



JOB, STABILITY, GROWTH

**MAKING THE
RECOVERY
LOCAL**

**FINE GAEL LOCAL ELECTION
MANIFESTO 2014**

FINE GAEL

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INTRODUCTION

In 2011, Fine Gael stood alone as the only political party to promise not to increase income taxes on you and other hard working families.

We made you that promise because hitting people at work with even more penal taxes, like the previous Government's USC, would have made it impossible for us to stop the disastrous collapse in employment, incomes and investment presided over by Fianna Fáil.

Supporting people to go to work was the central part of our recovery plan.

In Government Fine Gael has kept its promise. While people have made a lot of sacrifices as we fixed the public finances, the Government has not increased taxes on income and work.

The resilience shown by the Irish people is now bearing fruit. From the situation under Fianna Fail where Ireland was losing on average 1,600 jobs per week, Irish businesses – big and small – are now creating over 1,000 jobs per week.

This is not enough. Too many people are still being forced to leave the country to look for work, and too many families and communities across the country have not felt any lift in their own personal circumstances.

The Local Elections provide people with an important opportunity to spread the benefits of the economic recovery into every town and parish.

Fine Gael wants to **make the recovery local.**

That's why every Fine Gael candidate in the Local Elections has committed to the "Three Steps to Local Recovery" contained in the Fine Gael local election manifesto.

First, Fine Gael Councillors will not vote for an increase in the Local Property Tax rate where they have discretion and will cut the Local Property Tax rate where circumstances allow.

Other parties are promising to increase Council spending, which you will have to pay for through a higher property tax. As with your income taxes, only Fine Gael can be trusted to manage your local government finances and keep your Local Property Tax rate low.

Secondly, during the harmonisation process of commercial rates, Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that there will be no increase in commercial rates and will reduce rates where possible, as part of a "Jobs and Small Business Package" in every Council budget. This package will also commit to a 20% increase in funding and a doubling of staff available to work in the new Local Enterprise Offices which are now being established to support local entrepreneurs and small businesses; and a doubling of the number of 'Gateway' work places for local long term unemployed people.

Thirdly, Fine Gael Councillors will vote to sell social housing to tenants at an attractive discount. Fine Gael supports home ownership because it is good for community stability, individual empowerment and local employment. Other parties are opposed to selling social housing. We will use the proceeds from the sales to reinvest in new social housing and to free up resources for new investment in parks, playgrounds and other local facilities so that all the community can benefit. Proceeds will also help social housing solutions such as refurbishments and improvements to existing social houses, bringing long-term vacant units back into social use, and targeting completion of unfinished housing estates.

A New Model of Local Government

After the Local Elections, we will have a new system of local government in Ireland. Your vote matters more than ever on 23rd May because Councillors will soon have more powers and citizens will have a stronger voice in every aspect of Council business.

The new system of local government, introduced by Minister Hogan, will be leaner and more streamlined:

- the number of Councils will be reduced by almost three quarters from 118 to just 31 after the next local elections;
- the number of Councillors will be reduced by 40% from over 1,600 to 950; and

- the number of Council staff has already been reduced by almost 25% since 2008 and will be further reduced in the years ahead as part of the reforms.
- The structural reforms introduced by this Government will deliver savings of between €40 - €45 million.

The new local government reforms will facilitate better engagement with the citizen, more transparency and greater accountability. As a citizen, you have the right to know the impacts of the decisions made by your Council, the level of services it provides and the cost of delivering those services.

Each Council will be carefully monitored and benchmarked against performance indicators by a new National Oversight and Audit Committee. Performance reports will be published and they will show how well services are provided by the Council, how well they meet needs, how targets set have been achieved, how the Council performed compared to other Councils, and how each Council is improving its level of service year-on-year.

Fine Gael will ensure there is maximum transparency as to how the local property tax (LPT) revenue is used in your local area. Elected members at the new Municipal District level will decide, through a schedule of works as an integral part of the budget process, on the priority projects to be carried out. Local people will therefore have the opportunity to get more involved in the debate with their local elected members about how their Local Property Tax is being spent.

Fully-costed annual Service Plans, which will include a comprehensive range of targets, will be approved by elected members in respect of each programme area (e.g. housing, economic development, roads, etc.) in parallel with the budgetary process. The role of Council Strategic Policy Committees will be expanded to include monitoring of the service plans, with a focus on efficiency and value for money.

Your Council will put in place a new Citizens' Charter to provide a commitment to you on the level of service they can expect to receive when dealing with their Council.

Fine Gael believes that a transparent and ethical model of local government is essential. Therefore, a new code of ethics will be introduced for local government, in the context of the examination currently being undertaken of the legislative frameworks for ethics across the public service.

JOBS, ENTERPRISE, INFRASTRUCTURE

Fine Gael believes that a tax on income is a tax on jobs. In government, we have prevented any increases in income tax and we will endeavour to reduce the burden on taxpayers as the recovery gains momentum. The annual Action Plan for Jobs is focussed on improving supports for Irish businesses and removing the barriers to employment-creation across the country.

Our jobs strategy is working. In the three years before Fine Gael entered government our country was shedding circa 1,600 jobs each week; we are now increasing jobs by over 1,000 each week. But Fine Gael wants to improve on the recent employment figures by increasing the pace of jobs growth.

We hope to achieve this by supplementing national schemes with a number of locally-led initiatives such as a County Based Youth Entrepreneurship Competitive Start Programme and the Gateway Initiative.

From mid-2014 your Council will play a more active role in economic development. Fine Gael believes Councillors are uniquely placed, through their local knowledge and links with enterprise, to drive economic initiatives. One of the key new reforms in this regard is the establishment of first stop shop 'Local Enterprise Offices' (LEOs).

