

Summary of Fianna Fáil General Election 2016 Manifesto

Commitments in Relation to Children¹

This document is produced by the Children's Rights Alliance and is a compilation of the information contained in the Fianna Fáil manifesto for General Election 2016. As the information is sourced from an external party, we do not accept responsibility for its content.

1. Alcohol, Smoking and Drugs

Make Smoking History:

Fewer than 1 in 5 adults now smoke in Ireland. This is a landmark achievement and it is the first time the smoking rate has fallen below the 20 per cent level. The next goal is to break through the 10 per cent barrier.

- We endorse the aim of 5 per cent by 2025 and will target efforts to curb smoking at disadvantaged socio-economic groups where rates are highest. This will encompass increases in excise duty on tobacco products.²

Establish an Office of Alcohol Control:

Fianna Fáil recognises that there is an issue with harmful drinking in Ireland. Over 8,000 people were treated for problem alcohol use in Ireland in 2012 alone. Alcohol is associated with 2,000 beds being occupied every night in Irish acute hospitals, one-quarter of injuries presenting to emergency departments and over half of attendances to specialised addiction treatment centres.

- We will establish an Office of Alcohol Control which will aim to holistically address the diverse drivers and consequences of harmful alcohol consumption in Ireland. This will cost €1.7m annually. In addition as part of our commitment to promoting healthy living, we will phase out alcohol companies' sponsorship of sporting events.³

Establish a Minister for Drugs:

The government has consistently downgraded the importance of tackling the scourge of drugs in cities, towns and villages across Ireland. We need to revitalise government efforts to stamp out the multi generational problem of drugs in the worst affected communities. A single lead Minister should take charge of this problem.

- We will create a Minister for Drugs.⁴

2. Child Protection and Care

Increase funding to Tusla:

Tusla is at the heart of protecting vulnerable children and ensuring all children have an equal chance in life. These services and infrastructure will help to look after the best interests of children and give them a fair chance at life. Specifically we will increase the funding to

¹ Fianna Fáil, An Ireland for All, General Election Manifesto 2016 < <https://www.fiannafail.ie/an-ireland-for-all/> accessed 15 February 2016

² ibid 59.

³ ibid 59.

⁴ ibid 78.

address deficits in child protection and welfare services as well as community programmes such as domestic abuse services Family Resource Centres and early intervention programmes.

- We will increase Tusla funding by €15m to equip the agency to fully perform its duties.⁵

Legislate to protect children from cyber bullying:

Social media has opened up immense opportunities to engage with others but it also revealed a darker underbelly. Cyber bullying is generating massive concern amongst parents who lack the control to protect their children from the 24/7 threat of bullying on-line. A co-operative approach with social media sites many of whom are based in Ireland is vital in setting out clear protocols in how to identify and remove bullying material Legislation has failed to catch up with the rapid development of social media and needs to be updated to reflect this new specific threat. Protocols with social media sites should be combined with the ultimate and final sanction of a criminal offence against bullies as a measure of final resort and deterrence. We will:

- Legislate to make cyber bullying a specific criminal offence and work with the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection to establish new protocols for social media sites operating in Ireland to deal with bullying.
- Provide training and support for schools to help them in identifying and tackling cyber bullying as part of the new mental health authority.⁶

3. Disability

Create a Minister for Disability at the Cabinet Table:

Strong leadership is vital in bringing together the disparate elements of disability policy. As part of our “Pathway to Inclusion” we will ensure disability is given a voice at the cabinet table.

- We will change the role of Minister of Social Protection to become the Minister of Social Protection, Disability & Equality. This Minister will drive and co-ordinate disability inclusion, whilst also reinforcing the idea that disability is a cross-departmental issue, requiring a whole of Government approach with each Government Department having a responsibility in terms of disability inclusion policy.⁷

Transferring Disability Policy to the Department of Social Protection:

The current location of disability policy within the Department of Justice and Equality is not suitable. It was introduced at a time when the primary focus was on equality legislation. Over time it has relegated disability to a secondary issue and as a consequence we have seen very little progress in the area of disability over the last 5 years.

