and that make the village centre the focal point of development and renewal. This requires:**

- getting away from rigid zoning strategies and instead allowing residential infill in industrial zones and supporting employment opportunities close to residential areas
- much stronger incentives for the refurbishment and conversion unoccupied space into usable residential homes, for example, over shops or on derelict open spaces no longer offering community amenity
- developing a blueprint for shopfronts, street furniture and vehicle movement that will make

urban villages into living spaces

**3. Community Utilisation policies so that available public resources are fully utilised to meet community needs in flexible ways and at reasonable cost. This means:**

- auditing available public resources in schools, clubs and other properties belonging to public agencies
- removing the barriers which often artificially block multiple use of space and equipment (for example in schools, which are often only open seven hours a day for seven months of the year, but have resources which could be invaluable for many community activities).

**4. Developing an area focus for tackling public policy issues. This means specific area based strategies for such things as:**

- community policing
- tackling drug addiction and its treatment
- enforcing litter control, dereliction, parking
- amenity, sport and leisure activities
- support services for children and families
- tackling educational disadvantage
- community health

To make this happen the statutory agencies have to be prepared to work with the community and with each other to deliver integrated services and to be accountable to their community for their policies. This requires a significant shift in policy and culture for many of these agencies.

**5. New concepts in public transport that will facilitate movement within neighbourhoods to complement the present exclusive focus on transport out of neighbourhoods.**

## **implementation**

*Many practical steps will have to be taken in order make this vision a reality. Some of the steps that Fine Gael has mapped out are:*

- an audit of community resources
- the appointment of a community facilitator for each area answerable to a representative steering committee from the community;
- mandating the Health Board, Gardaí, FÁS, Transport Providers and other public agencies to support area based strategies
- mandating these agencies, where appropriate, to undertake joint initiatives in the community which integrate a range of services to support families under pressure. The success of such integrated service initiatives will depend on agencies being willing to devolve the necessary powers and budgets to teams working "at the coalface" in the community
- new public policies to deal with issues such as co-operative insurance and security which often hamper more open community access
- mandating planners to develop the necessary local area development plans to give expression to the concept
- building a local business partnership to bring local business fully into the process

## Funding

An important part of this new approach will be the devolution of budgets by public agencies in respect of community services to specific community areas giving considerable local discretion regarding their use. Already private contributions to certain community activities attract some tax relief. These include designated urban renewal contributions to disadvantaged schools, employment of Home Help for Incapacitated persons, contributions to nursing homes, contribution to natural science education, employers' expenditure on childcare. Fine Gael proposes to facilitate the establishment of Local Community Development Funds by broadening the areas where tax relief for both individuals and companies could be obtained in the context of a Community Action Programme by a Local Development Company formed for the purpose. Development levies and revenues generated from operators of new services on franchise from public authorities will also be channelled into such a Fund.

Fine Gael supports continued funding of local partnership initiatives and believes these funds should be protected in the course of re-negotiations of EU funding. Local Authorities will be given a more central role in sustaining this work. Block grants will be available for allocation by the Local Authorities on the basis of competitive application for innovative projects. This funding mechanism will be developed to encourage the raising of matching funding particularly in more prosperous communities.

## Strengthening Partnership

Official Ireland has failed to recognise the very significant breakthroughs that have been made in embracing community involvement and innovative responses to social problems in many new pilot initiatives. These can be seen in the Partnership Companies, in the Local Drug Task Forces, in Neighbourhood Watch and in Community Education Projects, to mention just a few. It is now time to harness what has been learned from these initiatives and to provide a sound basis for planning their future as part of a mainstream policy response.

A new framework is needed to allow the continuing development of such initiatives in a coherent way, while retaining their capacity for flexibility and innovation. In many areas there are opportunities for deepening the involvement of the community sector, notably in health and in education. New responsibilities will also require stronger accountability both to the Dáil and to the local community by the relevant groups.

There is a genuine concern that the integration into local government of such initiatives might smother rather than develop the community partnership approach. These concerns will be respected. Fine Gael believes that the urban village can become the focal point of area based strategies with strong community involvement. *A new framework will involve:*

- the designation of spheres of policy for community action indicating broad criteria within which they would work and the types of budgets that might be devolved
- the undertaking of a local area based audit of population need and available services in order to identify potential projects through a process of wide consultation
- contract arrangements with a mix of providers to achieve targeted outcomes with agreed costs
- regular democratic scrutiny through the committees of local councillors of the community based initiatives, and transparent rules for the election or appointment of members of Partnership Companies

It is clear that there are a growing number of major social needs in our neighbourhoods that will not be successfully served by the market alone. The concept of developing a social economy in our neighbourhoods is vital if we are to secure a balanced development of our urban villages. Already we are seeing the stresses emerge in the inadequate provision of care for the elderly and care for the young. These are the gaps that are beginning to be filled through community partnerships, but much more can be done.