1: A First Stop Shop for Local Businesses: the LEO

Fine Gael Councillors will improve the support services for small and medium businesses by facilitating the roll out of the new network of 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) by the end of 2014. LEOs are a merger of the Business Support Unit of each Council with the relevant County Enterprise Board creating a "First Stop Shop" for local entrepreneurs, delivered by Enterprise Ireland.

The LEO is a new initiative led by Minister Bruton and Minister Hogan and requires strong backing from elected members to become operational and to deliver to local businesses in your area.

Fine Gael Councillors will prioritise the establishment of a first class LEO in your area, demanding the transfer of all business support unit staff into the LEO along with any necessary additional staffing.

Fine Gael Councillors will demand ambitious performance targets from their LEO including published targets for job creation, start-ups supported, grants approved, training initiatives delivered etc.

Fine Gael Councillors will drive implementation of this key reform, demanding an annual Enterprise Plan from each Council that will underpin the enterprise ambitions of the Council area.

Among the improved services for local businesses will be:

- Access to a single point of application through the LEO for a range of enterprise supports. One evaluation committee will decide on the most appropriate grant support for the applicant business cutting down on paperwork.
- Seamless access to Enterprise Ireland supports where there is potential to grow jobs and exports.
- Information, advice and access to a range of services and supports e.g. Microfinance Ireland Loan Fund; Credit Review Office; Companies Registration Office; Revenue and Department of Social Protection Schemes; Solas and Skillnets Training; other local funding streams e.g. LEADER.
- Advice on planning, rates, licences, procurement and other Council services
- Mentoring programmes overseen by Enterprise Ireland.
- Companies with over 10 employees operating exclusively in the domestic market, which currently in most cases are not supported by the State, will be eligible for supports under the new system.
- Access to the range of support services – including planning and licensing – offered by Councils.

2: Revitalising the Main Street

Fine Gael Councillors will introduce measures to revitalise the Main Street.

Commercial Rates

During the harmonisation process of commercial rates, Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that there will be no increase in commercial rates and will reduce rates where possible. This means that there will be no additional burden placed on the business community to fund local government.

From 2014 a single Annual Rate on Valuation (ARV) will apply across each new Council area, replacing the old system of multiple commercial rates. Harmonisation of rates will mean a level playing field for the first time for all businesses within the same Council area, so that those located on the outskirts of the town will pay the same rate as those located in the town.

Ahead of the formal merger of Limerick County and City Council, and Waterford County and City Council, the Councils have successfully harmonised their commercial rates to the lowest level in each case as a result of efficiency savings from local government reforms.

This will complement the new more efficient valuation system being introduced at national level which involves a range of measures including a streamlining of appeals procedures available to ratepayers and increased self-assessment.

Cutting the Cost of Local Government

Fine Gael will aggressively drive cost savings through the Local Government Efficiency Review, building on the €839 million saved over the last six years. Savings in future will be passed on to local businesses, particularly in the area of commercial rates.

To renew trust and confidence among citizens in the local government system, Service Plan implementation will be monitored by the Council's Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and each Council's finances and performance will be monitored annually by a National Oversight and Audit Commission.

A new code of ethics will be introduced for local government which will include a review of expenses paid to councillors.

Vacant Premises

Under Minister Hogan's reforms, Councillors will have the power for the first time to decide on the level of incentive to levy on landlords in the case of vacant premises. Councillors can decide on a rate of up to 50% of the original rates bill. Fine Gael Councillors will use this power to incentivise landlords to lease vacant properties in appropriate circumstances.

The Government has removed the subsequent occupier liability, whereby new tenants had to pay up to two years' unpaid commercial rates accrued by the previous occupier. This measure will eliminate the financial burden for new occupiers, and ensure that property that may have otherwise remained vacant and unoccupied can now be re-let.

Encouraging New House Building in Urban Areas

The collapse of the housing market and the construction industry has essentially ceased the output of new housing in the Dublin area which is causing an acute shortage of new family homes. However, there are still many sites within the Dublin area that could be used for construction of new family homes.

New development often requires infrastructural investment and that investment has to be paid for. Development contributions have played, and will continue to play, an important role in enabling capital investment by Councils in transport, community facilities, amenities and cultural facilities.

The impact of the recession has resulted in substantial reductions in development contributions, with Dublin's Councils, for example, reducing their contributions for new planning applications by 26%.

However, it has not been possible thus far for the holders of existing planning permissions to avail of these reduced contribution levies without revisiting the planning process.

Fine Gael Councillors will therefore support measures to ensure that current arrangements are amended to provide that lower rates of contributions can have retrospective effect for existing planning permissions that have yet to be activated.

To kick-start the construction of new housing in Dublin, Fine Gael Councillors will review the published Development Contributions Schemes with a view to providing reductions of a minimum of 25% of the published scheme rate. The revised discounts will apply to future projects that have obtained planning permission by the end of 2015, provided that development commences by the end of 2015 and is completed by mid-2016.

As a further measure to promote urban regeneration of brownfield sites and to help bring life back into many parts of our urban areas, Fine Gael Councillors will also support the reduction in Development Contributions of a minimum of 50% of the published scheme rate for a defined period of time where the Council is seeking to promote significant regeneration in city and town centre areas.

Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme

Historic structures are an important part of the community's heritage as well as providing a tourist focus and an aesthetic focal point in the area. The Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme is designed to help fund conservation by providing half the funding required, i.e. successful applicants have to match the funding awarded with the same amount from private or fundraised sources.