- We will place responsibility for disability policy within the Department of Social Protection. It is from this Department that many decisions are made that affect the lives of people with disabilities, and we as a consequence believe that disability policy should fall under this Department’s remit.

⁵ ibid 42.

⁶ ibid 50.

⁷ ibid 79.

- In addition to these administrative changes, we will also legislate to give statutory recognition to Irish Sign Language.⁸

Ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the end of 2016:

Creating a strong, robust legal framework for disability rights is vital to ensuring people with disabilities can play a full, active role in Irish life.

- We will, as one of our first priorities, work towards ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability (UNCRPD). We recognise that this is an essential step and must be done if we are to achieve our goal of ending discrimination and achieving equality for all of our citizens.⁹

4. Early Years and Childcare

Helping families with the cost of childcare is a priority for Fianna Fáil. We believe that a range of social and economic objectives require that families be helped with the pressure of these costs.¹⁰

We will:

Create a €2,000 childcare support tax credit:

The burden of childcare costs is crippling working families and preventing many parents from taking up employment. In particular, the burden of childcare costs mostly affects women who continue to bear the bulk of responsibility of childcare. Childcare supports must reflect the diverse and unique circumstances of each family rather than a crude one size fits all approach.¹¹

Parents are in the best place to know what is right for their family and the state must support that by giving them real choice and flexibility. This means choosing what is best for their child whether looked after in a home or centre based setting.¹²

- We will directly support working parents with a progressive tax credit worth €2,000 for average income households to help them deal with childcare costs. Low income households can benefit up to €5,000.¹³

The Childcare Support Credit will have three main goals:

1. To Ease the Cost of Childcare for Working Families
2. To Enable all Parents to Afford Good Quality Childcare
3. To Facilitate Parents of Young Children to Participate in Employment¹⁴

The Childcare Support Credit will cover 20 to 40 per cent of families' childcare costs, depending on their income. Parents will be responsible for choosing the childcare arrangements and type of childcare provider, that best suit their needs.¹⁵

⁸ ibid 79.

⁹ ibid 80.

¹⁰ ibid 40.

¹¹ ibid 40.

¹² ibid 40.

¹³ ibid 40.

¹⁴ ibid 40.

¹⁵ ibid 40.

The Childcare Support Credit will be allocated on the basis of the income of one parent – the designated Primary Care Giver, which is currently initially established for tax purposes at birth cert registration. The designated recipient of the Childcare Support Credit will have to work a minimum of 25 hours per week to be fully eligible to participate in the scheme.¹⁶

The support credit will be progressive, based on three income bands with an income of €35,000 receiving a credit of €2,000. In addition parents who do not pay enough tax to avail of the full tax credit return (e.g. a lone parent earning between €30,000 and €33,000), they will receive a cash subsidy payment for the balance.¹⁷

Expand maternity benefit from 26 to 30 weeks and allow for shared leave between parents:

In order to give parents increased choice and the option to spend more time with a child during its special first few months without damaging career progress, maternity leave should be increased. This will allow for a better work life balance, give parents more flexibility in their career and contribute enormously to the well-being of the new born child.

We will:

- Increase maternity benefit from 26 weeks to 30 weeks at a cost of €40m per annum.

- Implement legislation already published by Fianna Fáil allowing for the sharing of paid and unpaid leave between mothers and fathers (or between two guardians). For many parents working full-time it will be more manageable to share leave from their career and allow both parents to share the responsibility of care more evenly between them.

- Extend Parental Leave Entitlements, which can currently be taken only until a child is 8 years of age, for parents up until their child is 12 years. This will ensure that parents have a greater opportunity to use their statutory parental leave entitlement.

Raise quality standards for childcare:

Each child, regardless of background, deserves the best possible start in life. To achieve this Ireland needs a childcare service that is fully trained and equipped to support them. It is central to the future success and positive impact of expanding the free pre-school year and tackling childcare costs that the childcare sector reaches the highest possible standards. The levels of effective early childhood care and education in early childhood services depends on having highly skilled and trained staff, and a high ratio of staff to children. Therefore we are committed to incentivising further training and upskilling for staff, and have earmarked €39m for that purpose.