### Operation Permanent Freeflow

Fine Gael, while in government, introduced the first serious strategy to tackle Dublin's mounting traffic chaos through Operation Freeflow. Fine Gael has sustained this by detailed planning of effective policies for Dublin Traffic. Fine Gael has the will to make this strategy work.

There are few areas where the present government's dithering has been more costly than in the area of public transport. There was a long delay while a new consultancy on Luas was commissioned, only to have all its key recommendations rejected. Both time and money were lost that should have been applied to tackle the city's poor transport infrastructure. The failure to invest in new buses and new trains has damaged the reputation of public transport at a time when everyone knows that it must become more attractive and more available. This has allowed the concept of Quality Bus Corridors to become discredited in the eyes of many Dublin commuters. Fine Gael is determined that a clear long-term strategy and immediate decisive action must quickly be put in place to make up the lost ground.

### Long Term Strategy

There is no coherence in the present delivery of transport policy in Dublin. There are many elements that must make up a new long-term transport strategy for Dublin. *The central aims of policy in the long-term must be:*

- to facilitate a reduction in unnecessary requirements on people to travel
- to optimise the mode of travel to efficiently meet the different needs of the public
- to utilise developing infrastructures and roadspace in order to imaginatively meet needs
- to deliver quality transport services whose providers are responsive to changing needs and properly accountable to the public

It cannot be a one-dimensional policy where engineers impose designs that the public must live with. Public transport will be the main mode for growth. However, the strategy must recognise that further rapid growth of car ownership in Dublin is inevitable. This must be managed. Options that permit higher utilisation of available road space must be part of a balanced policy. Options such as under passes or overpasses for road vehicles and lanes that double as inbound in the morning and outbound in the afternoon, must be part of the mix. *Key elements of our long-term strategy are:*

- Switching the focus from urban sprawl to developing sustainable neighbourhoods that reduce the need to travel
- Quality alternatives to the car will be offered. There will be bigger fleets of buses and trains and new routes including orbital routes responding to changing travel needs
- Transport service contracts with built-in quality standards of service will be put out to competitive tender from either public or private providers
- The painfully slow implementation of quality bus corridors and cycle lanes will be accelerated
- Progressive removal of heavy goods vehicles from residential areas will be planned. Initially

they will continue to be allowed on dedicated routes for deliveries at specified off peak times. However, when major transport infrastructures are in place, a complete HGV ban within the M50 boundary should be possible

- All employers with more than 50 employees will be required to develop Commuter Plans for their staff (flexi-time, public transport vouchers, facilitating options to work from home promoting carpools and company minibuses)

### **Immediate Action**

While these are long-term strategies that will take time to implement, there are many initiatives that will be implemented within a tight time limit of no more than one year. *These include:*

- the development of integrated ticketing on public transport, so that one ticket will bring you to your destination regardless of how many changes are made
- local secure park and ride facilities for both cars and bicycles
- safe routes to local schools marked out to allow children to walk to school in safety and encouragement to schools to develop the concept of a supervised "walking bus" (including a facility to carry bags)
- the introduction of off peak refuse collection and deliveries in all the key centres
- the charging of an excavation rental to any public utility roads, with a premium paid for peak hour openings and a continuing rental charged until satisfactory restoration is completed
- permission for hackney drivers to use bus lanes
- progressive liberalisation of taxis with annual demand-led issues of new licences (to follow the present 800 planned new licences) and the permitting of taxi sharing
- an immediate programme of surface repair and improvement on all roads used by cyclists (outside of the dedicated lane) to make this a safer option
- certain parking will be reserved for car pools

### **A Home of Your Own**

The housing crisis in Dublin has not been addressed. House prices now exceed those of the leading capitals in Europe. A person on average wages who borrows up to their maximum limit will still be €50,000 short in bidding for an average house in Dublin. Government intervention has perversely accelerated the rise in rents which are often prohibitively high, difficult to get (especially where there are children) and offer no security of tenure. Ordinary workers who have been the backbone of this country's economic success are now being priced out of a share in the benefits that they have won.

A coherent housing policy is needed rather than ad hoc interventions that often have perverse side effects. *Policy must address several objectives:*

- reduce the cost of entry for first-time buyers to the housing market
- increase the supply of housing through new cities, greenfield development and infill development, particularly around our urban villages;
- develop new models of public housing which give communities the stability of home ownership but require re-sale back to the public authority;



- promote a competitive private rented sector with guaranteed quality standards;
- facilitate the possibility of moving home during a family's life cycle so that families occupy property of a size suitable to their needs;
- allow older people get access to some of the value of their assets tied up in the family home to support their needs.

