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STATEMENT OF COMMON PURPOSE

On the 25th February a democratic revolution took place in Ireland. Old beliefs, traditions and expectations were blown away. The stroke of a pen, in thousands of polling stations, created this political whirlwind. The public demanded change and looked to parties that would deliver the change they sought.

In that election record numbers of Irish people turned to, and chose, Fine Gael and Labour. The people chose our two parties to begin mending the pieces of a fractured society, a broken economy and to provide a sense of collective hope in our shared future.

It is no exaggeration to say that we now face one of the darkest hours in the history of our independent state. To deal with this unprecedented national economic emergency, our country needs an unprecedented level of political resolve. What is needed now after a long period of reckless, ill disciplined Government is strong, resolute leadership.

That is why Fine Gael and Labour, the two largest political parties in the State having achieved historic levels of support in the general election, now seek to use their mandate to form a Government for National Recovery.

A Government that will be built on partnership and parity of esteem between our two parties. Its key objective will be to repair our society over the next 5 years and get our people back to work.

We have a secure and stable mandate and we will use it to build a secure and stable Government. A Government that will restore our country's finances, will radically reform an outdated system of administration and will rebuild Ireland's reputation on the international stage.

In doing so, both our parties are committed to protecting the vulnerable and to burden-sharing on an equitable basis. Fianna Fáil presided over an unequal and increasingly divided

Ireland. We are both committed to forging a new Ireland that is built on fairness and equal citizenship.

The Government for National Recovery will strive to ensure that every one of our citizens has an effective right, free from discrimination, to contribute to the economic, social and cultural life of the nation. Our aim, when our legislative and constitutional changes are implemented, is that Ireland will be a transformed country. By the end of our term in Government Ireland will be recognised as a modern, fair, socially inclusive and equal society supported by a productive and prosperous economy.

Both parties approach the task ahead with a combination of humility and hope, underscored with an absolute resolve to bring the change the people so clearly demand. The new Government will seek to match the spirit, courage and pride of the people, so that our country can confidently begin a period of renewal.

But the old ways, the old politics that created the crisis from which we seek to release ourselves from, will not do. Both our parties have long recognised this reality and we campaigned hard and sought and secured a clear mandate to break from the past and start anew.

With this in mind new ways, new approaches and new thinking will form the constant backdrop to the coalition's style of governance. In all the major areas of public life this determination to modernise, renew and transform our country will be evident over time as our shared programme is implemented.

The Government will get our economy moving, restore confidence, fix our banking system and support the protection and creation of jobs. The success of our economic plans will lay the foundation for the rest of our agenda for change.

In parallel, there is a clear need for our political system to embrace change, share the burden and lead by example. Every section of our society is facing hardship. Our political system, if

it is to regain credibility and relevance, must change too. Wider than that, our system of Government must modernise, adapt to new financial circumstances and start to deliver better services with scarce resources.

The challenge facing the new Government is unlike any other. Our economy and our politics have been shattered. But our people's spirit has not. And that is the spark. The spark that encourages a new Government to look to the future with a sense of hope. A sense of hope that with the right plans, the right people, and with a unified sense of purpose our country can recover.

The Government for National Recovery faces an historic challenge. The trust of the nation has been invested in it. It is committed to honouring that trust. At all times it will meet each task guided and informed by some words first spoken by Albert Einstein:

“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.”

The new Government has to show too that it has learned from the past. Our Programme reflects the new reality that our politics and our government can, and must, change. The new Government is determined to make each day count as we begin a slow but deliberate renewal of our country.

Our country deserves a fresh start from the failed politics of the years past. It also deserves a new hope that a new Government guided by the needs of the many rather than the greed of the few can make a real, positive difference in their lives.

There isn't a moment to be lost.

Economy

Banking and Re-Negotiation of the IMF/EU Programme of Support

As a result of reckless mismanagement of the Irish economy by recent Governments, Ireland faces a profound banking, fiscal and jobs crisis, and has been forced to seek external financial assistance. This has been provided by the IMF and the EU through an assistance programme that provides a loan facility to Ireland.

At the core of the loss of domestic and international confidence in Ireland's economy has been the outgoing Government's commitment – between NAMA asset purchases and the subsequent recapitalisation – of over €100 billion of State resources to bank rescues. This is three times the national debt before the crisis.

Much of this taxpayer commitment reflected the policy to crystallise – through asset transfers to NAMA – massive losses in banks under taxpayer guarantee at a time of extraordinary financial distress.

If it were not for the historical and potential future losses for Irish taxpayers from the outgoing Government's banking policy, Ireland's public finance problems would be acutely difficult but nonetheless entirely manageable.

The outgoing Government's "blank cheques for banks" policy must now be ended. We must step back from the edge of national insolvency.

The new Government supports the objectives of the EU/IMF Programme of Support i.e. restructuring and recapitalising the banking system, achieving fiscal stability and returning the Irish economy to growth.

However, it is observable to all that the Programme of Support has – to date – failed to restore confidence in the Irish economy. In the view of the new Government, this reflects uncertainty over the affordability of the rescue package, and in particular the unknown but potentially enormous cost to the Irish taxpayer from the continuation of existing policies aimed at resolving the banking crisis.

Moreover, the failure of the Programme of Support to restore confidence in the financial health of Irish banks or the Irish State continues to contribute to wider euro-zone financial instability.

On this basis, both parties to the new Government sought, and secured, a strong mandate from the Irish electorate to renegotiate a more credible package that is better for both Ireland and Europe

The overall aim of renegotiation must be to secure a Programme of Support and solution to the banking crisis that is perceived as more affordable by both the Irish public and international markets, thereby restoring confidence, growth, job creation and the State's access to affordable credit from private lenders. The Parties to the Government recognise that there is a growing danger of the State's debt burden becoming unsustainable and that measures to safeguard debt sustainability must be urgently explored.

In our engagement with the lenders, we will pursue a number of different strategies to achieve this end.

- We will seek a reduced interest rate as part of a credible re-commitment to reducing Government deficits to ensure sustainability of our public finances.
- We will re-commit to structural reforms required to accelerate growth, job creation and debt sustainability.
- We will attach the utmost priority to avoiding further down-grades to our sovereign credit rating by setting further capital spend by the State on bank re-capitalisation at a level that is consistent with national debt sustainability.
- In this regard, we will defer further recapitalisation of the banks until the solvency stress tests are complete and known to the new Government. Earlier recapitalisation in advance of publication of the stress tests will not contribute to market stability and confidence.
- We remain committed to a smaller banking system that reduces its reliance on funding from the Irish and European Central Banks and volatile market sources. In order, however, to limit further calls on the State to cover bank losses from distressed asset sales, bank deleveraging must be paced to match the return of more normal market conditions and demand for bank assets.
- As an interim measure, we will seek to replace emergency lending to our banks with medium-term, affordable, official financing in a way that can restore confidence among other potential lenders in the liquidity position of our banks.
- We will end further asset transfers to NAMA, which are unlikely to improve market confidence in either the banks or the State.
- We will ensure that an adequate pool of credit is available to fund small and medium-sized businesses in the real economy during the re-structuring and down-sizing programme.
- We will introduce a comprehensive special resolution regime for dealing with bank insolvencies.
- The Government accepts that enabling provisions in legislation may be necessary to extend the scope of bank liability restructuring to include unsecured, unguaranteed senior bonds.
- The new Government will seek to dispose of the public stakes in the banks as soon as possible at the best possible return to the taxpayer.
- We will create an integrated decision making structure among all relevant State Departments and Agencies to replace the current fragmented approach of State bodies in dealing with the financial crisis.

A key challenge for the new Government will be to make our banking system an engine of economic recovery by restoring public and market confidence in its financial health, management competence and ethical integrity.

- The new Government will re-structure bank boards and replace directors who presided over failed lending practices. We will ensure that the regulator has sufficient powers of pre-approval of bank directors and senior executives. To expedite this change-over we will openly construct a pool of globally experienced financial services managers and directors to be inserted into key executive and non-executive positions in banks receiving taxpayer support.
- We will insist on the highest standards of transparency in the operation of NAMA, on reduction in the costs associated with the operation of NAMA, and that decision-making in NAMA does not delay the restoration of the Irish property market.
- Once the banking sector has been restored and is functioning effectively, we will introduce a bank levy based on the size of a bank's liabilities (other than shareholder capital).
- We will establish a Strategic Investment Bank
- We recognise the important role of Credit Unions as a volunteer co-operative movement and the distinction between them and other types of financial institutions. In Government, we will establish a Commission to review the future of the credit union movement and make recommendations in relation to the most effective regulatory structure for Credit Unions, taking into account their not-for-profit mandate, their volunteer ethos and community focus, while paying due regard to the need to fully protect depositors savings and financial stability.
- We support the future development of the IFSC as a source of future employment growth, subject to appropriate regulation. We will establish a taskforce on the future of the financial services sector to maximise employment opportunities in financial services for staff leaving employment as a result of downsizing.
- We will ensure that the investigations into failures in the banking system are adequately resourced.
- All remuneration schemes at banks subject to state support will undergo a fundamental review to ensure an alignment of interest between banks, their staff and the taxpayer.

2011 Jobs Programme

The big challenge for Ireland is to develop a strategy that will allow job growth and sustainable enterprise. Job creation is central to any recovery strategy. Every person who leaves the dole and goes back to work reduces the deficit by an estimated €20,000, spends on average an additional €15,000 on goods and services and also reduces the risk on the banks mortgage books.

We will - within the first 100 days – resource a Jobs Fund which will

- Provide resources for an additional 15,000 places in training, work experience and educational opportunities for those who are out of work;
- Cut the 13.5% rate of VAT to 12% up to end 2013;
- Halve the lower 8.5% rate of PRSI up to end 2013 on jobs paying up to €356 per week;
- Reverse the cut in the minimum wage;
- Abolish the Travel Tax as part of a deal with airlines to restore lost routes;
- Implement a number of sectoral initiatives in areas that will create employment in the domestic economy;
- Initiate a long-term strategy to develop new markets in emerging economies;
- Secure additional resources for the national housing energy retrofitting plan, as part of plans to phase out subsidies in this area by 2014;
- Expand eligibility for the back to education allowance; and
- Accelerate capital works that are ‘shovel ready’ and labour intensive including schools and secondary roads.

Labour Market Policy

We will develop new graduate and apprentice internship scheme, work placement programmes and further education opportunities for our young unemployed providing an additional 60,000 places across a range of schemes and initiatives. We will provide a range of initiatives to increase access to further higher level education for the unemployed.

We will make Literacy and basic workplace skills a national priority, with literacy training incorporated into wider variety of further education and training.

Within this total, we will provide 30,000 additional training places across the education and training system, distributed in line with the recommendations of the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs.

We will replace FAS with a new National Employment and Entitlements Service so that all employment and benefit support services will be integrated in a single delivery unit managed by the Department of Social Protection. This integrated service would provide a ‘one stop shop’ for people seeking to establish their benefit entitlements; looking for a job; and seeking advice about their training options.

It will process citizen entitlements such as supplementary welfare allowances, higher education grants and welfare allowances. It will manage as much as possible means testing for State entitlements. It will also be responsible for employment referral and training supports provided by FÁS. This service will offer users a higher level of personalised employment counselling, with more frequent face-to-face interviews. Those on the live register who are identified as being most at risk of long-term unemployment will receive priority treatment for more intensive support. It will ensure active case management for people in need of assistance.

Increasing Exports

Ireland’s economic recovery must be export-led. We will take a number of actions to achieve the maximum growth in exports, including the long-term development of new markets.

We will establish an Export Trade Council to strengthen cooperation and coordination across all key departments and agencies involved in promotion and development of trade and exports, whose membership will be divided equally between government and private sector representatives who have experience in establishing and growing export-oriented business. We will create a new ‘Home to Export’ programme to share the expertise of exporting companies with firms currently reliant on domestic markets. A ‘Source Ireland’ portal will be developed to market Irish goods and services abroad.

We will position Ireland to develop better trade relationships with emerging economies, including the establishment of local trade and investment teams. These teams will execute detailed local market plan, with progress against targets reviewed annually. We will develop cultural and diplomatic links with emerging markets including a scholarship scheme. We will actively develop the export of educational services.

We will exempt from VAT service companies that export more than 90% of their output.

Innovation and Commercialisation

We will implement innovation and commercialisation policies as outlined below subject to cost benefit analysis.

- We will progressively implement the recommendations in the Trading and Investing in the Smart Economy Report
- We will support our indigenous digital game industry by reforming R&D supports available to the industry, setting aside funding from Innovation Fund Ireland for a seed capital scheme for Irish digital gaming start-ups, introduce a digital media component to Transition Year programmes and promote Ireland as digital gaming hub.
- We will develop Ireland as a ‘digital island’ and first-mover when it comes to information technology by ensuring more progress on e-Government and moving Government services online, investing in ICT in schools, and investing in information technology in the healthcare sector.
- We will make Ireland a leader in the emerging I.T. market of cloud computing by promoting greater use of cloud computing in the public sector, organising existing State supports for cloud computing into a package to promote Ireland as a progressive place for I.T. investment, establishing an expert group to address new security and privacy issues arising from the use of cloud computing and reviewing the adequacy of current legislation and identify what steps need to be taken to ensure a supportive regulatory environment.
- We will develop a National Intellectual Property (IP) protocol to give predictability about the terms on which business can access IP created in Higher Education Institutions and the wider digital sector.