Administration of this Scheme is the responsibility of local Councils. Fine Gael Councillors will ensure the implementation and success of the Built Heritage Jobs Leverage Scheme and enhance the Scheme where necessary, increasing its potential to become a permanent part of our conservation agenda.

3: Growing the Regional and Local Economy

With the creation of LEOs and the reform of local government, Councillors now have a strong role to play in driving economic development locally. There are now new opportunities for regional linkages which would see a number of Councils coming together to cooperate on an initiative in their region. The advantage of a regional approach is evident through the successful South East Employment Action Plan pioneered by Minister Richard Bruton.

Fine Gael Councillors will work across Council boundaries to maximise regional development potential in line with the new Government strategy of regional development.

(i) Regional Enterprise Strategy

Fine Gael will develop a new framework for a Regional Enterprise Strategy to better integrate the efforts of enterprise agencies and the other regional stakeholders to grow employment in locally companies based on the sustainable competitive advantage of the region.

The intention is to develop a suite of regional actions and regional policy tools that promote innovation and collaboration across the network of LEOs and Councils with the aim of creating sustainable local jobs.

(ii) County Based Youth Entrepreneurship Competitive Start Programme

Fine Gael Councillors will fast-track implementation of Minister Bruton's proposal to introduce an Enterprise Ireland Competitive Start Programme through the LEO network which identifies the best young entrepreneur in the county to compete in regional and national competitions. Key criteria of this proposal include job creation potential, relevance to the local area, adoption of new technologies and the capacity to scale and grow exports.

It is expected that an additional allocation of €2 million in capital funding will be provided for a Youth Entrepreneur Start-up call. Each LEO will have a specific fund to award to the best three young entrepreneurs in their area with a final additional award for regional winner and ultimately a national winner.

4: Tackling Unemployment at Local Level

Your Council has a key role to play in providing opportunities for unemployed people to access the labour market. As economic recovery continues, Fine Gael Councillors will fight to ensure that households in their communities are not left behind. Your Council can provide opportunities for retraining, up-skilling and valuable work experience. The new 'Gateway' initiative seeks to emulate the success of JobBridge which has already provided over 27,000 placements to social welfare recipients, of which over 60% are moving into full-time jobs.

The Gateway Scheme

The new 'Gateway' initiative—a Council work placement scheme—will provide over 3,000 local work placements for people who have been on the live register for two years or more by the end of 2014.

The work programmes will cover the full spectrum of services areas across the Council and the work placement opportunities will range from general operative work (e.g. parks, environment, roads, etc.), through specialist roles (e.g. dog warden assistants, sports instructors, ambassadors at tourist attractions, etc.), to back office clerical and IT support.

Fine Gael Councillors will demand a doubling of places nationally to develop a number of flagship projects, in particular local tourism and recreation infrastructure, including cycleways, walkways and waterways.

5: Meeting Local Transport Needs

Fine Gael believes that decision-making on transport should take place on a local rather than a national level to the greatest extent possible.

Roads

Minister Varadkar is giving Councils greater discretion in respect of their expenditure on local and regional roads. Fine Gael Councillors will prioritise maintenance and upkeep of the existing road network in the first instance rather than the planning and design of possible new roads.

Fine Gael Councillors will exercise the greater discretion being given to Councils in respect of speed limits to prioritise sensible, safe speed limits and take account of local circumstances including, for example, the presence of schools.

Ports

Responsibility for the ports of Galway, Wicklow, Drogheda, New Ross and Dun Laoghaire will be transferred to Councils shortly. Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that these ports are integrated into local planning and that their full potential as a local amenity and a regional transport hub is fully realised, along with their tourism potential.

The Rural Transport Programme

The Rural Transport Programme (RTP) is an important local service, particularly for those who do not own cars. It is a bulwark against rural isolation. This Government is placing the RTP on a more secure footing and we are determined to maintain and expand the programme into the future.

The Councillors that you elect will play a role in new RTP structures called Transport Coordination Units (TCUs), working alongside the National Transport Authority (NTA) and transport providers. Fine Gael will prioritise integration

of the school transport and HSE transport networks with the RTP so that all of our publicly-funded buses are used to maximum efficiency.

Cycleways & Greenways

Councils are the key enablers of 'Greenways' - cycle routes along disused railways lines or canals. Routes such as the Great Western Greenway have proven extremely successful attracting high tourist numbers and leisure use.

In many cases, Council leadership is crucial to the creation of Greenways. Fine Gael Councillors will tackle the unacceptable delays in progressing the introduction of cycleways in communities around the country so that the success of the Great Western Greenway can be replicated.

Rollout of Public Bike Schemes

Fine Gael Councillors are championing the extension of the hugely successful Dublin Bikes Scheme to new parts of Dublin and to cities around Ireland.

Public bikes are environmentally friendly, enhance and link-up the existing transport network, promote healthy living, are popular with tourists and save money for the State and citizen. In Dublin there have been over six million rentals since the introduction of the scheme.

Fine Gael Councillors across Dublin, Limerick, Cork and Galway will drive the roll out and extension of the Bikes Scheme.

6: New Opportunities for Local Tourism

Building on the success of 'The Gathering'

Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that within each Council there is a dedicated fund for tourism development, as well as a separate fund to support local events and festivals that have the ability to bring in overseas visitors.

The very successful Gathering initiative, led by Ministers Varadkar and Ring demonstrated the crucial role of Councils in tourism. The success of the Gathering was built on local buy-in and with over 5,000 events around the country, many small towns and villages realised a previously untapped tourism potential. During the year of The Gathering, visitor numbers increased by more than 7% nationally while extensive training was provided to more than 2,500 people in communities across the country.