We will:

- Put a Professional Development Fund in place similar to the existing Learner Fund for staff, but with greater resources and higher ambitions. In line with increased investment, we will revise the conditions of DCYA childcare programme funding contracts as an incentive to raise quality standards for the early childhood workforce as follows:
 - Introduce Higher Capitation Rates for Level 8 and above qualifications as an incentive for up-skilling and agree a professional pathway for staff.

¹⁶ ibid 40.

¹⁷ ibid 40.

- Ensure higher capitation rates are passed on to staff through an agreed salary scale for the early childhood workforce in line with qualifications, levels of experience and job responsibility.
- Increase early childcare and education programme from 38 to 42 weeks per year for children aged three and over.

- Develop a cohesive national plan with ring fenced funding for the roll-out of Aistear training and Síolta accreditation, putting in place the essential practical supports for early childhood educators to provide quality experiences and opportunities for young children. This will be backed up with the full and rigorous implementation of the 2014 national inspection plan to maintain strong standards.

5. Education

Introduce a new Primary School Farm Safety Programme:

Farm safety deaths remain a serious threat to old and young alike. 2014 witnessed a disturbing spike in avoidable fatalities that devastated families and communities. Fianna Fáil is committed to addressing farm safety.

- We will introduce a new primary school level programme on farm safety in rural areas. Based on the successful RSA road safety education programme we will target instilling farm safety at a young age. Combined with this, the Health and Safety authority will adapt a renewed focus on key risk areas and enhance co-operation with the industry to address safety concerns. The total estimated cost of this measure is €235m per annum.¹⁸

Education is the best way to tackle inequality and ensure that equality of opportunity is spread to all children across the country. It is the cornerstone of our economic model which is built on a highly skilled workforce, attracting investment and creating new businesses. Fianna Fáil will emphasise education as a national priority.¹⁹

Reduce average class sizes at primary level to 23:1 by 2021:

We will start to fundamentally improve the education system by confronting the basic problem of class room overcrowding. Teachers addressing supersize classes are unable to make the personal difference that young children need. Tackling oversized classes to give teachers more time to interact with each individual pupil is important in ensuring they receive the most effective possible education. We will invest €138m to achieve this. We will:

- Hire 5,500 new teachers (2,500 additional above demographic demand) to progressively reduce the average class size to 23:1, over the term of government. We will prioritise reductions for the youngest children under 9 years of age and super-size classes which will have the biggest impact on long term outcomes for children.
- Protect small schools from adverse teacher pupil ratios affecting their viability.²⁰

Invest in the School infrastructure:

¹⁸ ibid 27.

¹⁹ ibid 46.

²⁰ ibid 46.

A lack of funding over the term of this government has left schools in varying states of decay and neglect. Basic funding for school buildings and day to day IT equipment has been drained away. The Minor works grant scheme is an effective mechanism to fund schools to bring their buildings and equipment up to scratch.

- We will place the Minor works grant on a permanent footing, linked in an automatic way to the annual capital depreciation costs that each school incurs. The scheme will be put on a multi-annual basis to ensure schools can plan ahead. This will ensure that each school is financed to deal with depreciation, not left behind struggling with inadequate infrastructure and equipment. We also increase the average annual value of the grant by 10% at a cost of €2.9m.²¹

Ensure free education for all:

The erosion of funding for primary schools by this government has placed increased pressure on parents to make up the shortfall with “voluntary contributions”. We believe that education should be free and that the inadequate funding of schools is damaging the fundamental bedrock of our education system. We are committed to ending the need for “voluntary contributions” by ensuring the state sufficiently finances education.