This requires a much more flexible housing market than we have had in the past where people have become "locked in" to housing due to the high costs involved. This has resulted in high social costs for Dublin as older areas with good facilities suffer falling population and new areas with few facilities undergo population explosions. The aim must be to have a housing market that meets demand more efficiently and public policies that give a fairer deal, particularly to first-time buyers.

*In order to tackle the crisis in housing supply, Fine Gael will:*

- set a target of 17,500 social housing units for Dublin over the next 5 years
- introduce a new model of public housing where homes are allocated on the basis of need, occupiers accumulate ownership in recoupable shares, and sales can only be back to a holding company. The advantage of this model is clear. It gives communities the stability of home ownership. It allows people who need to move access to a substantial block of cash related to their years of occupancy. It prevents publicly funded houses being siphoned off to the private market.
- introduce a two-month time limit for Bord Pleanála consideration of planning appeals. In the transition to this, developments of 50 houses and over will be first to operate under this limit
- carry out a trawl of land in public ownership to release sites for starter homes
- introduce new planning regulations where minimum-planning formality will be required where developers comply with broad principles set out for certified zones.
- develop transitional housing options for homeless people
- develop new centres of population outside of Dublin which would be built consciously around the concept of sustainable communities

*To promote more efficient housing, Fine Gael will:*

- undertake a full review of all elements in the transaction cost of housing sales including stamp duties to identify ways of reducing or spreading the cost of changing home
- introduce schemes to permit senior citizens to sell their home to a local authority in return for a senior citizens flat or for a life interest as tenant in the house, with the property reverting to the local authority after death
- provide tax relief for landlords who let their property on long leases
- enact the Fine Gael Anti Gazumping Bill immediately
- change planning law to impose clear legal responsibility on builders to complete housing development to a proper standard
- establish a network of independent housing information and advice centres to meet the rapidly rising demand for information about housing options in the present very difficult housing market.

While measures to improve the housing market will undoubtedly ease price pressures over time, there is an immediate need to address the fairness of access to the available supply particularly for families who are first time buyers trying to get on to the bottom rung of home ownership. *To*



*promote fairness, Fine Gael will:*

- increase the first time buyers grant from €3,000 to €5,000
- amend the Shared Ownership Scheme to make it more accessible to applicants by increasing the "income multiple" applied to the mortgage element and improving the rental subvention for low income applicants
- exempt first time buyers from paying stamp duty on second hand houses
- make rent and mortgage interest supplement available on equal terms to persons in low paid work as to those who are unemployed, based on actual disposable income
- introduce a quota that will allow 15% of all new residential developments to be channeled to shared ownership purchasers or tenant purchasers surrendering a local authority home
- allow local authority tenants to buy shares in flats on the basis of this new partnership model
- establish an effective unit for enforcing accommodation standards in rented accommodation, targeting in particular accommodation where the Health Board provides a subvention
- support the expansion of co-ownership models in the private sector

### **Patients First**

Our health service is in crisis. This is nowhere more evident than in Dublin. Our flagship hospitals and national centres of excellence in Dublin find themselves cash-starved and constrained, having to close beds and cancel elective admissions in order to keep within budget.

The growth in our population - increases in births, the return of emigrants and greater longevity - have placed our health services under unprecedented pressure. Neither the Minister for Health nor his Department has yet come to terms with the needs of the growing population in the Greater Dublin area.

Waiting lists in Dublin are up 20% since the present Minister took office. There are now 17,584 people waiting in Dublin, almost half of the entire national list.

Many of those on the waiting lists have to wait for between 12 months to 2 years for the treatment to which they are entitled. Some have to wait even longer.

There are in effect two waiting lists for public patients. The 17,584 people on the Dublin waiting lists have seen a consultant and have been assessed as requiring a hospital bed. There are many thousands of adults and children in Dublin on another waiting list - those awaiting initial appointments with a consultant. The Department of Health does not keep statistics of those people awaiting consultations. This is the hidden waiting list - the queue to join a queue. This hidden waiting list is often very long. Examples are 5 months for an initial appointment with a consultant dermatologist, 8 months for an ophthalmologist and 6 months for a gynaecologist.

Fine Gael is committed to equality of access to health care for all of those who require essential treatment, and to a new and expanded Patients Charter.

Fine Gael also commits itself to improving the existing service for children, the elderly and the disabled.