The Government is currently working on a new tourism policy and improving and streamlining the role of Councils and their members in tourism is a crucial issue in this review. Councils are responsible for co-ordinating tourist activity locally, supporting tourism product development and fostering a pro-tourism culture within communities.

Fine Gael Councillors will build on the success of The Gathering by developing the legacy of networks it has created and continuing to invest in tourism infrastructure. This will involve Fine Gael Councillors, through the Strategic Policy Committees, placing a strong emphasis on tourism as part of their economic planning within their areas.

Fine Gael Councillors will work to promote local tourist attractions and ensure accessibility.

7: Funding for Community Projects

Every year local communities receive significant funding under the "LEADER" Programme, which is financed by the EU and the Government to provide for rural development programmes. The next round of LEADER funding 2014-2020 will continue to be based on the 'bottom-up' approach to delivery. However, recent changes introduced by Minister Hogan will provide for better alignment with the Council, which in turn provides for better accountability on what projects are funded in local communities and gives Councillors a greater say.

Councillors are your local representatives; they, along with community interests, are your voice when decisions are being made on matters such as the allocation of LEADER funds. New Local Community Development Committees will see Councillors and community interests coming together to prepare a Local Community Plan – a strategic framework for all local and community development spend in the local area.

Elected members, through the new Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), will have a greater input in the planning and oversight of local and community development spending, in the form of Local Community Plans, which will detail the range of local and community projects and programmes to be funded in the locality including the LEADER rural development programme.

8: The Rural Economy

The introduction of Local Community Development Committees is a positive development for rural Ireland. Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that the Local Community Plans are aimed at improving the economic as well as social fabric of local communities. In particular, Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that funding is prioritised for:

- labour market training to assist the unemployed find work,
- projects and programmes that increase economic activity and generate employment, including:
 - speciality food and beverage;
 - renewable energy;
 - tourism initiatives, including destination management and marketing;
 - creative industry businesses; and
 - social enterprises.

A New CAP and CFP

The nature of the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) in 2013 was certain to have a colossal impact on the rural economy. Under Minister Coveney's leadership, a new CAP and CFP were agreed in Europe, with measures set to significantly benefit rural Ireland in the coming years.

Common Agricultural Policy

More than €12.5 billion in Common Agricultural Policy and Exchequer funding will be allocated to the agriculture sector in the period to 2020 with €8.5 billion of EU funding in direct payments being complemented by a rural development fund of €1.9 billion in national funding and €2.2 billion in EU funding. This represents a very significant, strategic financial investment in the agri-food sector, and comes on top of the large commercial investments that have been made by major players in the sector in recent times and the very positive news from Bord Bia on the continuing rise in the value of agri-food exports in 2013.

To make the developing economic recovery felt in every locality, Minister Coveney is drafting a new Rural Development Programme which will see more on-farm investment as we grow our indigenous food and drink industry to new heights.

Minister Coveney's focus is on the need to achieve smart, green growth, as envisaged in Food Harvest 2020. The package of measures contained in the new CAP provides practical, targeted support that will help the sector to achieve its ambitions while meeting its climate change responsibilities.

The main areas targeted are:

- Young farmers: 2% of the national ceiling will be allocated to young farmers;
- Agri-environment: a substantial new agri-environment/climate scheme (GLAS) will be introduced;
- Areas of Natural Constraint (formerly "Disadvantaged Areas"): €195 million per year has been allocated to support Areas of Natural Constraint;
- Incentives for on-farm capital investment: these include support for the expansion of the dairy sector following the abolition of milk quotas in 2015;
- Improving the Beef Herd: Ireland will have a new beef data and genomics measure worth up to €52 million per year.

Common Fisheries Policy

During the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU, Minister Coveney brokered a new EU Common Fisheries Policy. The main achievements under the new Common Fisheries Policy will be:

- To set quotas that fully respect scientific advice, leading to healthier fish stocks and higher quotas;
- Discarding of fish stocks will no longer be allowed;
- A commitment to develop and strengthen biologically sensitive areas (e.g. the "Irish Box" off the south and west coast); and
- To retain ownership of fish quotas as a public asset, protecting the family owned fishing vessels around our coast.

HOUSING AND LIVING

9: Minimising Your Local Property Tax (LPT)

Fine Gael Councillors recognise that the Local Property Tax (LPT) is a financial burden on homeowners, though fairer and more progressive than the Household Charge and Non-Principal Private Residences charge introduced by the last Fianna Fáil-led Government.

The Government will ensure that by 2015 at least 80% of the LPT will be retained locally so that local taxes directly fund local services such as parks, libraries and services in a transparent and accountable way.

From 2015 Councillors will have the ability to increase or lower the LPT rate by 15%. Fine Gael Councillors will not increase the LPT rate and will reduce the LPT rate where possible taking into account local county needs. We will ensure that no Council will be worse off following these reforms. The law underpinning the Local Property Tax will see a revaluation of property in 2016, this and the setting of a national rate will be a matter for Government and the Oireachtas in 2016.

10: Social Housing: New Home Ownership Opportunities

Fine Gael Councillors will pioneer a new approach to the management of local housing needs through the Council. The Social Housing waiting list backlog will be partly tackled through the introduction of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). This is one element of helping people to put down deeper roots in their communities; the second element is a new Social Housing Tenant Purchase Scheme.

Assisting low-income families to purchase their own home

Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that your Council avails of and robustly implements the new Social Housing Tenant Purchase Scheme.

The scheme will assist low-income households put down long-term roots and help to build stable and integrated communities.

Purchase will be strictly confined to existing tenants and will not be available to investors or to any other individuals.

We will use the proceeds from the sales to reinvest in new social housing and to free up resources for new investment in parks, playgrounds and other local facilities so that all the community can benefit.

