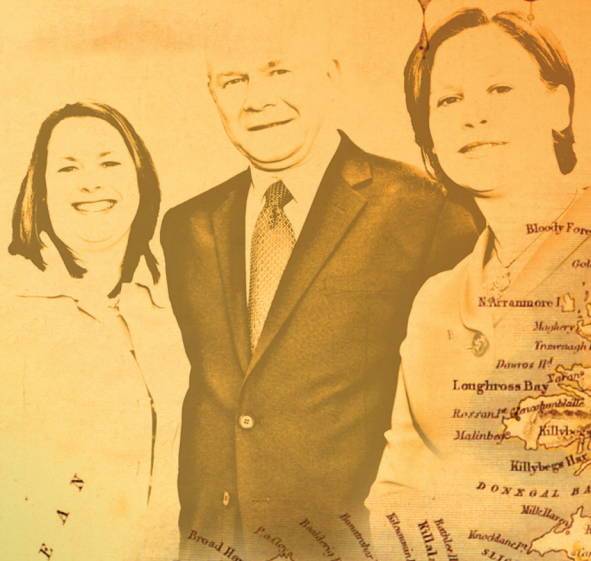
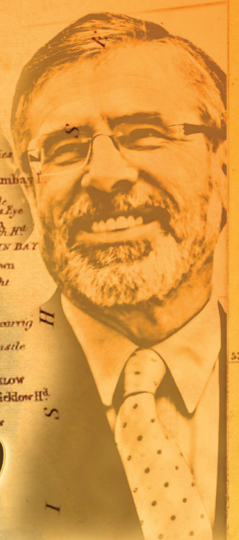


IRELAND.



Towards a New Republic



Longitude West from Greenwich

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE POLITICAL SYSTEM has failed the people of Ireland. Public disillusionment has grown as the role of the Government and the Establishment parties in bringing about the economic crisis has become more apparent.

This has been exacerbated by revelations of corruption, outrageous expenses claims and an ineffectual Oireachtas.

The political system is dominated and corrupted by the privileged, paralysed by clientelism and dynastic politics, and resistant to change. The Oireachtas has consistently failed to exert sufficient scrutiny over the Government and public bodies.

Sinn Féin believes that it is time for fundamental political reform. The current system is not fit for purpose. It has brought us 'boom and bust' economics and has failed to create a fair society where there is genuine equality of opportunity. It has not delivered a vibrant and fair society or the ability to underpin that society with a robust and sustainable economy.

For many citizens, the political institutions on this island are exclusive and unaccountable. A large proportion of those eligible to vote don't vote.

Others, including citizens in the Six Counties and those working and living abroad, are denied the right to vote.

Partition has had a corrosive and deeply damaging impact on our politics, economy and society. The all-Ireland structures of the Good Friday Agreement should be developed and enhanced.

SUMMARY OF SINN FÉIN PROPOSALS

- 1)** Establish an all-Ireland Constitutional Forum drawn from representatives of both legislatures on this island, civic society, business and trade unions to discuss and bring forward proposals for constitutional change. Using best international practice, this to be done within 18 months. The Forum would involve consultation at grassroots level and ensure participatory governance.
- 2)** The goal would be to bring forward proposals for constitutional change to create a Constitution fully reflective of the values and aspirations of the Irish people today and which would form the basis for a future 32-county Republic. This would draw upon the equality provisions in the Good Friday Agreement to safeguard citizens' rights and be soundly based on democratic principles and international human rights standards. This would be put to the people in referendum
- 3)** Reform and empower local government, including increasing participatory democracy and authority for planning and public services that correspond to local need. Borrow from the best practice internationally and look at whether citizens should be given the ability to initiate referenda and to set priorities for local budgets as well as setting social and planning objectives.