To deliver this new Charter of Care, Fine Gael will introduce:

*To Wipe out waiting lists:*

- Specific timeframes for a patient to attend with a consultant for an opinion and to obtain treatments or surgery.
- Joint waiting lists for consultants who specialise in a particular branch of medicine and

practice in a particular hospital or health board area in order to spread the work evenly.

- An on-line, interactive service between GPs and hospitals to facilitate GPs obtaining information on consultant waiting lists and waiting times. This would enable GPs to help their patients to have the earliest possible access to consultant care.
- Additional "step down" facilities for people, particularly the elderly, who require nursing care, but not acute hospital care. This would free up many beds.
- Expansion of dedicated day surgery units, and the end of bed closures for budget balancing.
- Additional resources to GPs to carry out testing which does not require consultant involvement. Such a change in medical practice would help with earlier diagnosis and may reduce the pressure on the secondary - hospital - services.
- Equality of access to medical technology

Fine Gael is committed to ensuring that the most up-to-date medical technology is available for proper patient care. We are also committed to ensuring that public patients are not discriminated against and we will provide the resources to ensure that they have equal access to such technology.

### **Dublin Disability Access 2000**

Fine Gael aims to make Dublin the access capital of Europe, a model city that allows people with a disability to participate fully in the life of the city. This will be a major Millennium project.

A Community Action Plan to achieve access will be developed. A steering committee with majority representation of persons with a disability will be put in place to undertake an audit of the barriers to access in Dublin and to consult on the policy actions necessary.

- An Access Officer in each local authority will be appointed.
- Every service provider will be required to publish an Annual Action Plan giving a statement of the improvements it has made in the year and its plans for the future
- Codes of practice will be developed for different facilities. A Quality Mark will be awarded where good standards are achieved, and a lemon awarded to those making no real effort.
- Every planning application for public facilities will be audited to ensure adequate provision for access and proper anticipation of the sort of wiring and other connections necessary to facilitate the use of modern technology in the home and at work by persons with a disability.
- The existing building regulations will be reviewed to identify areas for improvements.
- Immediate priorities will be the dishing of footpaths and the provision of ramps to public buildings.

In each village centre, a comprehensive audit of the access status of facilities will be undertaken. A public private partnership approach will be developed with local business and community interest to identify measures to be taken.

Fine Gael is committed to providing the resources necessary for the early implementation of the recommendations of the Report of the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities in regard to the need for additional residential and respite care places, additional money for aids and appliances and for the provision of personal assistance services.

### **The New Deal for Citizens**

There is a widespread sense of powerlessness among Dublin citizens. Although Dublin is the capital city and is the national headquarters for many services, it is very difficult for the ordinary Dubliner

to have his or her voice heard. There are far more accessible channels of influence on services outside of the city. The fragmentation of local authorities and the national (rather than regional) mandates of institutions operating in Dublin deprive citizens of influence over the crucial services that impact on their daily lives. This is evident in hospital, transport, police, education and recreation services. To counteract this, Fine Gael offers a New Deal for Dublin's citizens. *It has three pillars. The first pillar is a Citizen's Charter:*

- standards of service will be published by all service providers in Dublin
- this will include health, policing, taxis, buses, ports and Dart and also standards of grass cutting, gully maintenance, litter removal and restoration after excavation etc. In addition, each body will be asked to set out response times, punctuality limits, rights of consultation, and terms of access including special provisions for persons with special needs
- each agency will be required to publish indicators twice yearly setting out the standards that have been achieved in each area
- each agency will be required to have a published complaint procedure

A joint committee comprising local authority members from each of the four Dublin local authorities will be appointed to monitor the standards set and their achievement, and compare achievement to best practice overseas. In time, agencies will be expected to commit themselves to compensate customers who experience significant lapses from the standards that they have set. Where a provider consistently fails to provide adequate standards, this would trigger the opening of a tender for another service provider to replace that provider.

A second pillar of the New Deal for citizens in Dublin will be to make administration in government more accountable to Dubliners. Certain decisions now exercised exclusively by the Local Authority Manager will become democratic decisions to be taken by the Council. This will include the decisions on key planning applications.

Fine Gael will facilitate the holding of a Referendum by the citizens to decide how Dublin should be governed. *Clear choices will be outlined:*

- the establishment of a Greater Dublin Authority to which certain county-wide functions would be given
- the election of a "Mayor" from among the members of each Council, and who would be have certain executive powers
- the direct election by the people of a Mayor with executive powers

*Fine Gael will seek the adoption of key policy changes for Dublin:*

- the vigorous pursuit of the urban village concept
- integrated ticketing on public transport services
- competition for public service contracts on bus routes
- the introduction of the citizens charter

If these are not adopted, Fine Gael will organise citywide petitions to secure a public mandate for these essential changes.