11: Housing: Healing the Scars of the Economic Crash

Minister Hogan has introduced a range of measures to address the huge burdens placed on people by poor planning and weak regulation during Fianna Fáil's last period in power. The new Pyrite Remediation Scheme offers solutions to those who find themselves with pyrite in their homes. Priory Hall residents have also been offered a Resolution Framework. Minister Hogan has introduced new Building Control Regulations to give greater protection to home owners.

Significant progress has been made in tackling unfinished housing estates. Councils have a key role in resolving the difficulties associated with unfinished housing estates, one of the worst legacies of Fianna Fáil's era in power. In particular, Councils determine the priority of unfinished housing estates to be dealt with through national programmes administered by the National Co-ordinating Committee on Unfinished Housing Developments (NCC).

Under the Public Safety Initiative for Unfinished Housing Developments the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government has made allocations totalling €4.46 million to 23 Councils. In Budget 2014 €10 million was allocated to the Site Resolution Fund to incentivise resolution in cases where more progress is needed.

Since 2010 there has been a decrease of more than half of the number of unfinished developments.

Fine Gael Councillors will aggressively pursue the resolution of difficulties with the remaining unfinished developments around the State, prioritising the developments with residents.

12: Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour for Peaceful Community Living

Residents should no longer have to feel intimidated by anti-social behaviour in their communities.

Fine Gael will strengthen Council estate management powers so that Councils may issue a tenancy warning as a consequence of anti-social behaviour.

A tenancy warning relating to anti-social behaviour will set out the detrimental effect of the breach on the quality of life in the community, and if the breach continues the Council may either apply to recover possession of the dwelling or apply to the District Court for an excluding order against the household member concerned.

The Council may take the tenancy warning into account for up to three years when considering whether or not to let or sell a dwelling to the household member who caused the breach.

The Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government will have the power to make regulations requiring housing authorities to revise their existing tenancy agreements accordingly so that they can retrospectively notify their tenants of the new responsibilities.

In addition, Fine Gael Councillors will work with Joint Policing Committees to ensure that anti-social behaviour hotspots are dealt with by An Garda Síochána.

13: Better Waste Management

The Government's waste policy is radically changing the way we view and deal with waste. The range of new regulatory measures include:

- The introduction of pricing structures that incentivise sustainable behaviour.
- New controls to ensure that rogue entities do not hold waste permits.
- The requirement that service providers put in place customer charters.

The new regime will benefit the consumer and business and help address current shortcomings, in particular the build-up of waste and illegal dumping especially in many of our urban areas.

Fine Gael Councillors will also use bye-law powers under the Waste Management Act to further improve the management of waste. For example, these powers might include controlling the times when waste collection is permitted, to limit the impact of noise and health and safety risks to children that can be sometimes created in estates by overlapping waste collection services.

14: Tackling a Welfare Trap & the Housing List: HAP

Fine Gael Councillors will be at the forefront of a new approach to local housing. A new payment, the 'Housing Assistance Payment' (HAP), is designed to address three problems associated with the traditional approach to social housing, namely:

- Social housing waiting lists are unacceptably long.
- Rent Supplement has been identified as a 'welfare trap' as recipients lose their entitlement if they take up employment.
- Responsibility for social housing is divided between the Department of Social Protection - which administers the Rent Supplement scheme - and the Council - which is responsible for managing the social housing list and the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS).

The Housing Assistance Payment will address these problems in three main ways as follows:

First, HAP applicants will source their own accommodation in the private rented sector and once they are accommodated they will be deemed to have their housing need met. HAP will help renters to bridge the gap between their rent and their ability to pay.

Secondly, housing assistance will no longer be based on employment status but rather on the income of the tenant and their ability to pay. HAP will therefore continue when a person enters the labour force thus removing employment traps.

Thirdly, the Council will have overall responsibility for the HAP scheme, therefore streamlining the service.

HAP will lead to a fundamental reconfiguration of the landscape of housing support in Ireland, appropriately recognising different needs whilst allowing resources to be more effectively targeted to those needs. The rollout of the scheme nationally will also complement the Social Housing Purchase Tenant Scheme.

Fine Gael Councillors have an instrumental role to play in ensuring the effective management of local housing needs; we will ensure that the HAP scheme is implemented in every Council as a matter of urgency.

15: Developing Local Services for our Children & Young Adults

Pre-School and Early Years services

Fine Gael recognises the crucial importance of promoting and ensuring quality and high standards in preschool and early years services.

County and City Childcare Committees exist throughout the country and have played an important role in supporting local childcare services. As part of Minister Fitzgerald's Pre-School Quality Agenda, the role of County and City Childcare Committees will be further developed with greater linkages to Councils.

Fine Gael Councillors will take on a more pro-active role in supporting the work of the County and City Childcare Committees, ensuring quality of preschool and early years services locally.

Since 2011 Minister Fitzgerald has provided €8.75 million in capital funding to develop and improve local preschool and early years services. Further funding of €3 million will be provided in 2014.

Supporting Play and Physical Activity

The new National Local Authority Play and Recreation Network brings together for the first time key Council managers and staff responsible for the local delivery of play and recreation services for your community.

Fine Gael Councillors will develop and support the 'National Play Day' and 'National Recreation Week' initiatives and ensure your Council draws down the maximum funding available under national schemes.

Through City and County Development Plans, Fine Gael Councillors will identify, require and provide for the development of innovative play and recreation areas in residential areas including smaller, informal play areas in estates, within walking distance of houses.