- We will promote and support investment in technology research, development and commercialisation beyond basic research supported by Science Foundation Ireland, as well as removing barriers to innovation and accelerate exploitation of new technologies.
- We will target key technology areas and sectors where innovation can be applied including but not limited to high value manufacturing, advanced materials, nanotechnology, bioscience, electronics, photonics and electrical systems and information and communication technology. We will also focus on the application of technological innovation in established sectors of the economy like energy generation and supply, transport, creative industries, high-value services and architecture and construction by identifying challenges, establishing priorities and developing strategies which specify necessary actions to transition to more innovative approach.
- We will promote Ireland's full engagement with the 'Innovative Union' proposals issued by the European Commission in October 2010 as one of the seven flagship initiatives under EU2020 Strategy, with the specific aim of refocusing R&D and innovation policy on major challenges and at turning inventions into products.
- The critical gap between basic research promoted and funded by Science Foundation Ireland and third level institutions and its subsequent development into commercial opportunity for investors can only be closed by making new technologies 'investment ready'. We will establish a network of Technology Research Centres focused on applied technological research in specific areas, to be linked to appropriate higher-education institutions. The centres will accelerate exploitation of new technologies by providing infrastructure that bridges gap between research and technology commercialisation. We will initially establish 3 additional centres focussing on biotechnology, nanotechnology and high value manufacturing. Further centres from a number of other areas will be selected at a later time.
- We will support the development of an International Content Services Centre to make Ireland world leader in managing intellectual property.
- We will pioneer within the EU a model of 'fair use' in European Copyright Law, like in the USA, which effectively permits the use of portions of a copyrighted work so long as the normal economic exploitation of the originating work is not undermined. This will allow internet companies and other digital innovators to bring their services to market.

Subject to a cost benefit analysis, we will amend the R&D tax credit regime to make it more attractive and accessible to smaller businesses, in the following ways:

- Companies with R&D expenditures of under €100,000 will be entitled to full tax credit on those entire expenditures as opposed to just the increment over the base year, with marginal relief for companies with expenditure just over €100,000.
- We will allow companies to offset the R&D credit against employers. PRSI as an alternative to corporation tax.
- To cut down on red tape in the applications process, companies in receipt of a Research, Technology and Innovation (RTI) grant from one of the development agencies will be automatically deemed as entitled to the R&D tax credit.

Supporting SMEs

We will reform public procurement to become a tool to support innovative Irish firms and to allow greater access to Irish small and medium sized businesses.

We will fast-track the substantial reforms needed for our bankruptcy legislation to bring us into line with best international standards, focusing on a flexible personal bankruptcy system that reduces discharge time for honest bankrupts.

We will reform the Joint Labour Committee structure, beginning with the appointment of independent chairpersons to JLCs, who will retain a casting vote. Reform options will examine the rate of pay for atypical hours.

We will legislate to end upward only rent reviews for existing leases.

We will direct the Revenue Commissioners to examine the feasibility of introducing – on a revenue neutral basis – a Single Business Tax for micro enterprises (with a turnover of less than €75,000 per annum) to replace all the existing taxes on sole traders and small businesses to cut compliance costs and make starting a business much less daunting.

We will reduce the cost of Government imposed red-tape on business, in part by streamlining regulatory enforcement activities out of a merger and rationalisation of existing structures. We will create a Business Inspection and Licensing Authority that absorbs the existing business inspection activities of the Health and Safety Authority, and the National Consumer Agency.

We will create a single food safety monitoring agency, building on the existing Food Safety Authority, responsible for food safety inspection from farm to fork. This will enhance the food traceability system and reduce the burden of red tape on business.

We will develop a Unique Business Identifier for use by all government departments and agencies that will facilitate the sharing of information within Government and reduce repetitive information requests from businesses.

We will require Departments to publish Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) before Government decisions are taken, thereby offering a further channel to obtain the views of civil society on new rules and regulations.

We will introduce new legally binding voluntary commercial debt plan structures to allow small businesses to restructure debts without recourse to expensive court procedures.

We will introduce new legislation to protect all small building subcontractors that have been denied payments from bigger companies.

Financial Services and Credit to Business

We will implement a temporary, partial credit guarantee scheme that will provide a level of insurance to banks against losses on qualifying loans to job-creating firms to get banks lending again to industry and entrepreneurs.

We will construct a €100 million Microfinance Start-Up Fund that will provide start-up loans and equity that draws funding from the NPRF and private institutional funds.

We will support the development of a more dynamic, venture capital industry in Ireland by seeking to attract top tier venture financing and investment companies to Ireland, such as Silicon Valley Bank.

We will work to promote a greater appreciation of the co-operative model as a distinct form of organisation, ensure a level playing field between co-operatives and the other legal options for structuring enterprise activities, and provide a conducive framework for the full potential of the co-operative model to be realised, including in areas such as childcare, education, housing, energy retrofitting, environmental protection, transport and healthcare.

Sectoral Strategies

Together with significant reforms and initiatives to improve the overall competitiveness of the economy, its capacity for innovation, its export performance, and the skills of our labour market, as outlined in this Programme for Government, we will also undertake a number of specific sectoral strategies for job creation in the domestic economy. These include initiatives in the retail and SME sectors, and in ICT. Other sectoral strategies include:

Growing the agri-food sector

- CAP reform will be vital for the future development of the agri-food sector. Our primary aim is to secure a fair overall funding envelope for agriculture under the CAP and a fair share of this budget for Irish agriculture.
- We will prioritise a Single Farm Payment system which best benefits active Irish farmers and the Irish grass based system of production.
- Further expansion and innovation in our dairy and meat sectors will be a key priority under a reformed CAP and we will work with industry to achieve more intensive levels of production.
- We will facilitate cooperation in the sector to move towards market-based pricing in order to reflect improved products and innovation in the meat and dairy sectors and the development of more integrated supply chains.
- We will promote greater land mobility and involvement of young farmers by investigating new farm models and farm partnerships between farmers, while retaining our family farm structure.
- We will work at an EU level to ensure that programmes targeting the involvement of young farmers in agriculture will be a key policy of the CAP.
- We will legislate to ban a number of unfair trading practices in the retail sector, such as 'hello money' from food suppliers.
- New food businesses will be developed through a series of coordinated efforts across the food sector and state agencies, such as building pilot plant kitchens to allow food producers develop and manufacture products on small scale and development by Enterprise Ireland of scaleable manufacturing solutions for food businesses that have the capacity to expand.
- We will develop a single brand for the Irish agri-food sector globally. Bord Bia will also work in cooperation with producers and small businesses to develop value-added Irish food brands, such an eco brand, and local brands.

- We will put in place an Irish seafood strategy to develop Ireland as a European hub for seafood processing, and to grow market profile and demand for Irish seafood products. Bord Iascaigh Mhara will be tasked with assisting Irish companies in adding value to products through innovation.

Improving our tourism product

- International access is vital to tourism recovery. We will abolish the €3 travel tax subject to a deal being agreed with Ryanair and Aer Lingus to re-open closed routes and bring more tourists into Ireland. If no deal can be done, there will be no reduction in the tax.
- We will prioritise the Tourism Marketing Fund as an essential pillar of our tourism strategy and will ensure the best return on Exchequer spending.
- We will explore the possibility of a new agreement on visitor visas with the UK, offering tourists the opportunity to visit the UK and Ireland with one visa, at a reasonable cost to tap into the tourism market for significant events such as the forthcoming London 2012 Olympics.
- Marketing campaigns will be developed in emerging long haul markets such as China, Russia, India, Japan and the Middle East, using the Tourism Marketing Fund. Recovery of market share in Britain will also be a key priority in a revamped tourism strategy.
- Improving the e-capability of our tourism product will be a priority.
- We will target available resources at developing and co-ordinating niche tourism products and activity packages that are attractive to international visitors focusing on food, sports, culture, ecotourism, activity breaks, water-based recreation and festivals.
- Event tourism will be prioritised to continue to bring major fairs and events to Ireland such as the Volvo Ocean Race or Solheim Cup.

International Education

- A National Strategy for International Education will be implemented, to develop the 'Education Ireland' brand, to encourage more international students to study here and to create new jobs in the sector.
- Our objective will be to double number of international students studying in Ireland, particularly targeting students from India, China and the Middle East.
- This policy will be pursued in line with employment, academic and skill requirements of overall economy and education sector.
- We will overhaul the student visa system and ensure advertising, diaspora policies and quality assurance systems are strategically developed to best position the international education sector.
- We will permit postgraduate students to be allowed work here for up to a year after they complete their studies. High-value research students will be permitted to bring families if they are staying more than two years.

Green jobs

- We will double funding for home energy efficiency and renewable energy programmes until the end of 2013, after which time these schemes will be ended. After 2013, we will roll out a ‘pay as you save’ scheme to continue home energy efficiency retrofitting work without recourse to public funding. We will explore the use of funding options such as an Energy Efficiency Obligation on energy suppliers.
- We will tender for a ‘pay as you save’ contract to insulate all public buildings in the state, where the contractor provides the capital.
- We will seek to establish Ireland as a renewable manufacturing hub to attract international and domestic investment. We will also position Ireland as a leading player in the global carbon market, and a centre of excellence in the management of carbon.
- We will facilitate the development of energy co-operatives to make it easier for small-scale renewable energy providers to contribute to our renewables target.

Social Enterprise

The Government will promote the development of a vibrant and effective social enterprise sector. We will instruct agencies to view social enterprises as important stakeholders in rejuvenating local economies. We will continue support for social innovation projects for young people through education, community and voluntary structures.

Investment Strategy

We will draw up a new National Development Plan that reflects Ireland’s changed economic circumstances, covering the seven-year period 2012-2019.

The plan will be based on a comprehensive study of Ireland’s public investment priorities over that period.

In the initial years, when resources will be most heavily constrained, we will prioritise investment in school building, non-national roads, healthcare, and in job-creation.

We will insist that major capital projects are subjected to proper cost-benefit analysis and evaluation, improving future productivity and growth prospects, and that the value-for-money obtained is significantly enhanced compared to the most recent period.

The new NDP will be based on traditional exchequer capital spending, plus other resources to be invested from the National Pension Reserve Fund, on the basis of obtaining a return on investment and that does not impact the Government Balance Sheet.

In developing the new NDP, we will re-examine the investment programmes of the semi-state companies to ensure that they are in line with new economic circumstances.

In order to ensure that public enterprise plays a full role in Ireland’s economic recovery, we will create a holding company to manage the state’s holdings of the semi-states, and to co-ordinate investment in key priority areas identified by the Government, including energy, water and forestry.

We will create a Strategic Investment Bank that will become a provider of finance to large capital projects, a conduit for venture capital and a lender to SMEs.

NewERA

The Government will put in place a parallel, commercially-financed investment programme in key networks of the economy to support demand and employment in the short-term, and to provide the basis for sustainable, export-led jobs and growth for the next generation.

Under the NewERA plan, streamlined and restructured semi-States will make significant additional investments, over and above current plans, over the next four years in “next generation” infrastructures in energy, broadband, forestry and water.

These investments – and the accompanying semi-state restructuring process – will be financed and pro-actively managed by a New Economy and Recovery Authority (NewERA), which will absorb the National Pension Reserve Commission.

Subject to finalisation in the National Development Plan, we propose to make additional investments in the following areas:

A New Water Network: The new Government will create Irish Water, a new State company that will take over the water investment maintenance programmes of the 34 existing local authorities. It will supervise and accelerate the planned investments needed to upgrade the State’s inefficient and leaking water network so has proved so unreliable during the recent harsh water conditions.

A Next General Telecoms Network: NewERA will co-invest with the private sector and commercial semi State sector to provide next generation broadband to every home and business in the state. This will be achieved by delivering fibre to the home or kerb for 90% of homes and businesses in Ireland with the remaining 10% provided with high speed mobile or satellite broadband.

A 21st century “Smart Grid”: Beginning with the hand-over of ESB’s transmission assets to Eirgrid, we will create a new ‘Smart Grid’ company with ultimate full ownership and responsibility for the development of Ireland’s electricity and gas networks.

Bio-Energy and Forestry: To accelerate the development of Ireland’s forestry and bio-energies, NewERA will merge together Bord na Mona and Coillte to create a new State company called BioEnergy Ireland to become a global leader in the commercialisation of next generation bio-energy technologies, including an annual 14,700 hectare afforestation programme.

Sale of State Assets

Over time, we also propose to finance the investment programme from the sale of certain state assets.

We will target up to €2 billion in sales of non-strategic state assets drawing from the recommendations of the McCarthy Review Group on State Assets when available.

Assets will only be sold when market conditions are right and when adequate regulatory structures have been established to protect consumer interests.

Fiscal Policy

We believe that sustainable public finances are a pre-requisite for economic stability and growth. To this end, the State must pursue a determined deficit reduction strategy. This must not, however, undermine short-term recovery, or investment for long-term growth, which would have the effect of undermining debt-sustainability.

The new Government also recognises the unusual degree of uncertainty regarding the short and medium term growth prospects for both Ireland and our trading partners.

We believe it is appropriate, in order to enhance international credibility, to stick to the aggregate adjustment as set out in the National Recovery Plan for the combined period 2011-2012.

