

**MOVING FORWARD. TOGETHER.
AG BOGADH AR AGHAIDH. LE CHÉILE.**

Supporting Urban Communities



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In this election Fianna Fáil's focus is on protecting the progress achieved by our country and setting out a range of policies to address the most serious challenges facing our country; policies which will move all parts of our country forward, together.

There is a need for a new era in support for communities – an era in which communities are helped to overcome serious issues and to develop to their full potential. In the past, programmes of coordinated state intervention have made a huge impact. For example, Ireland now has one of the highest school completion rates in the developed world. This has underpinned new opportunities and rising living standards.

However, the momentum in local development has been lost, and many parts of our cities have suffered as a result.

Fianna Fáil is committed to helping communities. In this document, we set out our 11-point plan for supporting urban communities. There are many different dimensions to this, not just crime.

Fianna Fáil is focused on bringing about a new era of targeted investment concentrated on renewing our urban spaces, as well as developing areas of significant disadvantage.

We want to make our urban communities vibrant places to live, work and play. We want to make them cleaner, safer and stronger.

In this document we outline 11 areas of action for our urban communities.

In addition, we have specific housing and investment proposals that will benefit our urban communities. These will be outlined during the campaign. There will also be more Dublin specific proposals that will be outlined in a separate policy.

1. Introduce an Urban Communities Initiative

Fianna Fáil is committed to introducing a new Urban Communities Initiative (UCI), backed by an investment of €175m over the term of government.

This initiative will be focused on our city centres and towns and the areas of highest disadvantage utilising the Pobal deprivation index to select areas and measure outcomes.

It is not sufficient to just spend money. We need to put in place lasting structures to transform disadvantaged areas. The UCI will bring together all State agencies to implement participative community development planning, targeted schemes for disadvantaged youth and expanded education programmes focused on areas of deprivation and disadvantage.

The UCI will involve hiring specialist community workers, innovative support programmes and targeted capital investment in facilities.

The Department of Taoiseach will take the lead on this initiative to provide leadership, drive change, and give it the relentless focus it needs. This work will be supported by a Cabinet sub-committee that will hold the UCI to account and ensure it has measurable outcomes.

2. More Gardaí on our streets

Garda visibility on our streets and in our communities is vital to ensure that people feel safe and protected.

We want to ensure that greater numbers of Gardaí are available for frontline policing and we will allocate €236m to achieve this.

Garda recruitment has been too slow. Fianna Fáil is committed to reforming our Garda recruitment and training processes to increase capacity.

We will recruit 5,000 more Gardaí over the next five years and plan for a medium-term force strength of 20,000. We will develop an accelerated graduate entry programme.

3. Anti-social behaviour

Anti-social behaviour is a particular problem in our urban communities. It undermines the fabric and cohesion of our cities. Fianna Fáil is determined to tackle it head on.

We will strengthen the powers of the Gardaí to tackle this issue:

- We will introduce legislation giving Gardaí the power to disperse groups of people involved in anti-social behaviour such as intimidation and verbal abuse ('Dispersal Orders').
- We will introduce 'Public Space Protection Orders' to protect public spaces from anti-social behaviour.
- We will create a Safe Public Places Unit within An Garda Síochána to advise Local Authorities, Planning Authorities and Community Safety Partnerships on best practice in public lighting and estate and street design.

Building on our work tackling knife crime, Fianna Fáil is committed to further broadening the range of offences to include bans on specific types of blades.

4. Introduce a DEIS Plus Initiative

Fianna Fáil has a big vision for equality of opportunity in education.

The DEIS programme, introduced by Fianna Fáil, has made enormous strides in promoting school retention in disadvantaged areas and reducing educational inequality. Under Minister Foley, the programme was expanded at the fastest rate since its inception, after being left stagnant for many years.

However, we need to do more. Fianna Fáil is proposing to introduce a new tier of DEIS for schools serving communities experiencing the highest concentrations of disadvantage. We will underpin the DEIS plus programme with funding of €50m every year.

The DEIS plus programme will expand the Support Teacher Service to these schools, ensuring that students get increased one-to-one and small group learning in literacy and numeracy. In addition to providing multidisciplinary teams of therapists to special education settings, we will also provide them to DEIS Plus schools to support children experiencing mental health challenges or special educational needs.

We will fully resource and staff 'Nurture Rooms' in these schools - short-term focused intervention to address issues that hinder learning for some pupils. While the Support Teacher Service provides additional literacy and numeracy support for pupils who need it, the Nurture Room provides additional social and emotional support.

5. Cleaning up our cities and towns

Our towns and cities must be clean and safe if they are to be attractive places in which to live, shop, and run a business. Too often, our cities and urban areas fall short in this regard. It harms their reputation at home and abroad. Fianna Fáil has a plan to clean up our cities.

We will work with Local Authorities to increase the number of staff keeping streets free of litter and spick and span, particularly during the summer months when less rain and higher temperatures can leave streets dirty and grimy.