In 2013 Minister Fitzgerald introduced a funding scheme to contribute on a 50:50 basis towards Council playground developments. Further funding will be provided in 2014. Fine Gael Councillors will seek to maximise the drawdown of funding through ensuring that matching playground funding is provided in Council Budgets.

Supporting Young People & Youth Services

Youth Cafés offer young people a safe, alcohol free environment to 'hang out' in a dynamic local hub and can provide a range of services including mental health services, information and youth employment supports.

Minister Fitzgerald has prioritised investment in Youth Cafés nationwide with €2.2 million having been invested since 2011, with further funding being provided in 2014 and subsequent years.

Fine Gael Councillors have been active in campaigning for the expansion of the Youth Café network and, following the next round of funding, will ensure the maximum draw down on this funding for their local communities.

Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that your Council plays a more pro-active role in partnering with youth services to provide Youth Cafés and other youth service hubs.

Planning for child-friendly communities

Fine Gael Councillors, when adopting new City/County Development Plans and new Local Area Plans, will seek to include policies and objectives to promote better planning for child-friendly communities, including provision of traffic-calmed residential areas, more informal play areas in residential areas and safe pedestrian/cycling routes to schools.

In addition, Fine Gael Councillors will seek to include explicit objectives in their statutory land-use plans to give local effect to the objective of the 2013 National Guidelines on Local Area Planning to reduce the exposure of children to the promotion of fast food; through restricting the opening of new fast food outlets in the vicinity of schools and parks.

Sports Capital Programme

The Sports Capital Programme aims to foster an integrated and planned approach to developing sports and physical recreation facilities throughout the country. In particular, its objectives are to:

- assist voluntary and community organisations, national governing bodies (NGBs) of sport, Councils and in some cases Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and schools to develop high quality, safe, well-designed, sustainable facilities in appropriate locations and to provide appropriate equipment to help maximise participation in sport and physical recreation;
- prioritise the needs of disadvantaged areas in the provision of sports facilities; and
- encourage the multi-purpose use of local, regional and national sports facilities by clubs, community organisations and national governing bodies of sport.

The Sports Capital Programme was shut down by the previous government when the financial crisis hit. Minister Ring secured funding for the re-launch of the scheme in 2012, which saw a record number of applications.

Minister Ring's recently announced 2014 Sports Capital Programme will allocate €40 million in grants, which should see dressing rooms, flood lights and sports halls built and pitches drained. While not all clubs can be successful, Fine Gael believes clubs who have not yet been successful in the Programme should get priority.

This €40 million in grants will also create construction and related jobs in communities around the country.

The Sports Capital Programme will be complemented by the important work of the Council in the area of sports. Each Council has personnel responsible for promoting sport and recreation activities among all ages in the community facilitating and running a range of programmes in their local area. Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that sports and recreation is prioritised in the Council's work programmes so that this important community service is enhanced and developed further.

CITIES, TOWNS AND COUNTRYSIDE

16: Fine Gael's Agenda for Cities and Towns

Local Property Tax (LPT)

The Government will ensure that by 2015 at least 80% of the LPT will be retained locally so that local taxes directly fund local services such as parks, libraries and services in a transparent and accountable way.

From 2015 Councillors will have the ability to increase or lower the LPT rate by 15%. Fine Gael Councillors will not increase the locally decided LPT rate and will reduce the LPT rate where possible taking into account local county needs. We will ensure that no Council will be worse off following these reforms.

Addressing Urban Housing Needs

Fine Gael Councillors will:

- Prioritise the refurbishment of vacant units to meet social housing demand.
- Temporarily reduce development contributions to kick-start the construction of new housing in Dublin and development of other urban brownfield sites.
- Ensure the planning system responds to the need for family homes.
- Implement the HAP scheme to remove a welfare trap and reduce housing lists.
- Prioritise the ending of long-term homelessness by 2016 by implementing the Government's Homelessness Policy Statement (February 2013) which provides for a housing-led approach to homelessness as the primary policy response.

A Better Urban Environment in our Regional Towns

Economic development has to be balanced if we are to make the recovery local. The potential of our regional and county towns must be harnessed if their wider rural hinterlands are also to thrive.

The local government reforms introduced in 2014 will mean that more streamlined and stronger Councils are now better placed to promote and co-ordinate economic activity.

Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that our towns are the main locus for development in the regions, providing for population growth, transport and key services such as education and health, while avoiding legacy issues such as unfinished housing estates that resulted from the excessive and inappropriate zoning of the 'Celtic Tiger' years.

Fine Gael Councillors will drive new initiatives to promote a better urban environment, including, joint initiatives with local businesses to improve town centres (as being piloted in Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council). Priority will be given to:

- Designing inclusive and safe public spaces;
- Tackling empty properties and brownfield sites;
- The needs of pedestrians and cyclists;
- Promoting the use of public, less polluting and more energy efficient modes of transport; and
- Giving local people a greater stake in the decision-making process of neighbourhood management.

Urban Parks

Work Activation Schemes run by Councils will provide an opportunity for valuable work experience while also delivering resources into the creation and maintenance of important public spaces, including parks, cycleways, walkways and waterways.

Play Areas

Fine Gael Councillors will deliver a series of Council play and recreation initiatives including play areas, particularly in residential areas and will identify further funding opportunities for smaller, informal play areas in estates, within walking distance of houses.

Flood Defences

Fine Gael Councillors will prioritise investment in flood defences to protect our cities and towns from extreme weather.

Living Cities

Fine Gael will continue to promote initiatives such as the "Living City" tax scheme which allows home buyers and commercial property buyers to apply for tax relief on the refurbishment of historic buildings. Minister Noonan has approved the introduction of this scheme in Dublin, Cork, Galway, Limerick, Waterford and Kilkenny.