In preparation for Budget 2013, we will review progress on deficit reduction, and draw up a plan which will achieve the objective of reaching the 3% of GDP target for the General Government Deficit by the target date of 2015.

Should Ireland succeed in obtaining a lower interest rate on its loans, this should be offset against the aggregate adjustment required over the term of the programme.

We believe that achieving the 3% of GDP deficit target should be seen as an intermediate step in the process of restoring the public finances, and that further reductions in the general government deficit as a share of national income will be required thereafter.

As part of our fiscal strategy the new Government will:

- Keep the corporate tax rate at 12.5%;
- Maintain the current rates of income tax together with bands and credits. We will not increase the top marginal rates of taxes on income. We will reduce, cap or abolish property tax reliefs and other tax shelters which benefit very high income earners. We will also ensure the implementation of a minimum effective tax rate of 30% for very high earners;
- Consider, arising from the previous Government's deal with the IMF, various options for a site valuation tax. Any site valuation tax must take into account the significant number of households in mortgage distress and provide local government with a reliable stream of revenue;
- We will limit the top rate of VAT to 23%;
- There will be no increase in the standard 10.75% rate of employers PRSI;
- We will review the Universal Social Charge;
- We will ensure that tax exiles make a fair contribution to the Exchequer;
- Re-prioritise capital funding for smaller projects that deal with specific immediate problems. Smaller projects are more labour intensive and more likely to be carried out by local contractors increasing short-run domestic economic impact. Investment priorities will include education, health and science and technology;

- Undertake a full review of the Hunt and OECD reports into third level funding before end of 2011. Our goal is to introduce a funding system that will provide third level institutions with reliable funding but does not impact access for students;
- Bring in a range of measures to tackle the problem of welfare fraud. As part of this we will create a new “one-stop shop” Payments and Entitlements Service to process all major welfare and other entitlements;
- Conduct a Comprehensive Spending Review to examine all areas of public spending and to assess effectiveness of spending programmes and value for company;
- Establish a Tax and Social Welfare Commission to examine entitlements of self employed and the elimination of disincentives to employment.

Constitutional Reform

The context for reform

Building on the well-established and tested Constitution of Ireland, and decades of judicial determination of rights under that Constitution, we will establish a process to ensure that our Constitution meets the challenges of the 21st century, by addressing a number of specific urgent issues as well as establishing a Constitutional Convention to undertake a wider review.

Parliamentary reform issues

We will prioritise putting to the people by referendum a number of urgent parliamentary reform issues:

- Abolition of the Seanad
- A referendum to amend the Constitution to reverse the effects of the *Abbeylara* judgment to enable Oireachtas committees to carry out full investigations.
- A referendum to protect the right of citizens to communicate in confidence with public representatives.

Other specific priority amendments

We will also give priority to the following specific constitutional amendments:

- A referendum to amend the Constitution to allow the State to cut the salaries of judges in restricted circumstances as part of a general cut across the public sector.
- A referendum to amend the Constitution to ensure that children's rights are strengthened, along the lines recommended by the All-Party Oireachtas committee.

Broader constitutional review

We will establish a Constitutional Convention to consider comprehensive constitutional reform, with a brief to consider, as a whole or in sub-groups, and report within 12 months on the following:

- Review of our Dáil electoral system.
- Reducing the presidential term to 5 years and aligning it with the local and European elections
- Provision for same-sex marriage.
- Amending the clause on women in the home and encourage greater participation of women in public life.
- Removing blasphemy from the Constitution
- Possible reduction of the voting age.
- Other relevant constitutional amendments that may be recommended by the Convention.

Political Reform

Change must start at the top

The political system cannot ask others to change and make sacrifices if it is not prepared to do the same. We will significantly reduce the size of the Oireachtas by abolishing the Seanad, if the public approve in constitutional referendum, and we will reduce the number of TDs following the publication of the results of the 2011 Census of Population. In addition ministers' salaries will be reduced, political expenses vouched for and severance payments for ministers axed. No political pensions will be paid to sitting TDs and in future no retired politician will get a political pension until the national retirement age. Politics must be about service to the public, not financial gain for politicians.

We will ensure our Government is seen to be held to account

We believe that in recent years an over-powerful Executive has turned the Dáil into an observer of the political process rather than a central player and that this must be changed.

We will:

Amend the Constitution to Give Dáil committees Full Powers of Investigation: The Abbeylara Supreme Court decision currently limits the ability of Dáil committees to hold investigations into crucial issues of public concern, such as the banking crisis.

Reduce the number of committees and give key committees constitutional standing: the Dáil needs fewer but stronger committees, resourced properly.

We will introduce a role for the Ceann Comhairle in deciding whether a Minister has failed to provide reasonable information in response to a question.

We propose a radical extension of the parliamentary question system, so that it shall be a statutory duty on any body established by or under statute, or with a majority ownership or funding by the State, to submit to the same parliamentary questions regime as applies to Government departments. This will involve a liability to provide answers to written questions within a specified number of Dáil sitting days. (We will however recognise the special position of bodies with a commercial mandate operating at arm's length from Government.)

In addition we propose a new procedure for answering oral questions by state bodies. The chief executive of every state funded body will be required to attend the relevant Oireachtas committee on a regular basis to answer oral parliamentary questions that can be submitted by any member, on a similar basis to the attendance of Ministers before the full Dáil.

We will amend Dáil standing orders to ensure that replies to written questions are furnished within a specified number of days, even during Dáil recess.

To make the oral question process more effective, we propose to increase the time allocated to oral question. To provide balance there will be a reduction in the number of oral questions being submitted to one per member. A member must be present in the chamber when his or her question is reached, although they may defer to another member the right to ask a supplementary question.

We Will Overhaul the Way Politics and Government Work

We will radically overhaul the way Irish politics and Government work. The failures of the political system over the past decade were a key contributor to the financial crisis and the system must now learn those lessons urgently.

Government is too centralised and unaccountable. We believe that there must also be a real shift in power from the State to the citizen.

We will legislate on the issue of cabinet confidentiality.

We will legislate to restore the Freedom of Information Act to what it was before it was undermined by the outgoing Government, and we will extend its remit to other public bodies including the administrative side of the Garda Síochána, subject to security exceptions.

We will extend Freedom of Information, and the Ombudsman Act, to ensure that all statutory bodies, and all bodies significantly funded from the public purse, are covered.

We will introduce Whistleblowers legislation.

We will introduce spending limits for all elections, including Presidential elections and constitutional referendums, including for a period in advance of scheduled Local, European, General and Presidential Elections.

We will significantly reduce the limits on political donations to political parties and candidates to €2,500 and €1,000 respectively, and require disclosure of all aggregate sums above €1,500 and €600 respectively.

We will introduce the necessary legal and constitutional provisions to ban corporate donations to political parties.

We will amend the Official Secrets Act, retaining a criminal sanction only for breaches which involve a serious threat to the vital interests of the state.

We will introduce a statutory register of lobbyists, and rules concerning the practice of lobbying.

Our open government legislation will also establish an Electoral Commission to subsume the functions of existing bodies and the Department of the Environment.

We will amend the rules to ensure that no senior public servant (including political appointees) or Minister can work in the private sector in any area involving a potential conflict of interest with their former area of public employment, until at least two years have elapsed after they have left the public service.

Restrictions on the nature and extent of evidence by civil servants to Oireachtas committees will be scrapped and replaced with new guidelines for civil servants that reflect the reality of the authority delegated to them and their personal accountability for the way in which it is exercised.

We propose an Investigations, Oversight and Petitions Committee of the Oireachtas. It would be a powerful committee, constructed on the lines of the Public Accounts Committee, bi-partisan in structure and chaired by a senior member of the opposition.

The Committee would be the formal channel of consultation and collaboration between the Oireachtas and the Ombudsman, responsible for receiving and debating her annual and special reports and for ensuring that her criticisms and recommendations are acted upon. For that purpose, she would attend as a regular witness before the committee.

The Committee would receive parliamentary petitions from individuals and groups in the community seeking the redress of grievances connected with the public services of the State and with the public administration generally. Its functions would be to act as a "clearing house", directing complaints to those bodies most competent to act on them: the Ombudsman, the Data Protection Commissioner, the Local Government Auditor, the Oireachtas committee that has oversight of the relevant Department, and so on.

We will refer to the Constitutional Convention the issue of reducing the Voting Age to 17 and giving citizens the right to vote at Irish embassies in the presidential election.

We recognise that there needs to be a substantial increase in the number of women in politics. We will ask the Constitutional Convention, which is examining electoral reform, to make recommendations as to how the number of women in politics can be increased.

Public funding for political parties will be tied to the level of participation by women as candidates those parties achieve.

We will make good corporate governance the law, not an optional extra, and enact legislation to provide for binding code of practice for corporate governance, which will be obligatory for companies wishing to be listed on Irish stock exchange.

We intend to end the heavy dependence on a very limited pool of extremely expensive private solicitors firms providing legal services to the State and agencies, look at ways to require agencies to seek legal advice from the CSSO and not from the private sector in order to save costs, and ensure that legal work at the bar for the State is spread more equitably rather than confined to a very limited pool as at present. We will progress the Statute Law Revision Project in order to enhance public accessibility to the statute book.

Showing Leadership

Politicians should be treated in the same manner as all other public servants.

We will abolish the additional pay for Ministers who leave office. We will restrict the payment of pensions to politicians so that in future a member can only qualify for a pension at the national retirement age (currently 65) and upon leaving public life. We will cap taxpayers' subsidies for all future pension schemes for politicians (and indeed for everybody) that deliver income in retirement of more than €60,000.

We will halve the cost of the existing provision of ministerial transport. We will provide for the efficient use of transport including the release of garda drivers to normal policing duties. We will end the automatic right to state cars for former office holders and other state officials.

We will introduce a new code of practice for the use of the government jet, ensuring transparent and cost effective travel.

Dáil Reform

We are proposing radical reform of the way the Dáil operates. Our objective is to make Dáil Éireann fit for purpose in the 21st century. To carry out this task we must identify the fundamental goals of a properly functioning Dáil. These include:

- to legislate,
- to represent the people on issues of national concern,
- more effective financial scrutiny, and
- to hold the executive to account.

On each of these headings the Dáil falls short, sometimes far short, of what is required. We will institute a programme of short-term and urgent Dáil reform, within the existing Constitution, to make the Dáil fit for purpose.

- We will give committees the power to introduce legislation, while a new *10 Minute Rule* will allow backbench TDs to introduce their own Bills. We will also tackle the huge over-use of guillotines to ram through non-emergency legislation
- We will introduce a package of changes that will bring about a 50 per cent increase in Dáil sitting days. Dáil Éireann will in future meet four days a week. There will be a summer recess of just six weeks and significantly reduced breaks at Christmas and Easter. We will abandon the practice of providing a “mid-term break” – a full week off at St Patrick’s Day and Hallowe’en. When the Dáil is not in session the Committees shall agree by roster that a particular Committee shall meet in the Dáil Chamber.
- We propose to break the Government monopoly on legislation and the stranglehold over the business of the Dáil, by providing that the new Friday sittings will be given over exclusively to committee reports and private members business except where urgent government business must be taken.
- We will enhance the democratic process by involving public representatives at an earlier stage of the legislative process, particularly before Bills are published. We will amend cabinet procedure instructions so as to allow government to publish the general scheme of a Bill so that Oireachtas Committees can debate and hold hearings at an early stage.
- While recognising that there may be exceptional circumstances in which debate may need to be concluded by a given deadline, we will restrict the use of guillotine motions and other procedural devices that prevent Bills from being fully debated, so that guillotining is not a matter of routine as it has become at present, particularly at the end of a session.
- We will also deal with the related problem of legislation being shunted through at high speed and will ensure that Dáil standing orders provide a minimum of two weeks between each stage of a Bill, except in exceptional circumstances.
- In order to enhance the role of the legislative committees, we will organise a committee week every fourth sitting week. The Dáil plenary will sit only for questions, including Leaders’

Questions and the order of business and the remainder of the day will be taken up in committee.

- We will establish a petition system to the Dáil, similar to that operating in the European Parliament, to be managed by a specific Dáil committee that will investigate and report on petitions which raise issues warranting attention.
- We will enhance the parliamentary relationship with the European Parliament in conjunction with Ireland's MEPs. These arrangements will include regular attendance by MEPs at relevant Dáil committees.
- We will legislate and change Dáil standing orders to ensure the absolute confidentiality of information entrusted to members of the Dáil by their constituents or informants, and ensure that such information cannot be compulsorily disclosed through the legal process except with the consent of the informant.
- We will significantly revamp the adjournment debate format. It will be renamed the topical issue debate. There will be a minimum of 5 topical issues. These will be taken in the middle of the day and there will be provision for questions at the end. A Minister or Minister of State from the relevant Department will be present and there will be an end to the practice of one junior Minister reading out scripts on behalf of a number of Departments about a range of issues of which he or she knows nothing.
- The standing orders on urgent issues are used regularly to attempt to raise issues that are not urgent and such requests are almost invariably refused. We will make the Dáil rules for raising urgent issues more meaningful by requiring a minimum number of signatories for such a request.
- In future standing order 32 requests will not be read out.

More Effective Financial Scrutiny

We will establish an independent Fiscal Advisory Council (FAC), separated from fiscal decision-makers in government, that would undertake official fiscal macroeconomic projections and monitoring.