- We will increase capitation funding to primary schools by €38 to pre-2010 levels.²²

Improve School leadership and Management:

Due to cutbacks many principals are under severe pressure with teaching responsibilities and are unable to meet their administrative requirements or put in place any strategic plan. The overall effectiveness of the school and children’s education suffers as a result. These principals, particularly in smaller schools require additional assistance to ensure they can fulfil their duties adequately. We will:

- Give each principal one administrative day a week. This will involve a pool of teachers to replace teaching principals on their administrative day. This will cost €10m annually.
- Appoint 350 assistant principals to help re-build the management structure at a cost of €6.2m annually.²³

Establish Early Intervention Teams in schools:

Fianna Fáil proposes to introduce multi-disciplinary therapy teams on-site in primary and secondary schools for children with disabilities. This would be a new point of departure for education of children with special needs in Ireland. This will include physiotherapists, speech & language therapists and psychiatrists which would be employed by the Department of Education. These school-based Early Intervention Teams will be shared in clusters between pre-schools participating in the ECCE programme and Primary Schools within each given geographic area.

By providing on-site visits by multi-disciplinary teams to each school, children can be assessed for developmental delays at an early age, receive early interventions and ongoing continuity of care by the same group of professional therapists. Such multi-disciplinary teams of therapists would be available to both mainstream and for special schools.

²¹ ibid 46.

²² ibid 46.

²³ ibid 47.

- We will establish multi-disciplinary early intervention teams based in pre-schools and primary schools and hire an additional 300 therapists to staff the new teams. This would cost €14m annually.²⁴

Overhaul Special Needs Assessment and increase Resource teaching:

Building on Fianna Fáil's proud tradition of investing in special needs education we are committed to addressing this government's attack on Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support and resource teaching hours. 100 years on from the founding commitment to "cherish all children of the nation equally" we will ensure the SNA role is developed into that of an Educarer helping the child to develop and thrive. We will:

- Restore resource teaching hours to 100% of National Council for Special Education the recommended hours at a cost of €72m per annum,
- Change the SNA structure to ensure they spend more time in the classroom,
- Hire an additional 100 psychologists and attribute learning supports and teaching based on need at a cost of €7m annually.²⁵

Expand DEIS & help schools serving disadvantaged communities:

Through a coordinated series of initiatives, Fianna Fáil in government succeeded in increasing the educational outcomes for disadvantaged students and communities to their highest ever level. Unfortunately Labour and Fine Gael have seen support for disadvantaged schools as an easy target for cutbacks and have stopped all progress in this area. We will:

- Implement a coordinated plan across all schemes to help schools serving disadvantaged families and communities,
- Remove the cap on the expansion of the DEIS programme to new schools and enhance investment in underperforming DEIS schools at a cost of €9.5m per annum,
- Reverse cuts and increase supports to the School Completion Programme that aims to help at risk school leavers to complete their education at a cost of €5.5m annually,
- Increase the school meals programme by 10% at a cost of €3.9m to ensure every child has adequate nutrition.²⁶

Make Modern Languages and Computer Coding accessible at Primary School level

At Primary school level children need to develop critical thinking, linguistic ability and IT literacy in order to grow and develop the tools that will equip them for the global workforce. Language and coding skills will help to promote entrepreneurialism and foster new start-ups across the country. In addition it will help attract further investment due to our highly skilled workforce.

- We will introduce modern languages as a separate primary school subject and establish a fund to promote coding in primary school and ultimately as a Leaving Cert subject based on the highly successful Israeli model. The annual required budgets for these measures is estimated at €12.6m and €3m respectively on an annual basis.²⁷

Ensure all children have access to their local school:

²⁴ ibid 47.

²⁵ ibid 48.

²⁶ ibid 48.

²⁷ ibid 48.

Irish society has grown increasingly diverse and parents are demanding a greater plurality of choice for their children's education. Basic fairness demands that we broaden school patronage and ensure that local children have access to their local school. We will ensure that educational partners are fully engaged in the divestment process. In addition school admissions policies must reflect the richer diversity and ensure children are not unfairly penalised for their denomination. We will:

- Engage with educational partners to set out a consensual approach to roll out further divestment of schools in line with assessed community demand.
- Reform school admissions on the basis of locality to ensure children have access to their local school regardless of denomination while protecting religious rights.
- Ensure LGBT students and staff are treated equally in every school.²⁸

Ensure every school has a guidance service:

Guidance counsellors have always played an important role in helping students with difficult career decisions at a critical juncture in their lives. Guidance counsellors have a strong record of helping young people through these important choices and difficulties. Government cut backs in this area have caused immense damage in depriving students of critical help. The Fine Gael and Labour decision to allow schools to provide for their own guidance has resulted in a massive 51% reduction in one-on-one counselling supports in secondary schools with the reduction even greater in disadvantaged areas.