The third pillar in the new deal for citizens will be the establishment of a Standards Board in each local authority to oversee the declaration of interest by members and officials, and a code of conduct in respect of the activities of members and officials. If necessary, people will be disqualified from office if they fail to respect these standards.

Fine Gael is committed to a waste strategy that will significantly increase recycling and reduce the dependency on crude landfill policies. *The policy will:*

- offer separation and collection of recyclable waste to 80% of Dublin households
- increase household recycling from 3% to 60% of the waste stream in the medium to long-term
- recover at least half of all packaging
- establish a biological treatment plant for organic waste
- set stringent standards for the operation of incineration

Substantial investment will be needed to achieve a sound waste policy based on the principles of Avoid, Minimise, Recycle and Reuse. This can be partially funded by charges made on polluters. Industry too will have to carry some of the cost. Construction and industrial/commercial waste account for 83% of Dublin's Waste Stream.

Fine Gael will aim to achieve "Blue Flag" status for a significant number of Dublin's beaches by 2002, when the new sewage recycling facilities in Ringsend and all around the County of Dublin will be fully on stream. Family friendly beaches will be introduced with designated permitted recreational uses in different areas.

Dublin's litter standards remain lamentable for a capital which attracts so many tourists. A vigorous campaign of enforcement with additional mobile litter wardens will be put in place. Commercial property owners will be vigorously pursued in respect of their obligations under the 1996 Litter Act. Legislation in respect of dogs fouling public places will be vigorously enforced. The number of litter bins will be significantly increased. *The Litter Removal service will commit the resources necessary to achieve the following standards of removal of significant accumulations of litter:*

- within three hours at Dart Stations and in neighbourhood centres;
- within six hours from high density housing areas;
- within twelve hours from low density housing areas, public parks, rivers and canals.

Litter squads will be developed to facilitate this rapid response, particularly at weekends. If the public service cannot commit to delivering these standards, the market will be tested for private delivery of some or all of the service.

### **Children First**

Despite our apparent wealth, Dublin is becoming a difficult place in which to raise children. Every family is experiencing increasing pressures. Where both partners have to work, it is often impossible to get quality childcare at an affordable price; frequently over €100 per child per week. Most workers get no relief with these costs, while those lucky enough to work with more progressive employers can avail of childcare subsidised by the taxpayer.

Many families battle against the odds as they try to educate children in the face of the social and economic disadvantage that our education system has reinforced rather than alleviated.

Nostalgia for an idealised picture of the past must not prevent the emergence of adequate policies for new realities.

*There is now hard evidence of the failures of public policy:*

- In some parts of our city 30% of young people leave the education system without adequate levels of literacy
- Each year over 5,000 young people in Dublin are referred to the Garda for involvement in juvenile offences. A quarter of them is under the age of 13.

- More than one in ten young people have become involved in juvenile offences before reaching the age of 18

It is time to have a coherent policy of putting "Children First". This is one key area where there must be an area-based focus requiring different agencies to co-operate in order to develop integrated responses to local needs.

*Some elements in this strategy include:*

- Local primary schools will be made available for the franchised provision of child care both after school hours, and in any unused rooms
- Subsidised quality pre-school will be developed for all children likely to face educational disadvantage
- New Planning Guidelines will be introduced to facilitate the provision of child care in residential areas in accord with transparent criteria
- District Care Teams to integrate services for children at risk
- A Local Education Mediation Service will be developed to track all children from age 14 years onwards who are at risk of early school leaving. This service will involve counselling, mentoring, appropriate placement and aftercare.

Fine Gael is committed to a radical restructuring of the child welfare, protection and adoption services that apply in the Dublin area. Presently the Eastern Health Board is unable to cope with the demands placed on it to speedily investigate reports of child abuse; to provide specialised residential care or foster care for children who require it, or to undertake and complete adoption assessment within a reasonable timeframe.

National Policy will also have to change to make a Children First Policy possible. *Some of the changes necessary are:*

- The rate of child benefit will be increased by €12 per week for children under the age of 5
- A scheme of income support will be introduced for low income families where children over the age of 15 enter an agreement to attend diligently in education and refrain from work that would interfere with this study
- A scheme of employee leave options either unpaid or in lieu of overtime payments will be developed to allow workers have leave for the care of sick children or on other required occasions
- The Juvenile Diversion Programmes will be substantially developed with innovative use of community service and methods for reintegrating young people into the education and training systems.

**ENDS**