The Fiscal Advisory Council functions would include identifying and advising on cyclical and counter-cyclical fiscal policies and structural deficits; the cyclical or temporary nature of particular revenues; and the need to maintain an appropriate and effective tax base.

The Fiscal Advisory Council will be independent of Government and will report to the Dáil and the public.

The modeling assumptions and inputs of the Fiscal Advisory Council will, as far as possible, be open to public scrutiny and its outputs would be freely available to external bodies, including in particular, the opposition parties.

We will open up the Budget process to the full glare of public scrutiny in a way that restores confidence and stability by exposing and cutting failing programmes and pork barrel politics.

We will publish cost-benefit analyses for major infrastructure proposals and "tax expenditures" in advance of Government approval.

Public sector bodies will be required to publish balance sheets and to move to accruals from cash-flow accounting.

Every Purchase Order by a Government Department or agency for more than €20,000 will be published online. We will give the Comptroller and Auditor General and Oireachtas Committees the extra powers needed to carry out value-for-money audits of State programmes.

Public bodies will be required to openly compete for budget resources by publishing pre-budget spending requests, and what they would deliver in return for such allocations to help deliver Programme for Government.

We will conduct a Comprehensive Spending Review to examine all areas of public spending, based on the Canadian model, and to develop multi-annual budget plans with a three-year time horizon. This plan will be presented to the Dáil for debate.

The Comprehensive Spending Review will assess effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes, and value for money.

The CSR will examine the number, range and activities of bodies funded significantly from public purse, including at local government level, and reduce numbers where appropriate. In future, when proposing a new agency, it will be necessary to prove that the proposed new functions cannot be carried out within the existing framework.

Every public body will set out clear and unambiguous long, medium and short term strategic priorities, which will be clearly communicated to public service and citizens. Strategic priorities will be translated into high level goals for all Departments, on a 'whole of government' basis, and in consultation with Ministers.

Performance indicators will be identified to monitor progress on high level priorities. Annual reports of departments and agencies will include output statements and audited financial accounts prepared on generally accepted accounting principles. The performance information provided in output and outcome-focused measurement will feed into the decision making process for future plans at political and senior management level.

The reform process will provide for increased delegation of budgets, subject to detailed plans, relevant performance reporting and audited accounts compiled in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

Detailed business cases will be required for major projects, with review and reporting requirements built in to the plan. Sanctions will be imposed at an early stage for significant overruns.

We will change the current emphasis on performance reporting to performance management. All medium to long-term projects that involve significant public spending will be subject to cost benefit analysis, and to on-going evaluation.

The results of programme evaluations will be published and programmes not meeting their objectives will be wound down.

Performance and progress will be published in a new, audited annual Public Service Delivery Reports. Oireachtas Committees will expose any failure to hit milestones and targets. Each sectoral Committee will take on new powers, similar to those wielded by Public Accounts Committee, to hold Ministers and public servants to account for value for money. This will feed into Oireachtas consideration of the next Budget.

Where appropriate, agency boards will be scrapped and agency managers will be accountable directly to Ministers.

We will bring forward the annual Estimates cycle, so that it becomes more timely and relevant. It will in future start at the beginning of the preceding year and conclude by the summer.

The annual Estimates will in future distinguish between monies being allocated to maintaining the existing level of service for existing programmes and money to support new programmes or policy decisions.

The Book of Estimates will be accompanied by a detailed performance report on what the previous year's spending had achieved. It will also give details of the level of performance achieved by agencies under service delivery agreements with Government.

Oireachtas members will be given, from within existing resources, dedicated resources for the proper scrutiny of the Estimates.

We will reform the Department of Finance by bringing in new leadership and skills to restore its capacity and credibility in financial and macroeconomic management. Specifically, we will make an external appointment of an economist of international repute to head up the Department's Budget and Economic Policy division.

We will give the Comptroller and Auditor General the extra powers needed to carry out value-for-money audits of State programmes.

The National Parliament and the European Union

We believe the Oireachtas must be given responsibility for full scrutiny of EU draft proposals, for proper transposition of EU legislation and for holding the Government accountable for the decisions it takes in Brussels. All Oireachtas committees must share the burden of dealing with EU policies and legislative proposals. Systems must be put in place to ensure that Ministers do not bypass the Oireachtas and make decisions in Brussels on EU matters before these matters are subjected to scrutiny by the Oireachtas.

The Taoiseach will be obliged to brief the Oireachtas prior to attending European Council meetings and to engage with the Oireachtas in debate on EU issues of national significance and concern.

The Oireachtas will devote a full week each year to debating major EU issues of concern to Ireland such as the Draft Annual Work Programme, Green and White Papers and proposals for EU budget co-ordination.

The Oireachtas will be linked up with the Irish offices of the European Commission and the European Parliament in communicating Europe to the Irish people. Outreach programmes, meetings and competitions particularly in schools will be organised and TDs and Senators invited to participate.

Under the Lisbon Treaty provisions the Oireachtas is entitled to receive all documents produced by the EU Commission at the same time as the EU institutions and the Irish Government receive them. We will ensure all EU documents are forwarded to the Oireachtas through the Cean Comhairle and the Cathaoirleach. They will transmit them to the Oireachtas library and the

relevant Committees. Every TD and Senator will be informed of the documents as they arrive, so that they can engage in EU matters that concern or interest them.

EU's Annual Work Programme

The EU Commission produces its Draft Annual Work Programme in October/November for the following year. We propose that the week in which the 9th May, "Europe Day" falls will be the occasion for a week-long parliamentary debate on Ireland's priorities within the EU. The debate will review the national progress in implementing the current year's work programme and focus on identifying the major issues of concern to Ireland for inclusion on the following year's EU Draft work Programme.

Oireachtas Committees

The most significant new power conferred on the Oireachtas by the Lisbon Treaty is the power to ensure that the policies of the EU comply with the principle of subsidiarity. In short that the EU does not overstep its competences under the Treaties and intrude in areas that are the preserve of the Member States.

We propose that Oireachtas Committees will play the major role in scrutinising the EU in the coming years. Greater emphasis will be placed on deepening the involvement in EU matters of the Oireachtas committees that shadow the work of each Government Department. We will oblige all sectoral committees to deal with EU matters that come within their remit within a defined period of time.

Committees will be supplemented by a system of subcommittees and a system of rapporteurs who have a particular interest in an area of policy or scrutiny and who volunteer to carry out an in-depth study for the relevant committee.

Transposing EU Legislative Measures

The situation can no longer be tolerated where Irish Ministers enact EU legislation by statutory instrument. The checks and balances of parliamentary democracy are by-passed. The parliamentary treatment accorded home-produced draft legislation must be extended to draft legislation initiated within the EU institutions.

The Regulatory Impact Assessments prepared for Ministers on all EU Directives and significant Regulations will be forwarded automatically to the relevant sectoral Oireachtas Committees. These Committees should advise the Minister and the Joint Committee on European Affairs as to whether the transposition should take place by Statutory Instrument or by primary legislation. Where primary legislation is recommended the full Oireachtas plenary process should be followed.

Oireachtas Accountability

All Ministers will be obliged to appear before their respective Committees or before the Committee on European Affairs prior to travelling to Brussels for meetings of the Council where decisions are made.

Reforming local government

We will move many of the functions currently being performed by agencies – such as community employment and enterprise supports – back to local government and ensure that all property-related revenues are part of the income stream of local government.

We will abolish the position of County Manager and replace it with that of Chief Executive, with a limited range of executive functions. The primary function of the Chief Executive will be to facilitate the implementation of democratically decided policy.

A democratically-decided Regional or City Plan will replace the present top-down Strategic Planning Guideline model.

We will give councillors a legal power to seek reports from, and question in public, all providers of public services in their area. And we will also empower them to question private sector service providers such as internet and digital TV providers, local banks or private schools, on their public service remit.

The Local Government Director of Audit will be required to publish an annual report covering all his functions to the Oireachtas Committee on Environment. The Report will assist in determining where local government can produce greater efficiencies.

We will examine what services could be converged between two or more local authorities, such as technology support, human resources and fire services. We will introduce a single national building inspectorate service.

Local authorities that deliver efficiencies, either alone or through sharing services, over and above what is required will be allowed re-invest a proportion of those savings in local initiatives.

We are committed to a fundamental reorganisation of local governance structures to allow for devolution of much greater decision-making to local people. We will give local communities more control over transport and traffic, economic development, educational infrastructure, and local responses to crime and local healthcare needs.

In local services, we will establish a website – www.fixmystreet.ie – to assist residents in reporting problems with street lighting, drainage, graffiti, waste collection and road and path maintenance in their neighbourhoods, with a guarantee that local officials will respond within two working days.

We will merge local enterprise and job support functions of local, regional and national agencies into a single business and enterprise unit within Local Authorities. This will allow streamlining of local job creation and support functions, increased shared knowledge capability and resources while saving on administration costs.

Public Sector Reform

Public service is, and must remain, about serving the public, not making a profit. It is about serving the common good, not sectional interests. Real reform of the public sector will require a commitment from the whole of government to become more transparent, accountable and efficient. It will require:

- Concrete mechanisms to improve performance, using a range of external standards and benchmarks, and to deal with persistent under-performance.
- A new approach to government which empowers public servants by devolving more power.
- New personnel from outside the current system, particularly experts in change management.
- Citizens having a basic right to key information on the performance of key services.

Government has to deliver better value in order to reduce the deficit and protect frontline services. We will, subject to there being no compulsory redundancies and to the protection of front line services:

- Reduce the total number of public sector employees by between 18,000 and 21,000 by 2014, compared to the total number at the end of 2010.
- Reduce this number by a further 4,000 by 2015.

In order to protect frontline services, even as employee numbers are reduced, we will make fundamental changes to the way government operates.

A Strategic Centre

A key condition of a successful turn-around strategy for the country is a more joined-up strategic centre at the heart of government, with the power to confront and break up the concentrations of power that so damaged the country.

- We will reduce the size of the Department of An Taoiseach, transforming it into the equivalent of a Cabinet Office that oversees the delivery of a new Programme for Government.
- We will bring new talent and skills into the Department of Finance.
- We will bring in new skills and rigour into policy-making across all Departments. All appointments at Principal Officer level and above will be open to external competition and at least one-third of such appointments will be reserved for candidates from outside traditional civil service structures for a 5-year period.
- We will strengthen corporate governance legislation and enforcement.

Open Government

Where there is secrecy and unaccountability, there is waste and extravagance. We will pin down accountability for results at every level of the public service – from Ministers down –

with clear consequences for success and failure. Ministers will be responsible for policy and procurement and public service managers for delivery.

- Where appropriate, agency boards will be scrapped and agency managers will report directly to Ministers and their Departments on performance against targets.
- We will put in place a Whistleblowers Act to protect public servants that expose maladministration by Ministers or others, and restore Freedom of Information.
- There will be no more “golden handshakes” for public servants that have failed to deliver.
- We will overhaul TLAC (Top level Appointments Commission), with the chairperson and the majority of members drawn from outside the public sector.
- We will require Departments to carry out and publish Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) before Government decisions are taken.
- We will introduce a reformed incentive system for all grades within core Government departments to reward cross-departmental teams that deliver audited improvements in service delivery and cost effectiveness.

Waste

We will cut back the waste and political cronyism built up over the last decade by paring back the expensive, fragmented structures of public administration.

- We will go beyond the recommendations of An Bord Snip to rationalise core processes that are duplicated across the public service, by establishing shared back-office operations for information technology, human resource management, payments and entitlement applications, business inspections and procurement.
- We will review the Local Government Efficiency Review as part of our Comprehensive Spending Review.
- We will make substantial cuts to the number of State bodies and companies.
- We will instigate a Government-wide review to identify and eliminate non-priority programmes and outsource, where appropriate, non-critical functions.

“Choice and Voice” for Service Users

Rather than giving fixed budgets to traditional public service providers like the HSE, VECs and FÁS, we will put resources into the hands of citizens to acquire services that are tailored to better suit their needs and less expensive for the taxpayer.

- Schools will publish annual reports.
- In local services, we will establish a website – www.fixmystreet.ie – to allow residents to report problems with street lighting, drainage, graffiti, waste collection and road and path maintenance in their neighbourhoods, with a guarantee that a local official will respond within 2 working days.

- We will establish a new model of financing social interventions – called Social Impact Bonds – that share audited exchequer savings with charitable and voluntary organisations.
- Where appropriate we will open up the delivery of public services to a range of providers.
- We will give schools, hospitals and other public service bodies new freedoms – within strict budgets and new accountability systems – to set their own staffing needs, automate routine processes and adapt work practices to local staff and customer needs.

Empowering the Civil Service

We will legislate for a reformulated code of laws, replacing both the Ministers and Secretaries Acts and the Public Service Management Act, which will spell out the legal relationship between Ministers and their civil servants and their legal accountability for decisions and for management of Departments.

- The system of implied general delegation of a Minister's statutory powers to civil servants will be abolished and replaced by a fixed and determined system of delegation of specified powers to specified officers.
- Where a responsibility is delegated through several civil service grades, each grade will be held accountable for their element of it and departmental officials giving evidence to Oireachtas committees will be obliged to speak on their own behalf for their delegated responsibilities and, where appropriate, defend themselves and their actions.
- Delegation orders will spell out the functions of the Minister in supervising the exercise of delegated powers: the Minister will be responsible for ensuring that adequate standards are maintained; outputs are delivered as determined or agreed; and procedures are in place to provide the Minister with the necessary and correct information to enable him or her to respond to problems of administration and to give an account of those problems, and of any necessary corrective action, to the Dáil and to the public.