- We will restore the ex-quota Guidance counsellor provision to all schools at a cost of €30m annually.²⁹

Increase supports for Traveller children:

There are serious issues with educational disadvantage for children from the Traveller community that demand serious action. We are committed to combining the unique cultural heritage of the Traveller community and ensuring that outcomes reach comparable levels to that of the settled community.

- We will restore the Visiting Teacher service for Travellers. This will involve the appointment of an additional 41 teachers at an annual cost of €1.9m.³⁰

Improve school transport links:

Government cutbacks to the school transport scheme have further marginalised rural families. The basic principle of equality of access to education was trampled upon. Ensuring rural families are not burdened with the additional cost of bringing their children to school is an important part of basic community services and an open, accessible education system.

- We will restore pre-2011 eligibility criteria for the school transport scheme ensuring that children who are attending a school that is not their nearest school (but still within the traditional catchment area) are eligible to apply for school transport. This will cost €3.2m annually.³¹

Ensure that History is a core part of the junior certificate curriculum:

Learning about the past is vital to understanding who we are. The centenary of the 1916 Rising marks an opportunity to reinvigorate and re-emphasize the history curriculum.

²⁸ ibid 49.

²⁹ ibid 49.

³⁰ ibid 49.

³¹ ibid 50.

Equally, it is impossible to expect our young people to succeed in the modern world without an appreciation of the core themes in European and world history. We must ensure that every student who emerges from our education system knows about and understands the key events that shaped us as a nation and the wider world.

- We will ensure that History is a core part of the Junior Certificate curriculum.³²

6. Health

Hire an additional 50 dental surgeons:

The erosion of the Health service by this government has seeped across all aspects of care. Escalating pressure on dental provision is another clear example of that. Fianna Fáil is committed to investing in and rebuilding the Health service across its multiple facets to ensure patients have access to quality care. We will:

- Hire a further 50 dental surgeons at a cost of €7.6m.
- Ensure that children that have been waiting long periods for dental and orthodontic treatment can apply to the National Treatment Purchase Fund.
- Develop a new oral health strategy.³³

Expand GP Care:

If we want to make primary care stronger and embed it as the first point of contact in health care we need to make it more accessible. Fianna Fáil wants to expand GP care on the basis of income, not age. Yet at the moment no-one, whether in government or opposition, can definitively say how much it will cost. Despite submitting a number of parliamentary questions neither the Department of Health nor the HSE has been able to provide an estimate up to now. We must also bear in mind how the original estimate for free GP Care for the under 6s doubled following the agreement of contract with GP's last April. Therefore, before we proceed any further on this, Fianna Fáil wants to see a GP contract in place which has General Practitioners on board for universal GP care. We will also undertake an evaluation of the impact of under 6s scheme, especially on waiting times to see a GP. We will:

- Negotiate a new GP contract following which we will then bring forward plans for the expansion of GP care.³⁴

Expand Medical Cards:

During the last Dáil, Fianna Fáil was to the forefront in highlighting the government's targeting of people on discretionary medical cards, especially from 2012 to 2014. The subsequent U-turn and climbdown by the government was testament to the strength of our opposition. However, we believe more can be done, especially for children with disabilities.

We will:

- Provide a medical card for all children in receipt of the Domiciliary Care Allowance.
- Ensure that the more humane system for discretionary medical cards that has been in place in the run up to the election is fully maintained after polling day. We will

³² ibid 50.

³³ ibid 55.