Revitalising the Main Street:

- **Commercial Rates:** During the period agreed by the Council for the harmonisation of commercial rates, Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that the commercial rate agreed at the outset will not be increased during that period, and they will reduce rates where possible so that there will be no additional burden placed on the business community to fund local government.
- **Vacant Premises:** Fine Gael Councillors want to address the problem of vacant commercial premises in our towns and cities. Fine Gael Councillors will use changes to the rates rules to incentivise landlords to lease vacant premises; this will complement Minister Hogan's decision to change the law to ensure that new tenants are no longer liable for the commercial rates arrears of previous tenants.
- **Clamping and Parking:** Fine Gael Councillors will adopt a parking strategy to examine and address the impact of clamping and parking charges on city and town centre retailers. This will build on Minister Varadkar's reform of clamping laws which involve minimum signage requirements, limits on fines and maximum clamp release periods and fees.

Changing Estate & Street Names

The naming of estates and roads has become an issue for many homeowners in recent years as it is currently very difficult to amend names once they are registered.

In the spirit of devolution, the Minister for Environment will introduce new regulations as part of ongoing local government reforms to make it easier for residents to change the name of a street or locality by a simple majority of the registered electors.

Urban Transport

As the area of highest population, Dublin and the counties surrounding it require an integrated transport network which includes Dart, Luas, Bus, Bicycles and Pedestrians and takes account of the wider commuter belt reaching into Louth, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow.

Fine Gael Councillors will work to deliver the Greater Dublin Area Cycle Network project which proposes to increase the provision of on and off road cycle paths from 500km to 2,840 kms in the four Dublin Council areas as well as counties Kildare, Meath and Wicklow.

Fine Gael Councillors are committed to a system of public transport that is as efficient and widespread as possible. Ten per cent of the Public Service Obligation (PSO) contracts held by Dublin Bus and Bus Éireann for the bus market will expire shortly and there will be a new competitive tendering process. This will deliver as good a service as we now have, or better, to commuters at a lower price to taxpayers.

Fine Gael Councillors will continue to prioritise bus lanes to improve the attractiveness of bus travel as an alternative to cars.

Fine Gael will continue to invest in improved technology including Real Time Passenger Information, new travel Apps, free WiFi and the Leap card to enhance services to transport users and increase efficiencies.

Building on the success of The Gathering

The Government is currently working on a new tourism policy and improving and streamlining the role of Councils and their members in tourism is a crucial issue in this review.

Fine Gael Councillors will build on the success of The Gathering by developing the legacy of networks it has created and continuing to invest in tourism infrastructure. This will involve Fine Gael Councillors, through the Strategic Policy Committees, placing a strong emphasis on tourism as part of their economic planning within their areas.

Fine Gael Councillors will work to promote local tourist attractions and ensure accessibility.

Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that within each Council there is a dedicated fund for tourism development, as well as a separate fund to support local events and festivals that have the ability to bring in overseas visitors.

DUBLIN

Dublin Mayor

Fine Gael believes an executive mayor would be good for Dublin and Dubliners which would introduce a model of international best practice to the governance of our national capital.

Following on from lack of agreement between Dublin local authorities we will develop alternative proposals for future consultation and action with Dubliners.

Dublin Transport Projects

The completion of the Luas Cross City project in an efficient manner is a crucial aspect of Fine Gael's transport plan for Dublin city.

Tourism in Dublin

Fine Gael is ambitious for tourism in Dublin, believing that Dublin has the potential to be amongst the leading European city destinations. However achieving this requires significant leadership from the four Dublin Councils, in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland and the tourism industry.

Fine Gael Councillors will champion the development a collaborative funding model for the promotion of Dublin overseas leveraging public and private funding sources.

Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that the existing work carried out by the Dublin Councils to bring and promote events across the city is enhanced and improved.

Fine Gael Councillors will develop a specific fund from across the four Dublin Councils to attract major international events to our capital city.

Urban Village initiative

Dublin is comprised of a series of villages, each with its own character and identity.

A distinctive village 'brand' is important in fostering community spirit among residents and a vibrant business community that attracts visitors to the area.

Fine Gael Councillors will require the Council to develop a 'best practice' model for urban villages which would guide community and business groups in coming together to promote their area as an attractive place to work, live and do business.

Fine Gael Councillors will promote an annual Best Urban Village competition in their Dublin Council area.

'Silicon Dock': Fine Gael Councillors will continue to develop the docklands as an ecosystem for the technology industry, delivering appropriate infrastructure and working in partnership with the local community, the IDA and the Dublin City Council LEO to cluster appropriate technological companies at 'Silicon Dock'.

Irish Shipping Centre: Fine Gael will work to create a maritime services hub in Dublin's docklands modelled on the success of the IFSC.

17: Fine Gael's Rural Agenda

Investing in the Rural Economy

New Local Community Development Committees are being established in your local Council. Their role includes developing a Local Community Plan.

Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that funding in these plans focuses on helping the unemployed find work along with projects and programmes that increase economic activity and generate employment, e.g. speciality food and beverage projects.

A New Common Agriculture Policy (CAP)

The Common Agricultural Policy programme negotiated by Minister Coveney in 2013 will see more than €12.5 billion in CAP and Exchequer funding will be allocated to the agriculture sector in the period to 2020 with €8.5 billion of EU funding in direct payments being complemented by a rural development fund of €1.9 billion in national funding and €2.2 billion in EU funding.

The main areas targeted under CAP include: extra funding for young farmers; a new agri-environment scheme (GLAS); €195 million for Areas of Natural Constraint; incentives for on-farm investment and a €52 million per annum investment in improving the Irish beef herd.