We will bring to an end the unacceptable executive practice where no record is kept of ministerial involvement with an issue and resulting decisions.

We will review the grading structure of the civil service and public service and reduce number of management grades. Public service managers will be given greater autonomy in deciding how they use staffing budgets and resources to achieve agreed outcomes.

We will remove barriers to mobility across the public service. As part of this we will create a new tier of senior public service management structures, where senior officials are rotated across the public sector to nurture the collaborative culture needed to tackle the biggest cross-cutting social and economic challenges.

High level strategic goals will be reflected in individual goals, in a new performance management and development system for staff. Staff recognition schemes will be developed and devolved, with particular emphasis on team awards. Staff will be encouraged to put forward suggestions for improving service delivery and organisation efficiency and effectiveness.

Government services websites, public offices, telephone services, and helplines will be reconfigured to facilitate access to a broad range of government services through a single point of contact.

Fairness

Health and Mental Health

This Government is the first in the history of the State that is committed to developing a universal, single-tier health service, which guarantees access to medical care based on need, not income. By reforming our model of delivering healthcare, so that more care is delivered in the community, and by reforming how we pay for healthcare through Universal Health Insurance, we can reduce the cost of achieving the best health outcomes for our citizens, and end the unfair, unequal and inefficient two-tier health system.

Health Service Reform

This Government will introduce Universal Health Insurance with equal access to care for all. Under this system there will be no discrimination between patients on the grounds of income or insurance status. The two-tier system of unequal access to hospital care will end.

The Universal Health Insurance system will be designed according to the European principle of social solidarity: access will be according to need and payment will be according to ability to pay. The principle of social solidarity will underpin all relevant legislation.

As a statutory system of health insurance, guaranteed by the State, the Universal Health Insurance system will not be subject to European or national competition law.

This Government will act speedily to reduce costs in the delivery of both public and private health care and in the administration of the health care system.

We will introduce a system of risk equalisation for the current insurance market.

A Special Delivery Unit will be established in the Department of Health to assist the Minister in reducing waiting lists and introducing a major upgrade in the IT capabilities of the health system.

A Patient Safety Authority, incorporating HIQA, will be established.

The Minister for Health will be responsible for health policy and for implementing this ambitious programme of reform and cost control.

The Health Service Executive will cease to exist over time. Its functions will return to the Minister for Health and the Department of Health and Children; or be taken over by the Universal Health Insurance system. Staff will be deployed accordingly.

Primary Care

Universal Primary Care will remove fees for GP care and will be introduced within this Government's term of office.

The legislative basis for Universal Primary Care will be established under a Universal Primary Care Act.

Universal Primary Care will be introduced in phases so that additional doctors, nurses and other primary care professionals can be recruited.

During the term of this Government, GP training places will be increased. GPs will be encouraged to defer retirement and will be recruited from abroad, and the number of practice nurses will be increased so that GPs can delegate care when appropriate to nurses.

Access to primary care without fees will be extended in the first year to claimants of free drugs under the Long-Term Illness scheme at a cost of €17 million.

Access to primary care without fees will be extended in the second year to claimants of free drugs under the High-Tech Drugs scheme at a cost of €15 million.

Access to subsidised care will be extended to all in the next phase.

Access to care without fees will be extended to all in the final phase.

Under Universal Primary Care, GPs will be paid primarily by capitation for the care of their patients and will work in primary care teams with other primary care professionals.

A new GP contract will provide incentives to GPs to care more intensively for patients with chronic illnesses. This will significantly reduce pressures and demands on the hospital system.

Registration with a primary care team will be compulsory once the Universal Primary Care system is fully implemented.

Exchequer funding for primary care will go to a Primary Care Fund on a transitional basis, which will pay providers of primary care. The goal under UHI will be to create an integrated system of primary and hospital care.

Ring-fenced funding will be provided to recruit additional psychologists and counsellors to community mental health teams, working closely with primary care teams to ensure early intervention, reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and detect and treat people who are at risk of suicide.

Universal Hospital Care

A system of Universal Health Insurance (UHI) will be introduced by 2016, with the legislative and organisational groundwork for the system complete within this Government's term of office.

UHI will provide guaranteed access to care for all in public and private hospitals on the same basis as the privately-insured have now.

Insurance with a public or private insurer will be compulsory with insurance payments related to ability to pay. The State will pay insurance premia for people on low incomes and subsidise premia for people on middle incomes.

Everyone will have a choice between competing insurers.

The VHI will be kept in public ownership to retain a public option in the UHI system.

Exchequer funding for hospital care will go into a Hospital Insurance Fund which will subsidise or pay insurance premia for those who qualify for subsidy.

The Hospital Insurance Fund will oversee a strong and reformed system of community rating and risk equalisation; provide direct payments to hospitals for services that are not covered by insurance such as Emergency Departments and ambulances; and provide matching payment to hospitals for treatments delivered.

The Hospital Insurance Fund will also control those health care costs for which central control is most effective.

Under UHI insurers will be obliged to offer the same package of services to all.

This guaranteed UHI package will be determined by the Minister for Health in consultation with the Hospital Insurance Fund and medical experts and will be regularly reviewed in a process to be established in legislation, the Universal Health Insurance Act.

Insurers will not be allowed to sell insurance giving faster access to procedures covered by the UHI package.

Hospitals and clinics which participate in supplying care under UHI will not be allowed to sell faster access to procedures covered by the UHI package.

A White Paper on Financing UHI will be published early in the Government's first term and will review cost-effective pricing and funding mechanisms for care and care to be covered under UHI.

The legislative basis for UHI will be established by the Universal Health Insurance Act.

Hospitals

Under UHI public hospitals will no longer be managed by the HSE. They will be independent, not-for-profit trusts with managers accountable to their boards.

Boards will include representatives of local communities and staff.

Smaller hospitals may combine in a local hospital network with a shared management and board.

Hospitals will be paid according to the care they deliver and will be incentivised to deliver more care in a “money follows the patient” system.

Insurers will negotiate directly with hospitals to help control costs and encourage innovation in the delivery of care.

Insurers will not take over the running of hospitals which will be independent providers of care separate from insurers as purchasers of care.

The Minister for Health will be responsible for hospitals policy and determining that hospitals which play an important role in an area should not be allowed to close under UHI.

The Hospital Insurance Fund will assist hospitals in more remote locations that may not have a large throughput of patients to continue to provide important local services.

To ensure that hospitals compete on an equal footing, public hospitals will be compensated for costs that they bear that private hospitals do not such as Emergency Departments and training health care professionals.

The Patient Safety Authority will introduce a national licensing system for hospitals, and will oversee the transition of hospitals from the HSE to independent local control.

The existing policy of co-location of private hospitals on public hospital lands will cease. Tax incentives for private hospital developments will cease.

Pathway to Universal Hospital Care Insurance

In the first term of this Government, the foundations will be laid for the introduction of Universal Hospital Care Insurance:

- The legislative basis for UHI will be enacted.
- Public hospitals will be given autonomy from the HSE.
- The HSE’s function of purchasing care for uninsured patients will be given to a Hospital Care Purchase Agency which will combine with the National Treatment Purchase Fund to purchase care for the uninsured over this transition period.

- This separation of purchaser-provider functions will enable the development of a money follows the patient system of purchase of care for people without insurance before the implementation of the UHI system.

Care of Older People and Community Care

Investment in the supply of more and better care for older people in the community and in residential settings will be a priority of this Government.

Additional funding will be provided each year for the care of older people.

This funding will go to more residential places, more home care packages and the delivery of more home help and other professional community care services.

The Fair Deal system of financing nursing home care will be reviewed with a view to developing a secure and equitable system of financing for community and long-term care which supports older people to stay in their own homes.

Integrated Care

The integration of care in all settings is key to efficient health care delivery, in which the right care is delivered in the right place.

Integration of care will be the responsibility of an Integrated Care Agency under the aegis of the Minister for Health.

This agency will oversee the flow of centrally tax-funded resources between the different arms of the system so that there are incentives for care to occur in the best setting.

Cost Control

Reference pricing and greater use of generics will be introduced to reduce the State's large drugs bill and the cost to individuals of their medications.

Under the new GP contract the rate of remuneration of GPs will be reduced.

Under a new consultant's contract hospital consultants' remuneration will be reduced. Action will be taken to reduce the cost of procurement for medical equipments and construction of facilities.

Health Administration

The Minister for Health and the Department of Health will be responsible for policy and spending.

The HSE will cease to exist as its functions are given to other bodies during this process of reform.

The HSE hospital purchasing arm will merge with the NTPF to become a new purchaser of public patient care during this period of transition.

HSE hospitals will become autonomous providers of care.

Capital developments in Health

Health capital spending will be a priority.

Within the Health capital budget, the immediate priority areas will be primary care centres, step-down and long-term care facilities, and community care facilities such as day centres for older people.

The completion and commissioning of the cystic fibrosis unit will be expedited.

The National Children's Hospital will be built.

Mental Health

Our policy on mental health incorporates the recommendations of A Vision for Change. We are committed to reducing the stigma of mental illness, ensuring early and appropriate intervention and vastly improving access to modern mental health services in the community.

A comprehensive range of mental health services will be included as part of the standard insurance package offered under Universal Health Insurance.

Given the central role of primary care in our reforms, we will ensure that patients can access mental health services such as psychologists and counsellors in the primary care setting. We will also strengthen GP education and training in mental health so that they can better diagnose, treat and refer as necessary.

We will ring fence €35m annually from within the health budget to develop community mental health teams and services as outlined in A Vision for Change to ensure early access to more appropriate services for adults and children and improved integration with primary care services.

Part of the ring-fenced funding will be used to implement Reach Out, the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, to reduce the high levels of suicide.

We will close unsuitable psychiatric institutions moving patients to more appropriate community-based facilities and will develop specific strategies for elderly patients and those with intellectual disabilities who remain under the care of mental health services. To ensure a joined-up approach to mental health in the community we will establish a cross-departmental group to ensure that good mental health is a policy goal across a range of people's life experiences including education, employment and housing for example.

We will endeavour to end the practice of placing children and adolescents in adult psychiatric wards.

We will review the Mental Health Act 2001 in consultation with service users, carers and other stakeholders, informed by human rights standards, and introduce a Mental Capacity Bill that is in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Other health priorities

We will develop a national Alzheimer's and other dementias strategy by 2013 to increase awareness, ensure early diagnosis and intervention, and development of enhanced community based services. This strategy will be implemented over five years.

We will introduce a cervical cancer vaccination catch-up programme for all girls in secondary school. We will also extend Breastcheck to 65-69 year old women.

We will develop a National Carers Strategy to support carers and to address issues of concern.

We will reopen discussions with the Irish Thalidomide Association regarding further compensation for victims of Thalidomide.

We will seek a mechanism to compensate those women who were excluded on age grounds alone from the Lourdes Hospital Redress Scheme.

Bioethics

We will legislate to clarify the law surrounding assisted human reproduction including the law relating parental relationships arising from assisted human reproduction.

We will legislate to regulate stem cell research.

We acknowledge the recent ruling of the European Court of Human Rights subsequent to the established ruling of the Irish Supreme Court on the X-case. We will establish an expert group to address this issue, drawing on appropriate medical and legal expertise with a view to making recommendations to Government on how this matter should be properly addressed.

We will legislate for post-mortem procedures and organ retention practices as recommended by the Madden report.

We will legislate to change the organ donation to an opt-out system for organ transplantation, rather than an opt in system so as to improve the availability of organs for patients in desperate need.

Education

This Government's ambition is to build a knowledge society. Education is at the heart of a more cohesive, more equal and more successful society, and it will be the engine of sustainable economic growth. Ireland has experienced a decline in educational outcomes in recent years. We will draw from top performing education models like Finland to reverse this trend. Even in our country's crisis, we can make progress in education and protect frontline services.

Early Childhood Care and Education

We will maintain the free pre-school year in Early Childhood Care and Education to promote the best outcomes for children and families. We will improve the quality of the pre-school year by implementing standards and reviewing training options.

As resources allow, this Government will invest in a targeted early childhood education programme for disadvantaged children, building on existing targeted pre-school supports for families most in need of assistance such as the young ballymun project.

Empowering Schools to Improve Standards

A priority in education will be to recruit, train and support the highest calibre of teachers. School leadership will be fundamental to furthering this aim.

We will give greater freedom and autonomy to school principals and boards to raise educational standards by devolving more responsibility locally, with greater freedom to allocate and manage staff with required flexibility and to delegate management responsibilities to teachers as school priorities require.

We will require schools, with the support of the Inspectorate, to draw up five year development plans for their schools and individual teachers.

Administrative functions, relating to maintenance, school building projects and co-ordination of support services currently carried out by principals will be devolved locally.

Protecting the Frontline

Education will be a priority for this Government. It will endeavour to protect and enhance the educational experience of children, young people and students. To that end, it will endeavour to protect frontline services in education, and seek efficiencies in work and school practices, in line with the Croke Park Agreement.