³⁴ ibid 58.

ensure that people with very serious illnesses which is causing them undue financial hardship will receive a discretionary medical card. These measures will cost €57m per annum.³⁵

Promote Healthy Living and fight obesity:

Promoting health lifestyles is vital to tackling long term health costs and enabling people to live long, active lives. A holistic approach to healthcare must start long before lifestyle illnesses become apparent. This needs to be targeted from childhood all the way to a person's elderly years. Government has an important role to play in education, economic incentives and providing a physical environment that encourages sports and physical activity. We will:

- Introduce a tax on sugar sweetened drinks. It would add on average six cent to a can of premium cola. This will raise €71m annually according to Department of Finance estimates.
- Establish a new primary school healthy eating education programmes to help cultivate lifelong good cooking and eating habits.
- Amend the 2000 Planning & Development Act to strengthen the capacity of Local Authorities to CPO land for recreational use.
- Issue National Planning regulations to create "No Fry" zones near Primary and secondary schools.
- Phase out alcohol companies' sponsorship of sporting events.
- Expand the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) code to prohibit TV advertising of foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) up to 9pm.
- Expand the PE programme at primary and secondary school level at a cost of €4.8m.³⁶

7. Homelessness

Ensure new social housing units form part of the Housing First Policy:

Our goal to eliminate long term homelessness by 2021 reflects a driving ambition that building "An Ireland for all" must include all citizens and achieve basic sense of decency. We need to rediscover a real sense of ambition in tackling serious social problems such as homelessness, not simply grow accustomed and insensitive to it. Constructing some 45,000 new social housing units by 2021 will address the long term issue of supply of affordable units for households. It is vital that local authorities co-ordinate to ensure that these homes are made available for vulnerable households who have slipped through the administrative cracks and under severe pressure ended up homelessness. The "Home First" strategy is vital to underpinning a long term solution to the complex factors behind many families and individuals becoming homeless. We will:

- Ensure that the required number of the 45,000 new social housing units are made available as part of the "Home First" strategy.

³⁵ ibid 58.

³⁶ ibid 62.

- Allocate adequate funding to address rough sleeping on our streets as a matter of priority.
- Ensure the new National Mental Health authority plays a central role in helping and assisting homeless people integrating into a community.³⁷

Increase Rent Supplement levels to support vulnerable households:

Combined with the range of measures around supply an additional short term measure to staunch the increase in homelessness numbers is required. Bolstering rent supplement levels focusing on the cities and subject to a rolling review of its impact on the market will help to keep households on the edge from falling into homelessness.

- We will increase rent supplement levels by 10% nationally to support vulnerable households at a cost of €32m. This increase will be targeted in Dublin and other high cost rental areas.³⁸

8. Mental Health

Establish a new National Mental Health Authority:

Mental health issues continue to silently inflict immense damage on our country. The undercurrent of depression, anxiety and addiction is a profoundly ingrained problem for society. No family is untouched from some form of mental health issue. Beyond the striking statistics about suicide levels the affliction of depression is exacting a hefty toll on the day to day lives of countless people. We have successfully confronted dangerous challenges like this before. The spike in road fatalities that endangered a generation of motorists was tackled head-on with the National Road Safety Authority. We need a similar concerted national approach to the devastating impact of mental health issues. We will:

- Establish a new statutory National Mental Health Authority to be charged with leading an all-out national programme to promote positive attitudes to mental health and to reduce the incidence of self-harm and suicide.

The National Mental Health Authority will provide a focus on mental health through an organisation that has the treatment of mental ill-health and distress and the promotion of positive mental health as its sole focus. It will also provide definite ring-fencing of funding for our mental health services.

We will also carry out a full review of what still remains to be achieved under A Vision for Change and will bring forward an updated plan for 2016 to 2026.

Current levels of funding for our mental health services are insufficient to deliver the staffing levels envisaged by A Vision for Change. At approximately 9,316 WTE (September 2015), mental health staffing levels remain at circa 75% of what is recommended by A Vision for Change. We will increase staffing levels to the 12,000 required under the strategy.

We have earmarked total additional funding of €187.5m for increased spending on mental health.³⁹

³⁷ ibid 123.

³⁸ ibid 123.