We will allocate funding to invest in cleaning equipment and to tackle litter blackspots within the urban core.

We will also develop anti-littering campaigns to remind citizens of our shared responsibility to keep our streets free of rubbish, with a particular focus on common urban litter such as cigarette butts, vapes and chewing gum.

6. Increasing the population of town and city centres

The combination of change in shopping habits (with a major shift to online retail) and change in work patterns (with more and more people working from home) has resulted in a significant decline in the footfall in our urban centres.

We need to increase the permanent population of our urban centres as this will help support businesses and increase the vibrancy and safety of our cities.

Fianna Fáil is committed to introducing incentives to encourage people to move back into our town and city centres. These will be outlined with our Housing proposals.

7. A standalone, dedicated Transport Police

Fianna Fáil has long advocated for the need for a dedicated Transport Police, focused on tackling crime and anti-social behaviour on our national public transport network.

A Fianna Fáil survey of over 1,300 people found that 93% of those surveyed have witnessed some form of anti-social behaviour while using public transport. This is not acceptable.

Irish Rail and Dublin Bus are spending significant sums of money each year on private security. Fianna Fáil is committed to introducing a permanent Transport Police presence on similar to units that operate in other European countries.

8. Public transport in our cities

The Luas is Ireland's only light rail service. Fianna Fáil will continue to invest in the expansion of the Luas and we are committed to expanding light rail services to our other cities including Galway, Cork and Limerick.

625,000 people across the country now have access to 24-hour regular public transport bus services. In Dublin city, 10 bus routes operate 24/7 in addition to 12 reduced fare 'nightlink' services on weekend. Late evening and 24-hour bus services are also operating in Cork, Limerick and Galway cities.

Fianna Fáil is committed to continue to expand public transport services in our cities and has committed €3.6bn to achieve this.

9. Youth services

Fianna Fáil is committed to providing increased community supports for young people in our urban areas so they have access to the facilities, services and outlets they need to thrive.

Fianna Fáil has increased funding for youth support services by 26% since 2019, investing €78m in 2024 alone.

If re-elected to Government, Fianna Fáil will develop a new Youth Services Action Plan within the first 100 days to provide a strategic direction for the delivery of youth services.

We will reform the Local Youth Club Grant Scheme, which assists youth groups with their development needs, and the UBU Scheme, which provides local services for young people, so that multi-annual funding is available, and that open-access youth work is funded.

We will also:

- Create a pathway for youth workers to access mental health supports for the young people in their care.
- Establish advanced drug treatment centres for young people suffering from addiction, developing a health-led approach to addiction.
- Roll out National Youth Diversion Programmes to support young people in a more holistic way outside of the formal criminal justice system.
- Create a pathway for youth workers to access mental health supports for the young people in their care.

10. Drugs

Drugs destroy lives. They destroy the lives of individual users. They destroy families, communities and the very fabric of society.

Fianna Fáil recognises the need for a differentiated response to drug use, on the one hand, and drug supply, on the other hand.

In terms of drug use, Fianna Fáil is committed to a health led response, rather than a criminal justice one.

In terms of drug supply, Fianna Fáil will deal with those who supply drugs in a very different manner. Criminals who are flooding our villages, towns and communities with drugs will be met with the full rigour of the law.

Fianna Fáil will ensure that An Garda Síochána, our Defence Forces and our Naval Service are adequately resourced to apprehend dangerous criminals who are using ever evolving methods and technologies to import and supply drugs in our country.

We will also ensure that once apprehended, the punishment imposed on those who supply drugs reflects the destruction and devastation that those drugs wreak on our communities and our society as a whole.

We will also:

- Expand the Remit of the Special Criminal Court to ensure that organised crime groups engaged in drug trafficking are prosecuted in the Special Criminal Court.
- Introduce specific legislation requiring social media companies and online communication platforms to provide An Garda Síochána with any information they have on their platforms relating to the supply of illegal drugs.
- Increase sentences for those involved in the supply of drugs. The punishment imposed must reflect the destruction and devastation that those drugs impose on our communities.

11. Enhancing sporting, arts and leisure amenities

Fianna Fáil recognises the positive impact that sport and recreational facilities have on improving the lives of people living in our cities.

Fianna Fáil Ministers (Jack Chambers and Thomas Byrne) delivered the two largest ever Sports Capital/Community Sports Facilities Funds programmes in the history of the state. Since 2020, more than €400m was allocated to develop sports facilities.

We enhanced the programmes to ensure that disadvantaged communities were prioritised, with the assessment process favouring funding for projects in areas with lower Pobal index rating.

If returned to Government, Fianna Fáil will:

- Increase capital funds to develop multi-sport facilities in communities that can be shared by various local sports clubs.
- Establish an Arts Capital and Equipment Programme to invest in local and community arts modelled on the highly successful Community Sports Facility Fund. We will again prioritise areas of disadvantage in the grant process.
- Introduce a 'Parks and Pitches' Fund of €250m to purchase and develop parks and playing pitches, walking and playing areas.



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