Improving Outcomes

A longer term aim of this Government will be to position Ireland in the top ten performing countries in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

We will review Junior and Leaving Certificate systems and implement reforms necessary to encourage greater innovation and independent learning, building on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's work in this area.

Maths and science teaching at second level will be reformed, including making science a compulsory Junior Cert subject by 2014. Professional development for maths and science teachers will be prioritised.

The system for evaluating schools will be reformed so parents have access to more information when choosing a school for their family. A new system of self-evaluation will be introduced, requiring all schools to evaluate their own performance year on year and publish information across a wide range of criteria.

A bonus points system for maths, which is linked to specific maths or science courses, will be introduced to encourage greater participation in courses where skills shortages currently exist.

Making Literacy a National Cause

This Government believes that no child should leave an Irish school unable to read and write.

A national literacy strategy for children and young people will be developed as a matter of urgency, with school-level targets that are related to national targets. Every school will be required to have a literacy action plan, with demonstrable outcomes. Responsibility for achieving these outcomes will be vested in the school principals, who will also receive continuous professional development to support the implementation of the strategy.

Pre-service and in-service training in teaching of literacy for all primary and secondary school teachers will be improved, with dedicated literacy mentors to work intensively with teachers in most disadvantaged primary schools.

Together with a new focus on how literacy is taught, time spent on quality literacy tuition is important. DEIS primary schools will be required to teach literacy for 120 minutes per day; non-DEIS schools to teach literacy for 90 minutes per day. This time includes incorporating structured literacy tuition into teaching of other subjects.

Local authorities will be supported in developing Right to Read campaigns involving community supports for literacy, from within existing budgets such as more spacious social housing, longer opening hours for libraries, homework clubs and summer camps that improve literacy through sport and games.

21st Century Schools

This Government will end the treatment of ICT in education as a stand-alone issue, but will integrate it across education policy. This will begin with merging the National Centre for Technology in Education with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. A new plan to develop ICT in teaching, learning and assessment will be developed. This plan will incorporate the integration of ICT policy across other agencies, such as the Professional Development Services for Teachers, the State Examinations Commission, and Project Maths.

The primary priority for investment in ICT in the immediate term will be the integration of ICT in teaching and learning across the curriculum and investing in broadband development to ensure schools have access to fibre-powered broadband. Investment in ICT will be maximised through pooling of ICT procurement.

Greater use of online platforms will be made to offer a wide range of subjects and lessons online, and to enable schools to ‘share’ teachers via live web casts. These online lessons will be made available through a new Digital School Resource, bringing together existing resources from National Council for Curriculum Assessment, Department of Education and other sources as a cost effective means of sharing expertise between schools.

We will engage with the publishing industry to develop more online learning resources and new mediums for their learning materials.

Building Schools for the Future

This Government will prioritise school building projects in a revised national development plan.

The objective of this Government will be to progressively phase out the inefficient renting of school prefabs. In the interim the negotiation of prefab rental contracts will be part of a reformed public procurement policy to encourage greater value for money, transparency and reduce dependency on temporary accommodation.

The devolution of an annual capital budget to schools will be piloted to allow schools to plan for capital projects.

The Department of Education’s central database of school accommodation will be overhauled to ensure a complete inventory of school buildings and associated structures is maintained so deficiencies are easily identifiable.

In areas of demographic growth, Shared Educational Campuses will be the preferred model for future development of educational infrastructure. New schools will be built to grow with their communities and to provide for more interactive, child-friendly model of education.

Local authorities will be required to complete Educational Impact Assessment on residential zoning, to identify potential need for schools.

We will negotiate the transfer of school infrastructure currently owned by 18 religious orders cited in Ryan Report, at no extra cost, to the State. In principle, school buildings and land will be zoned for educational use, so that they cannot easily be sold and lost to system.

Delivering Equity in Education

We will consider recommendations of the review of the DEIS programme and use it as platform for new initiatives to deliver better outcomes for students in disadvantaged areas.

We will examine how to make existing expenditure on educational disadvantage more effective, and innovative ways in which teenagers at risk of leaving school system can stay connected, for example through use of ICT-based distance learning and projects such as iScoil.

We will publish a plan for the implementation of the EPSEN Act 2004 to prioritise access for children with special needs to an individual education plan. The priority will be to move to a system where necessary supports follow a child from primary to second level and to achieve greater integration of special needs-related services.

We will support diversity in education of children with special needs, recognising that both intensive education and mainstreaming can be seen to work for individual children.

We recognise the critical importance of early diagnosis of autism and early intervention and address current deficits in this area. We will reverse the cut to the number of psychologists in National Educational Psychological Service in Budget 2011.

We will encourage schools to develop anti-bullying policies and in particular, strategies to combat homophobic bullying to support students.

We will improve co-ordination and integration to delivery of services to the Traveller community across all Government departments, using available resources more effectively to deliver on principles of social inclusion, particularly in area of Traveller education through the DEIS programme

We will examine supports in place for gifted students and create improved links with third level institutions on regional basis, to provide gifted students with access to new programmes or educational resources.

Patronage

We will initiate a time-limited Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector to allow all stakeholders including parents to engage in open debate on change of patronage in communities where it is appropriate and necessary. The Forum will have concise terms of reference and will sit for a maximum of 12 months.

The Forum's recommendations will be drawn up into White Paper for consideration and implementation by Government to ensure that education system can provide sufficiently diverse number of schools, catering for all religions and none.

We will give parents and local communities the opportunity to have a say in the patronage of existing and future schools, for example by direct ballot.

We will also move towards a more pluralist system of patronage at second level, recognising a wider number of patrons.

People of non-faith or minority religious backgrounds and publically identified LGBT people should not be deterred from training or taking up employment as teachers in the State.

Third Level Reform

We will review the recommendations of Hunt report on higher education. A reform of third level will be driven by the need to improve learning outcomes of undergraduate degree students, as well as providing high quality research.

We will initiate a time-limited audit of level 8 qualifications on offer and learning outcomes for graduates of these courses.

We will introduce radical reform in third level institutions to maximise existing funding, in particular reform of academic contracts and will encourage greater specialisation by educational institutions.

We support the relocation of DIT to Grangegorman as resources permit.

We will explore the establishment of a multi campus Technical University in the South East.

We will extend the remit of Ombudsman to third level institutions.

We will merge the existing accreditation authorities; National Qualifications Authority, FETAC and HETAC to increase transparency.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning, community education and vocational training for jobseekers will be a high priority. We will expand training options for jobseekers across the VEC, further and higher education sectors to facilitate upskilling of the labour force. We will address the widespread and persistent problem of adult literacy through the integration of literacy in vocational training and through community education.

Housing and Distressed Mortgages

A policy of putting the interests of big developers and the banks ahead of people looking to purchase a home was a direct cause of Ireland's disastrous property boom and bust. This Government is committed to helping homeowners in distress to weather the recession, and to ensuring that Ireland has a sustainable housing policy.

Both parties believe that more protection is needed for homeowners with distressed mortgages. The recommendations of the Cooney report are inadequate to address the scale of the current crisis. A more radical approach is needed to protect families in fear of losing their home. This Government will examine a number of such proposals, including:

- Increasing mortgage interest relief to 30% for First Time Buyers in 2004-08 (from the current sliding scale of 20% to 25% depending on the year the mortgage was taken out), financed in part by bringing forward the abolition of relief for new buyers from June 2011.
- Directing any mortgage provider in receipt of State support to present Government with a plan of how intends to cut its costs, over and above existing plans, in a fair manner by a sufficient amount to forego a 25 basis point increase on their variable rate mortgage.
- Introducing a two year moratorium on repossessions of modest family homes where a family makes an honest effort to pay their mortgage.
- Fast-tracking personal bankruptcy reform needed to bring us into line with best international standards, such as introducing a flexible discharge period for "honest bankrupts", defined as one that has materially complied with the Tax, NAMA and Companies Acts among others.
- Converting the Money Advice and Budgeting Service into a strengthened Personal Debt Management Agency with strong legal powers. The agency will support families who make an honest effort to deal with their debts, including non-mortgage debt, providing protection from their creditors where appropriate, so that they have time to sort out their affairs. In order to do so, the Personal Debt Management Agency will have quasi-judicial status.
- Making greater use of Mortgage Interest Supplement to support families who cannot meet their mortgage payments, which is a better and cheaper option than paying rent supplement after a family loses their home.

Ghost Estates

We will mandate the Minister for the Environment, in conjunction with Local Authorities, to bring forward a coherent plan to resolve the problems associated with ghost estates. This plan will be developed in cooperation with NAMA.

Social Housing

We will introduce a staged purchase scheme to increase the stock of social housing, while achieving the best possible value for public investment. Under the terms of this scheme, leased dwellings will revert to the ownership of local authorities and housing associations at the end of the leasehold period.

We will enable larger housing associations and local authorities to access private sector funding for social housing by issuing ‘social housing bonds’, secured on the value of their existing housing stock when market conditions allow.

We will amend the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (1992) to require all local authorities and housing associations to register with the Department of the Environment if they wish to access Government subsidies or other supports for social housing provision

Urban Regeneration

We are committed to urban regeneration to revitalise communities in areas such as Limerick to give families a better quality of life.

Homelessness

We are committed to ending long term homelessness and the need to sleep rough.

To address the issue of existing homelessness we will review and update the existing Homeless Strategy, including a specific focus on youth homelessness, and take into account the current demands on existing housing and health services with a view to assessing how to best provide additional services.

In line with our Comprehensive Spending Review, we will alleviate the problem of long term homelessness by introducing a ‘housing first’ approach to accommodating homeless people. In this way we will be able to offer homeless people suitable, long term housing in the first instance and radically reduce the use of hostel accommodation and the associated costs for the Exchequer.

We believe that prevention is better than cure and we will aggressively target the root causes of homelessness. By having a dedicated body to coordinate policy across Government we will target initiatives in cross cutting areas which will aim to prevent as much as possible problems like homelessness.

Housing

We will ensure that the Central Bank and Financial Regulator supervise credit institutions' mortgage lending practices comprehensively and intensively. Where credit institutions fail to adequately control mortgage lending risks, the Central Bank will impose loan-to-value ceilings on mortgages, caps on loan-to-income multiples, limits on the term of new mortgages, and more rigorous procedures for verifying borrowers' incomes.

We will improve the quality of information available on the Irish housing market by requiring that the selling price of all dwellings is recorded in a publicly available, national housing price database.

We will legislate for tougher and clearer rules relating to fire safety in apartment buildings and will introduce a new fire safety inspection and certification regime.

We will establish a tenancy deposit protection scheme to put an end to disputes regarding the return of deposits.

Justice and Law Reform

Victims Rights

We will enact legislation to strengthen the rights of victims of crime and their families, to ensure that victims and their needs are at the heart of justice process and that rights to information, advice and other appropriate assistance are met effectively and efficiently.

White Collar Crime

We will ensure that rogue bankers and all those that misappropriate or embezzle funds are properly pursued for their crimes and that the full rigours of the law will apply to them.

We will enact a new consolidated and reformed anti-corruption law to punish white collar crime and end the impunity from consequences for corporate behaviour that threatens the economy.

We will strengthen measures to ensure that convicted white collar criminals cannot transfer assets to spouses or other family members and we will empower the Criminal Assets Bureau to pursue such convicted white collar criminals for any legal aid costs awarded to them.

Criminal Law Reform

We will enact legislation to strengthen the powers of the Criminal Assets Bureau in relation to forfeiting the proceeds of crime.

We will establish a DNA Database to assist the Gardaí in the investigation of serious crime, such as homicides and sexual offences. The database will also be utilised to enhance cooperation within the EU in the area of asylum and immigration. There will be appropriate safeguards in relation to inclusion on and access to the DNA database.

We will provide statutory guidelines for the witness protection programme.

We will increase the penalty for tobacco smuggling for commercial purposes and provide robust detection measures to counteract such smuggling.

We will introduce x-ray scanners to all prisons to screen people and goods entering prisons to stop the flow of drugs and mobile telephones into prisons. Appropriate action will be taken to stop mobile phones being used in prisons.

We will introduce roadside drug testing programmes to combat the problem of driving under the influence of drugs.

We will enact legislation to prohibit the practice of Female Genital Mutilation for the protection of girls and women.

Strong and Efficient Policing

We will ensure that administrative duties are carried out by civilian staff in order to free up highly trained Gardaí for preventing and detecting crime.

We will reform the prosecution and judicial case management systems so as to reduce the number of Gardaí unnecessarily detained in the courts.

We will seek to combat drug supplies at source by providing x-ray scanners at major ports; greater patrols along coastline and increasing presence of Customs officers at smaller airports.

Sentencing and Penal Reform

We are committed to a sentencing system that provides a safer society at a lower cost to the taxpayer. We will ensure that violent offenders and other serious offenders serve appropriate prison sentences while at the same time switching away from prison sentences and towards less costly non-custodial options for non-violent and less serious offenders. This will result in a reduction in the prison population and alleviate overcrowding.

We will fully implement the Fines Act 2010 and extend the use of Community Service Orders. Where a member of the judiciary is considering the imposition of a prison sentence of one year or less, he/she will be required by legislation to first consider the appropriateness of Community Service Orders as an alternative to imprisonment.

We will end the practice of imprisoning people who cannot pay fines and debts and introduce a system which takes a small amount of money from wages or social welfare by “attachment order” to pay off a fine or debt over time, as an alternative to imprisonment for people who refuse to pay.