A New Common Fisheries Policy

During the Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU, Minister Coveney brokered a new EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

The new CFP involves the end of discards; a commitment to develop and strengthen biologically sensitive areas (e.g. the "Irish Box" off the south and west coast); and a promise to retain ownership of fish quotas as a public asset, protecting the family owned fishing vessels around our coast.

Safer Communities – the Role of the JPC in Tackling Crime

Ensuring safe communities requires Garda recruitment, more Gardaí out from behind desks on the beat in the locality, new rostering to ensure Garda power is concentrated where needed and a new approach to policing that is intelligence-led.

Fine Gael is delivering in each of these areas with County Councillors providing a critical voice through local Joint Policing Committees (JPCs).

Garda recruitment recommenced in 2014; a reorganisation of the Garda station network in 2012-2013 means that more Gardaí are now out on the beat rather than behind desks in under-used stations; new rostering arrangements allows Gardaí to better respond to community needs with rostering reflecting the times when extra policing is needed.

Minister Shatter has prioritised new technology - including €9 million worth of new modern vehicles sanctioned in 2013 alone, making the Gardaí better equipped to fight crime.

CSO figures are showing a downward trend in crime including burglary and robbery.

Fine Gael Councillors will continue to be a strong voice for your locality on the JPC – a forum which brings together representatives of the Council with senior Garda officers responsible for the policing of the local area along with representatives of the community and local Oireachtas members to consult, discuss and make recommendations on matters affecting the policing of the local area.

Rural Roads

Minister Varadkar is giving Councils greater discretion in respect of their expenditure on local and regional roads.

Fine Gael Councillors will prioritise the maintenance and upkeep of the existing road network in the first instance rather than the planning and design of possible new roads.

Fine Gael Councillors will exercise the greater discretion being given to Councils in respect of speed limits to prioritise sensible, safe speed limits and take account of local circumstances such as the presence of schools.

The Rural Transport Programme

The Rural Transport Programme (RTP) is an important local service, particularly for those who do not own cars. It is an essential bulwark against rural isolation. This Government is placing the RTP on a more secure footing and we are determined to maintain and expand the programme into the future.

The Councillors that you elect will play a role in new RTP structures called Transport Coordination Units (TCUs), working alongside the National Transport Authority (NTA) and transport providers. Fine Gael will prioritise integration of the school transport and HSE transport networks with the RTP so that all of our publicly-funded buses are used to maximum efficiency.

Cycleways & Greenways

Councils are the key enablers of 'Greenways' - cycle routes along disused railways lines or canals. Routes such as the Great Western Greenway have proven extremely successful attracting high tourist numbers and leisure use, boosting the rural economy.

In many cases, Council leadership is crucial to the creation of Greenways. Fine Gael Councillors will tackle the unacceptable delays in progressing the introduction of cycleways in communities around the country so that the success of the Great Western Greenway can be replicated.

Hospital Groups: protecting Local Hospital Services

Six hospital groups are being established around the country. In each group smaller hospitals will be linked to large hospitals, securing their future. More patients will be treated in small hospitals which will do more work in a large number of areas including day surgery, diagnostics, rehabilitation and chronic disease management. This will allow the larger hospitals to focus on the medical procedures that only they can do and reduce waiting times for patients.

The introduction of primary care centres is delivering a one-stop-shop to communities by providing a range of health under one roof, e.g. GP services, dental services, community mental health services etc. Since May 2011, 32 Primary Care Centres have opened and we will deliver 35 additional Primary Care Centres around the country by the end of 2016.

Developing Rural Tourism initiatives

The very successful Gathering initiative was built on local buy-in and with over 5,000 events around the country and visitor numbers increasing by 7% nationally.

Many small towns and villages realised a previously untapped tourism potential while 2,500 people in communities across the country received training.

The Government is currently working on a new tourism policy and improving and streamlining the role of Councils and their members in tourism is a crucial issue in this review.

Fine Gael Councillors will build on the success of The Gathering by developing the legacy of networks it has created and continuing to invest in tourism infrastructure. This will involve Fine Gael Councillors, through the Strategic Policy Committees, placing a strong emphasis on tourism as part of their economic planning within their areas.

Fine Gael Councillors will work to promote local tourist attractions and ensure accessibility.

Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that within each Council there is a dedicated fund for tourism development, as well as a separate fund to support local events and festivals that have the ability to bring in overseas visitors.

Sports Capital Programme

The Sports Capital Programme assists voluntary and community organisations and other bodies to develop high quality, safe, well-designed, sustainable facilities and provides appropriate equipment to help maximise participation in sport and physical recreation.

The last Fianna Fáil-led Government shut the Programme down but Minister Ring has re-launched the scheme.

Under the 2014 Sports Capital Programme €40 million in grants will be allocated which should see dressing rooms, flood lights and sports halls built and pitches drained.

While not all clubs can be successful, Fine Gael believes clubs who have not yet been successful in the Programme should receive priority.

This €40 million in grants will also create construction and related jobs in communities around the country.

This initiative will be complemented by the important work of the Council in the area of sports. Each Council has personnel responsible for promoting sport and recreation activities among all ages in the community facilitating and running a range of programmes in their local area. Fine Gael Councillors will ensure that sports and recreation is prioritised in the Council's work programmes so that this important community service is enhanced and developed further.

The relevance of new Council structures in Rural Areas

This year a new system of Local Government will modernise Council structures.

At sub-county level, we will have Municipal Districts with Municipal Councils which will be empowered to take certain local decisions affecting the locality.

There will be greater opportunities for local citizens and community representatives to work with their Council representatives to prioritise and make decisions on local issues.



For the latest details on Fine Gael, our policies,
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