9. Equality and Social Inclusion

Improve Direct Provision Care:

Grave political instability, civil war and the escalating impact of climate change is driving the issue of migration into the centre of European debate. As outlined in the above section there is an onus and moral obligation on us as members of the European Union to accept a fair proportion of people who are seeking to escape the horrors of conflict and the ravages of war. We have earmarked €4m to improve Direct Provision. We will:

- Increase the adult allowance from €19.10 up to €38.74 as recommended by the Working Group over the lifetime of the Government.
- Raise the allowance for children from €9.60 up to €29.80⁴⁰

10. Social Protection

Raise the Homecarer Tax Credit to €2,000:

In order to ensure mothers and father's who stay at home to care for children or a look after a parent are not unfairly penalised we will match the €2,000 Childcare Tax credit with a €2,000 Home Carers tax credit. This credit will ensure all families are given a break with the costs of raising a family or looking after a dependent. The increase will benefit families by around €72m overall to help deal with the cost of living.

- We will double the Home Carer Tax Credit from €1,000 to €2,000

Increase Child Benefit by €10 & maintain it as a universal payment:

We are committed to maintaining child benefit as a universal payment to all families. The payment is an integral part of family's household budget and ensures that all parts of Irish society benefit from the Social Welfare system. An increase in the payment to meet inflation rates will help ensure it continues to help families across the country.

- We will maintain the universal payment of child benefit and increase it by €10 per month at an annual cost of €145m.⁴¹

Increase the One Parent Family maximum Child age threshold to 12:

The reduction in the One Parent Family Allowance from 14 to 7 years of age hit lone parent households hard. Despite promises of a "Scandinavian style" childcare system from the Tánaiste Joan Burton, lone parents trying to raise their family were put under further severe pressure. We will put some €23m back into the hands of hard pressed, lone parents.

- We will increase the One Parent Family Payment scheme maximum child age threshold from seven years to twelve years and move towards full restoration as resources allow.⁴²

Make work pay by introducing a sliding scale for welfare payment assessments:

Across Job Seekers Allowance, Family Income Supplement and One Parent Family Payment people are being locked into a poverty trap. This has a devastating impact on families and upon future generations raised in a culture of joblessness. Fianna Fáil is committed to

³⁹ ibid 59.

⁴⁰ ibid 105.

⁴¹ ibid 42.

⁴² ibid 43.

encouraging and rewarding work, not punishing it with a sharp financial cliff. We will make work pay by moving towards replacing the financial cliff with a sliding scale across a number of areas where this is administratively and financially possible.

We will:

- Explore revising the Three Day Rule for the payment of Jobseeker's Benefits with a system which better recognises the reality of the modern labour market.
- Revise the 38 hour threshold for FIS qualification, subject to resources and administrative feasibility, with a view to creating a sliding scale in order to reflect the fact that many people may be working (or wish to work) less than 19 hours per week and may be in just as much need as current FIS recipients.
- Study the possibility of expanding FIS to cover the self-employed to allow families, in particular lone parents, greater flexibility in seeking work.⁴³

11. Reforming the Government Department Structure

Reform the government department structure:

The decay in public services overseen by this government demands a substantial monetary and organisational response. Beyond our comprehensive investment package we will restructure government departments to make them more responsive to the needs of modern Ireland. We will retain the current number of 13 Junior Ministers and 15 cabinet positions. We will:

- Reform the Department of Social Protection to make it the Department of Social Protection, Disability & Equality. This will move disability out of the inappropriate area of justice and into a new department recognising the need for inclusion.
- Create a new Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government. This department will be tasked with tackling the housing crisis and cutting through the red tape of multiple agencies.
- Establish a new Department of Climate Change. This new department will head up our climate change policy. It will bring together the current departments of Environment, Flood Defence, Energy, Transport, Natural Resources, & Heritage.
- Set up a new Department of Community Support & Development, Rural Affairs, Gaeltacht and Islands to lead on community services and ensure a nationwide set of basic services.
- Secure Super Junior cabinet table status for the Minister for Primary and Social Care including older people.
- Amalgamate the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform with the Department of Finance.⁴⁴

Support the Community and Voluntary Sector:

The new cabinet position will be entrusted in overseeing Ireland's expanding community and voluntary sector. We will

⁴³ ibid 45.

⁴⁴ ibid 64.

- Task the new Minister with ensuring the sector is adequately funded and regulated to empower it to function at the heart of our communities and deliver critical services.

- Develop and implement a new strategy for the sector.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ ibid 78.