We will introduce legislation to ensure that aggravating factors are considered in sentencing and to allow for the criminal prosecution service to make a submission on sentence, which draws to the court’s attention aggravating factors which relate to the crime.

We will introduce a series of post-imprisonment restraint orders for violent and sexual offenders to include electronic tagging and other restrictions, which may be imposed at the time of sentencing.

Violent and sexual offenders may only earn remission based on good behaviour, participation in education and training, and completion of addiction treatment programmes and, where appropriate, sex offender programmes. We will review the workings of the Prison Act 2007 in relation to incentivising engagement with rehabilitative services in prison.

We will strengthen the Inspector of Prisons, by putting the office on a statutory footing and removing restrictions on publication by the Inspector of Prisons of his/her reports.

Prison visiting committees will furnish their reports to the Inspector of Prisons who will be under an obligation to publish them. The Inspector of Prisons will make an annual report to the Minister for Justice and the Oireachtas Justice Committee, and will be empowered to appear before that Committee on such other occasions as may be appropriate.

We will ensure better coordination between the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service to create an integrated offender management programme.

A review will be conducted of the working of mandatory sentencing laws in the context of an overall review of drugs policy.

We will review the proposal to build a new prison at Thornton Hall and consider alternatives, if any, to avoid the costs yet to be incurred by the State in building such a new prison. We are conscious of the need to provide in-cell sanitation to all prisons and, in so far as resources permit, to upgrade prison facilities.

We will end the practice of sending children to St. Patrick's Institution.

Anti-Social Behaviour

The Government will tackle anti-social behaviour and the plague of low level crime that is so destructive of community life. We will build on the existing community policing partnerships and forums to enhance trust between local communities and their Gardaí. It is Government policy that a higher priority be attached to community policing and that, within available resources, there is a higher Garda visibility in the local neighbourhoods worst affected. In the case of public or social housing, we will implement a 12-month probationary tenancy for all new tenants. Where tenants engage in anti-social behaviour during this period the tenancy will be terminated.

We will give special emphasis to alternative programmes for juvenile offenders through extensions to the Juvenile Liaison Officer Scheme and the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme, and the extended use of Restorative Justice where appropriate. We will also examine outcomes-based contracts with community organisations to help reduce re-offending by young people, based on the social impact bond model in the U.K..

Drugs

We support the principles and objectives of the National Addiction Strategy. We are committed to providing renewed impetus to the fight against drugs and to ensuring that the Strategy once again becomes relevant and effective. We will where possible enhance demand reduction strategies. The new National Addiction Strategy deals with both drugs and alcohol addiction. The first step in implementing a successful strategy will be to outline key priorities for short-term implementation, underpinned by a realistic timeframe and targets.

We will –

- expand rehabilitation services at local level in line with need and subject to available resources;
- integrate drug and alcohol abuse strategies at local level;
- strengthen the supply reduction effort and criminal assets seizures, particularly at local level;
- develop compulsory as well as voluntary rehabilitation programmes;
- reduce the flow of drugs to prisons;
- carry out a full review of the Drug Treatment Court Programme to evaluate its success and potential in dealing with young offenders identified as having serious problem with drugs;
- ensure every Government Department, Agency or task force responsible for implementing elements of the National Addiction Strategy will be required to account to the Minister for their budget annually and to demonstrate progress on achieving targets;
- work with Local and Regional Drug Task Forces to implement effective programmes aimed at preventing addiction in schools;
- require all local and regional drugs taskforces to build on the success of Education Prevention Units in other taskforces;
- update the out-dated drugs awareness programmes in schools to reflect current attitudes and reality of recreational drug use amongst teens;
- target resources to increasing the number of needle exchange programmes and rehabilitation places across the country where it is needed most;
- assist drug users in rehabilitation through participation in suitable local community employment schemes.

Law Reform, Courts and Judiciary

We will legislate to establish a Judicial Council, with lay representation, to provide an effective mechanism for dealing with complaints against judges.

We will introduce a constitutional amendment to allow Government to reduce the pay of the judiciary as a whole in line with other public sector reductions. We will also provide a modern and reformed framework for judicial expenses.

As soon as resources as permit, we will introduce a constitutional amendment to allow for the establishment of a distinct and separate system of family courts to streamline family law court processes and make them more efficient and less costly.

We will take the necessary steps to create a permanent Civil Court of Appeal.

We will encourage and facilitate use of mediation to resolve commercial, civil and family disputes in order to speed up resolution of disputes, reduce legal costs and ameliorate the stress of contested court proceedings.

We will provide for a Commercial Court to facilitate speedy resolution of disputes at Circuit Court level, where monies in dispute do not warrant High Court jurisdiction.

We will introduce legislation to facilitate courts making provision for structured settlements in circumstances where lump sums are currently awarded as a consequence of individuals suffering catastrophic injury because of the negligence of another.

We will create an enforcement mechanism for District Court maintenance orders in family cases.

We will reform and modernise aspects of family law.

We will introduce consolidated and reformed domestic violence legislation to address all aspects of domestic violence, threatened violence and intimidation in a manner that provides protection to victims.

We will establish independent regulation of the legal professions to improve access and competition, make legal costs more transparent and ensure adequate procedures for addressing consumer complaints.

We will prioritise a programme of law reform arising out of the recommendations made by the Law Reform Commission.

We will review existing tendering processes for legal services by Government and State and semi-State agencies to ensure value for money and end anti-competitive practices.

Passports, Citizenship, Immigration and Asylum

We will introduce comprehensive reforms of the immigration, residency and asylum systems, which will include a statutory appeals system and set out rights and obligations in a transparent way.

We will provide for the efficient processing and determination of citizenship applications within a reasonable time.

Consideration will be given to transferring the passport service from the Department of Foreign Affairs to the Department of Justice to operate as an Independent Executive Agency under the aegis of that Department.

Equality and Social Protection

This Government is committed to tackling Ireland's economic crisis in a way that is fair, balanced, and which recognises the need for social solidarity.

Tackling poverty and protecting the most vulnerable

During a time of recession and deep unemployment the Government acknowledges the vital role of the community and voluntary sector working in partnership with local communities, State agencies and local authorities.

We will maintain social welfare rates.

We will reverse the recent cut in the national minimum wage.

The Commission on Taxation and Social Welfare will examine and make recommendations on the interaction between taxation and the welfare system to ensure that work is worthwhile. In particular, it will examine family and child income supports, and a means by which self-employed people can be insured against unemployment and sickness.

The elimination of poverty will be an objective of this Government. We are committed to achieving the targets in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion to reduce the number of people experiencing poverty.

A new approach is needed to break the cycle of child poverty where it is most deeply entrenched. We will adopt a new area based approach to child poverty, which draws on best international practice and existing services to tackle every aspect of child poverty. Initially, this model will be rolled out to up to ten of Ireland's most disadvantaged communities, in cooperation with philanthropic partners to co-fund and manage the project.

We will complete and publish a strategy to tackle fuel-poverty.

Eliminating poverty traps

We will examine the social protection system with a view to identifying and eliminating poverty traps including:

- amending the 30 hour rule for Rent Supplement and Mortgage Interest Supplement for people moving from welfare to work.
- activating people on a reduced week who refuse extra day(s) employment.
- over time, One Parent Family Payment will be replaced with a parental allowance that does not discourage marriage, cohabitation or work.

We will also tightly regulate moneylenders and debt collectors.

A zero tolerance approach to welfare fraud

We will take a zero tolerance policy in relation to welfare fraud, underpinned by a major anti-fraud enforcement drive.

As well as more regular face-to-face interviews with an integrated employment and entitlements service for those of working age, we will undertake other anti-fraud measures using latest available technology and better sharing of data across government departments and agencies.

Getting better value for money

We will progressively reduce reliance on Rent Supplement, with eligible recipients moving to the Rental Accommodation Scheme.

We will review the operation of the Rent Supplement Scheme and introduce a code of conduct for rent supplement eligibility similar to that which operates for local authority tenants.

Rent supplement will only be paid to tax-compliant landlords registered with the PRTB and offering decent quality accommodation, to root out fraud.

We will divert staff from elsewhere in public service to clear the social welfare appeals backlog, and introduce a consolidated appeals process.

The household benefits packages will be put out to tender, so that the Exchequer benefits from reduced prices.

We will raise the issue of payment of Child Benefit in respect of non-resident children at EU level, and seek to have the entitlement modified to reflect the cost of living where a child is resident. We will examine all possible flexibility within European legislation to reduce the cost of this payment.

Equality

Equality is at the heart of what it means to be a citizen in our democracy. This Government believes that everyone has the right to be free from discrimination and that we all benefit from living in a more equal society.

We are committed to ensuring that the rights of women and men to equality of treatment and to participate fully in society are upheld.

We will take steps to ensure that all State boards have at least 40% of each gender.

We will promote greater co-ordination and integration of delivery of services to the Traveller community across Government, using available resources more effectively to deliver on principles of social inclusion, particularly in the area of Traveller education.

We will encourage schools to develop anti-bullying policies and in particular, strategies to combat homophobic bullying.

We will ensure that trans-gender people will have legal recognition and extend the protections of the equality legislation to them.

We will require all public bodies to take due note of equality and human rights in carrying out their functions.

We will reform the current law on employees' right to engage in collective bargaining (the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 2001), so as to ensure compliance by the State with recent judgements of the European Court of Human Rights.

We will promote policies which integrate minority ethnic groups in Ireland, and which promote social inclusion, equality, diversity and the participation of immigrants in the economic, social, political and cultural life of their communities.

People with Disabilities

We will ensure that the quality of life of people with disabilities is enhanced and that resources allocated reach the people who need them. To achieve this, we will reform the delivery of public services to bring about back office savings that will protect front line services.

We will also facilitate people with disabilities in achieving a greater level of participation in employment, training and education.

We will publish, following wide consultation, a realistic implementation plan for the National Disability Strategy, including sectoral plans with achievable timescales and targets within available resources. We will ensure whole-of-government involvement and monitoring of the Strategy, in partnership with the disability sector.

We will seek to get best value for money for investment in services and to ensure that services meet the needs of users. A Comprehensive Spending Review will examine all provision for people with disabilities with a view to determining how users can get the best services. We will also ensure that money spent on disability services under the National Disability Strategy is clearly laid out and audited.

As part of this Review we will move a proportion of public spending to a personal budget model so that people with disabilities or their families have the flexibility to make choices that suit their needs best. Personal budgets also introduce greater transparency and efficiency in funding services.

We will put the National Standards for Residential Services for People with Disabilities on a statutory footing and ensure that services are inspected by the Health Information and Quality Authority.

We will examine different mechanisms to promote the recognition of Irish Sign Language.

We will reform the law on mental capacity to ensure the greatest degree of autonomy for people with intellectual disabilities or suffering with mental illnesses in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In planning legislation, we will promote and support universal design whereby all environments can be used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of age, ability or disability.

PROGRESS

Children, Families and Older People

We will fundamentally reform the delivery of child protection services by removing child welfare and protection from the HSE and creating a dedicated Child Welfare and Protection Agency, reforming the model of service delivery and improving accountability to the Dáil.

We are committed to implementing the recommendations of the Ryan Report including putting the Children First Guidelines on a statutory footing and legislating for the use of “soft information”.

We will enact legislation to amend tax and social welfare law in respect of civil partnerships. We will amend the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights and Obligations of Cohabiting Couples Act 2010 to address any anomalies or omissions, including those relating to children.

Our tax, social welfare and other laws should not discourage people from getting married or cohabiting. For example, single mothers lose the One Parent Family Payment if they marry. Over time, we will transform it into a family income-based payment that does not discourage marriage or work.

We will modernise and reform outdated elements of family law. We will enact legislation to consolidate and reform the law on adoption.

We will complete and implement the National Positive Ageing Strategy so that older people are recognised, supported and enabled to live independent full lives.

Local Authorities will be required to establish Older People councils, where members of the community can raise local concerns or issues of importance.

We will support older people in living in their own homes and communities for as long as they wish and will facilitate this by ensuring that the eligibility criteria for the home help and the Home Care Package Scheme are applied consistently. We will also develop and implement national standards for home support services which are subject to inspection by the Health Information and Quality Authority.

We will reform the pension system to progressively achieve universal coverage, with particular focus on lower-paid workers, to achieve better risk sharing, and to provide for greater flexibility for those who wish to retire on a phased basis.

Arts, Culture and Sport

We will make strategic policy formulation the primary function of the Department, with line agencies and bodies responsible for policy implementation.

We will encourage the Arts Council to continue to dedicate resources to touring in order to protect the State's investment in regional Arts infrastructure around the country and to bring cultural tourism opportunities to towns and villages across the country.

We will work with stakeholders in the Arts community to develop new proposals aimed at building private support of the Arts in Ireland exploring philanthropic, sponsorship or endowment fund opportunities.

We will make the Culture Night Initiative a twice yearly event, and introduce a National Lottery Funding Anniversary Day, whereby all facilities which have received funding from the National Lottery will open their doors to the public free of charge. We will also review the opening times of our national cultural institutions.

We will develop a cultural plan for future commemorative events such as the Centenary of the Easter Rising in 2016.

We will promote genealogical tourism by updating the National Cultural Institutions Act in relation to the Genealogical office to put it on a proper statutory footing, modernise its operations and to enable publication of the 1926 census to stimulate genealogy tourism.

We will also explore philanthropic opportunities for the development of a national archives and genealogy quarter, providing easy access to archives and tapping into an area of cultural tourism which is of huge interest to the vast Irish Diaspora.

We will encourage greater co-operation between local authorities to provide assistance where possible for local authorities currently lacking a local authority Arts officer due to recruitment restrictions and to co-operate in developing cultural tourism opportunities.

We will seek to capture some public good from NAMA by identifying buildings that have no commercial potential, and which might be suitable as local facilities for art and culture.

Responsibility for policy-making will revert to the Department, while agencies will be accountable for implementing policy, assessing outcomes and value for money.

All State funding will be subject to the beneficiaries signing up to a dispute resolution service, a code of governance and a new mandatory code of conduct regarding child protection in sport.

A number of positions on the Sports Council's governing Board will be made directly electable.

The National Sports Facilities Strategy will become the blueprint for the future development of all sports facilities in the country and will inform any future investment on sports infrastructure.

In future sports funding should prioritise projects which further greater participation in sport on a local and national level.

Foreign Affairs, ODA and Defence

We are determined to restore Ireland's standing as a respected and influential member of the European Union and as part of the wider international community.

We will ensure that our diplomatic network aids the repair of our reputation through a transparent and responsible approach to winning inward investment and we will recall Ireland's Ambassadors within 100 days of this new government for briefings on a new approach to promoting and marketing Ireland as a country to do business in.

We will review the 2006 White Paper on Overseas Development Aid.

In times of humanitarian crises, we will unite NGOs that provide humanitarian aid to create a single appeals mechanism for national fundraising and public response. This will maximise publicity for the cause, the receipt of emergency funds and ensure the effective and co-ordinated dispersal of emergency aid. The State will financially support these NGOs in their response.

We are committed to the 0.7% of GNP target for Overseas Development Aid. We will seek to achieve this by 2015.

We will position Ireland, in particular Shannon airport, to become an international hub for the storage and distribution of emergency humanitarian supplies.

We will seek to establish a Civilian Corps, which could allow some job seekers use and share their skills in developing countries while retaining some job seeker's benefit.

We will implement the Defence Forces Medical Services Review as resources allow.

We will initiate a detailed legal review of the basis, structures and governance of the Red Cross in Ireland to improve its functioning in the light of changing circumstances.

We will enforce the prohibition on the use of Irish airspace, airports and related facilities for purposes not in line with the dictates of international law.

Northern Ireland

We support the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and St. Andrew's Agreement.

We are committed to publishing and acting on the recommendations of the first Review of the North-South Implementation Bodies and Areas for Co-operation; and we will progress the second Review, which will identify new areas for North South co-operation.

We will work for greater economic co-operation to accelerate the process of recovery and creation of jobs on this island.

The threat from dissident paramilitary groups cannot be underestimated. We will foster the continuing strong relationships between An Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern

Ireland to deal with this threat and we will also ensure the necessary resources to deal with these groups.

Ireland in Europe

We are fully committed to the EU2020 strategy and its creation of employment and smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

We will commission an independent audit into the transposition and implementation of EU legislation, placing priority on laws and regulations that caused concern or deemed burdensome to Irish business. We will put in place a mechanism across Government to accelerate implementation of directives, involving relevant Departments and the Attorney's Office.

We will enhance the Irish role in EU judicial and home affairs cooperation.

An Gaeilge agus an Ghaeltacht

We will support the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030 and will deliver on the achievable goals and targets proposed.

We will undertake a thorough reform of the Irish curriculum and the way in which Irish is taught at primary and second levels of education. We will reform the curriculum so more emphasis is put on oral and aural skills. We will allocate 50% of marks to the oral Irish exam at Leaving Certificate level.

We will aim to double the proportion of Irish students sitting the Higher Level Leaving Certificate exam by 2018.

Gaeltacht regions will benefit from the jobs action plan outlined in this document. Under our proposals, we will deliver new job creation prospects to Gaeltacht regions. We will invest in energy, broadband and water infrastructure, creating the modern infrastructure needed to attract and support new businesses and jobs. We will also strongly support the potential for jobs in tourism and marine activities. We will continue to support the Irish language broadcasting and arts sector.

We will review the Official Languages Act to ensure expenditure on the language is best targeted towards the development of the language and that obligations are imposed appropriately in response to demand from citizens.

We will review current investment and funding programmes that benefit Irish language organisations in order to achieve visible value for money for citizens and tangible outcomes on a transparent basis.

We will take steps to improve the quality and effectiveness of the teaching of Irish at second level. When these steps have been implemented, we will consider the question of whether Irish should be optional at Leaving Certificate.

Climate Change

We will publish a Climate Change Bill which will provide certainty surrounding government policy and provide a clear pathway for emissions reductions, in line with negotiated EU 2020 targets.

We will legislate to give the relevant line Ministers temporary powers to take charge of State's actions in response to natural disasters, under the aegis of National Emergency Response Action Committee.

We will further improve energy efficiency for new buildings, with a view to moving towards zero carbon homes in the longer term. All new commercial buildings will be required to significantly reduce their carbon footprint.

Energy

We will legislate to support the geothermal energy sector.

We will provide efficient foreshore licensing and leasing process for marine energy.

We will ensure that future wind farms are built in locations where wind regime is best and that they are built in large numbers or in clusters to reduce cost of connection to grid under new 'planned' Gate 4 process, as opposed to existing 'developer led' system.

We will incentivise and promote off-shore drilling and streamline planning and regulatory process for bringing ashore these reserves and seek to maximize the return to the Irish people.

We will review and reform the PSO levy to ensure that only most cost-effective projects are supported by ReFIT tariff and that consumer can benefit from claw-back when market prices exceed tariff or where appropriate, share of profits or royalty.

We will appoint an independent international expert commission to review and report, within six months, on a case for, and cost of, undergrounding (all or part of) Meath-Tyrone 400KV power lines.

We will provide ReFIT for micro-generators wishing to produce electricity for their own homes, farms and businesses and facilitate them to sell surplus electricity to the grid. The tariff will not be significantly above single energy market price for electricity.

Regulation

We will rationalise regulators to strengthen consumer regulation and promote the consumer interest.

Sustainable waste policy

We will develop a national waste policy that will adhere to the EU waste hierarchy and favours a coherent approach to waste management that minimises waste going to landfill, and that maximises the resources that can be recovered from it.

We will drive a waste reduction programme through extension of producer responsibility initiatives and a levy on packaging after appropriate consultation with industry.

We will ensure specific producer responsibility requirements for construction and demolition projects over certain threshold, with recycling and waste management requirements, enforced through mandatory compliance bonds that can be refunded at end of project.

We will introduce competitive tendering for local waste collection services where the private sector and local authorities can bid to provide services in an entire local authority area for a set time frame. Tender bids will be judged and awarded by the new utilities regulator. Contracts would be required to stipulate a guaranteed service level to be offered. A public service obligation would include a fee waiver scheme for low-income households. Licences would be flexible enough to allow for localised waste management needs and opportunities.

Enhancing the quality of the environment

We will clamp down on environmental crime, such as illegal dumping and graffiti and noise pollution by allowing for on the spot fines, and providing for mediation between neighbours.

We will complete ratification of Aarhus Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters.

Peat

We will allow an exemption for domestic turf cutting on 75 National Heritage Area sites subject to the introduction of agreed national code of environmental practices.

We will establish an independent mediation between all relevant stakeholders with specific objective of facilitating resolution to 55 Special Area of Conservation designated bogs.

We will establish an independent mediation to resolve outstanding issues associated with turf cutting on blanket bogs.

Communications

We will mandate the regulator to require all broadband providers to publish average speeds for each package.

We will restrict misleading advertisements relating to monthly caps.

We will introduce a new government rating system so that home owners and tenants can assess broadband facilities easily.

We will accelerate Capital Allowances on software purchases against income tax and corporation profits tax from 8 to 3 years subject to a cost benefit analysis.

We will review and update Intellectual Property legislation currently in place to benefit innovation, develop a National Intellectual Property protocol to give clarity about terms on which business can access IP created in Higher Education Institutions, and clarify legislation relating to online copyright infringement and enforcement of rights relating to digital communications.

We will examine the role, and collection of, the TV license fee in light of existing and projected convergence of broadcasting technologies, transform the TV licence into a household-based Public Broadcasting Charge applied to all households and applicable businesses, regardless of the device they use to access content and review new ways of TV licence collection, including the possibility of paying in instalments through another utility bill (electricity or telecom), collection by local authorities, Revenue or new contract with An Post.

We will review the funding of public and independent broadcasters to ensure a healthy broadcasting environment in Ireland.

We will maintain the current regime with regard to the Heineken Cup.

A universal postal service is an essential public service, in particular for rural communities and those disadvantaged communities affected by digital divide. A publicly owned, commercially viable, profitable and efficient An Post is critical to the long-term viability of the postal market. We will enact into law the Postal Services Bill which opens postal market to competition. Will protect universal service obligation by assigning it to An Post for at least 20 years, make provision for state subvention and require that any decision by ComReg to reassign or scrap USO is subject to ministerial approval.

We will ensure that the network of post offices around the country is maintained and that communities have access to adequate postal services in their locality.

Transport

We recognise the need to rebalance transport policy to favour public transport. We will therefore establish a Cabinet sub-committee on Infrastructure to explore the benefits to the public transport passenger of more diverse bus service provision.

A modern high speed transport system is essential to ensure our economic competitiveness. We will support the expansion in range and frequency of high capacity commuter services, which will be subject to cost benefit analysis.

Funding will be provided on a once off basis to repair damage done to non-national roads due to recent severe weather conditions.

We will review and update the regulation of taxis to ensure that taxi services are recognized as a key component of the public transport system and we will provide for a forum for discussion between the regulatory authorities and taxi providers.

We will legislate to regulate the vehicle clamping industry.

We will continue to invest in the National Cycle Policy and we will look to extend the Dublin Bikes Scheme across the wider Dublin area and to other cities and integrate the scheme much more effectively with public transport links.

The rural transport network is vital for rural communities as a reliable and sustainable transport service. We will maintain and extend the Rural Transport Programme with other local transport services as much as is practicable.

We will work with the Aviation Regulator to cut airport charges in order to deliver increased routes, airlines and passenger numbers.

Agriculture

We will take advantage of our links at an EU level to engage in bi-lateral exchanges with other countries to ensure that any changes in EU policy or in WTO negotiations do not place the Irish agri-food sector at a competitive disadvantage.

We will move responsibility for agri-payments to a new one-stop-shop as well as developing a new innovation unit in the Department to drive new policy initiatives in the agrifood industry.

We will enact the Fair Trade Act, which will ban a number of unfair trading practices in the retail sector such as ‘hello money’ which suppliers have to pay to secure a place for their goods on supermarket shelves.

Further expansion and innovation in our dairy and meat sectors will be a key priority under a reformed CAP and we will work with industry to achieve more intensive levels of production.

We support the recommendations of Harvest Food 2020 Report.

We will exempt farm diesel from further increases in the carbon tax.

Building on the existing Food Safety Authority, we will create a single food safety monitoring agency responsible for food safety inspection from farm to fork.

We recognise the contribution that farm gate schemes make to farm incomes. We particularly value of agri-environment scheme as an income support and in protecting the environment. As

funds permit, we will investigate the possibility of expanding the Agri-Environment Options Scheme to farmers locked out of the scheme following the conclusion of their REPS 3 contracts.

We will invest in a 14,700ha per annum afforestation programme.

We will amend and strengthen legislation on animal cruelty and animal welfare.

Coastal communities, fisheries & marine environment

We will negotiate the best possible deal for fishermen in the review of the Common Fisheries Policy.

We will support the development of sustainable aquaculture and fish farms by streamlining the licensing process and reducing associated bureaucracy.

Marine responsibilities will be merged under one Department, for better co-ordination in policy delivery. We will develop an integrated marine and coastal planning process in order to maximise the potential of Ireland's coastline in fishing, aquaculture, ocean energy and tourism.

A Sea Fisheries Sustainability Impact Assessment, based on consultation with all major stakeholders, will be brought before the Dáil annually before EU fisheries negotiations commence.

We will replace criminal sanctions system for minor fisheries offences with administrative sanction system to bring Ireland into line with other European jurisdictions.

Safety at sea and decent working conditions must underpin the development of the fisheries sector. We will explore the provision of an emergency towing vessel for the Coastguard.

Planning

We will seek to better coordinate national, regional and local planning laws in order to achieve better and more coordinated development that supports local communities instead of the current system that favours developer led planning.

We will improve local transport access by making local transport plans an integral part of local Development Plans. We will force all local authorities to develop a transport plan in conjunction with their County/City Development Plans, and Local Areas Plans.

We will pass legislation to allow local authorities take housing estates 'in charge' after three years if there are no significant financial implications for local authorities, and substantially increase existing penalties for those who break planning laws.

We will require local authorities to carry out an 'Educational Impact Assessment' for all new zonings for residential development to ensure an adequate supply of school places.

We will make the planning process more democratic by amending the 2010 Planning and Development Act to allow for detailed public submissions on zoning, and to rebalance power towards elected representatives. Local authorities will be required to carry out a flood risk report in the preparation of their City and County Development Plans, and will also be legally required to manage flood risk through sustainable planning and development.