- 4) Increase voter participation by (a) Holding elections at weekends; (b) Establishing an Independent Electoral Commission to be responsible for voter registration and education; (c) Simplifying voter registration by automatically registering voters as soon as they become eligible to vote, using PPS numbers to avoid fraud.**
- 5) Give more people the vote. Reduce the voting age to 16. Voting rights in Presidential elections to be extended to citizens in the Six Counties. Extend the right to vote to Irish citizens living and working abroad as is the norm in most modern democracies. Models in place in other countries should be examined to find the best model to apply here which could involve restrictions based on the length of time that a person has been abroad.**
- 6) Reform how the Dáil is elected to make it more representative. Elect one-third of the Dáil from a list system and the other two-thirds from seven-seat constituencies based on our current PRSTV system. Consideration to be given to reducing the number of TDs in the Dáil.**
- 7) Change the law to allow for the impeachment or removal from the Dáil any TD involved in corruption, deliberate misuse of public money or fraud.**
- 8) Abolish the Seanad in its current form.**
- 9) Cut ministerial salaries by 40% and TDs' salaries by 20%. Cap wages in the public sector at €100,000. Tackle expenses corruption by ending the payment of unvouched expenses .**
- 10) Make the Dáil more accessible to the public, increase the number of days the Dáil sits, and introduce family-friendly sitting hours.**
- 11) Increase the power of TDs to hold the Government to account and to question the Taoiseach and Ministers on issues of importance.**
- 12) Give TDs the ability to have a real influence in the formation of legislation and give all TDs the power to bring forward draft legislation for consideration by the committee of which they are a member.**
- 13) Give Dáil committees investigative powers and allocate committee chairs proportionally on the basis of party strength with no additional financial reward attached to them**
- 14) A significant cull of QUANGOs and unelected bodies to cut back on waste and improve transparency and efficiency in decision-making, retaining only those agencies whose independent function is essential to the public interest. All state boards to be answerable to the Oireachtas through relevant committees and Ministers.**
- 15) Establish an All-Ireland Consultative Civic Forum, involving both all-Ireland and cross-border groups, allowing representatives of civic society and the social partners to discuss and bring forward all-Ireland plans and strategies across a range of issues.**

ACHOIMRE FEIDHMIÚCHÁIN

Ní ar leas mhuintir na hÉireann a d'oibrigh an córas polaitíochta. D'fhás oscailt súl na ndaoine maidir le polaitíocht mar gheall ar ról an Rialtais agus na bpáirtithe bunaíochta i dteacht na géarchéime geilleagraí ag éirí níos follasaí. Dianaíodh é seo le scéala éillitheachta, le héilimh chostais móra agus le hOireachtas neamhéifeachtach.

Tá an córas polaitíochta faoi stiúir na ndaoine atá faoi phribhléid agus á éileamh acu, á ghortú ag cliantachas agus ag polaitíocht ríshliochtach, agus frithsheasmhach in aghaidh athraithe. Theip ar an Oireachtas iniúchadh iomchuí a dhéanamh ar an Rialtas agus ar chomhlachtaí poiblí.

Creideann Sinn Féin gur aimsir oiriúnach í seo chun leasú bunúsach polaitíochta a thosú. Níl an córas polaitíochta mar atá sé oiriúnach don fheidhm. Thug sé eacnamaíocht 'bórradh agus cliseadh' dúinn agus theip air sochaí chothrom a chruthú ina bhfuil cothromas na ndeiseanna agus na dtorthaí. Theip air soláthar na mbunchloch riachtanach de shochaí chothrom a sheachadadh agus an cumas chun an tsochaí sin a neartú le geilleagar láidir inbhuanaithe a chur ar fáil.

I súile mórán saoránach, tá na hinstiúidí polaitíochta sa tír seo eisiach, neamh-inrochtana agus nach féidir iad a choimeád cuntasach. Ní vótálann roinnt mhór daoine a bhfuil cead vótála acu. Níl cearta ag saoránaigh sna Sé Chontae ná ag saoránaigh a oibríonn nó a chónaíonn thar lear.

Imríonn críochdheighilt drochthionchar dochrach ar ár bpolaitíocht, ar ár ngeilleagar agus ar ár sochaí. Ba cheart go bhforbrófaí agus go bhfeabhsófaí struchtúir Uile-Éireann atá leagtha amach i gComhaontú Aoine an Chéasta agus ba cheart go gcuirfí struchtúir eile ar bun.

TÁ SINN FÉIN TIOMANTA:

- 1) Do bhunreacht a ullmhú. Fóram Bunreachtúil Uile-Éireann a bhunú a dhéantar as ionadaithe den dá reachtas ar an oileán seo, as sochaí shibhialta, as ceardchumann agus as cumainn ghnó chun Dréacht-Bhunreacht a phlé agus a chur ar fáil. Is éard a bheadh i gceist san fhóram seo ná comhairliúchán ag leibhéal na cosmhuintire agus rialachas rannpháirtíochta a dheimhniú. ba é ab aidhm dó Bunreacht a ullmhú a sheasfadh do phrionsabail agus do mhianta mhuintir na hÉireann sa lá atá inniu ann, bunaithe go daingean ar phrionsabail daonlathacha agus ar chaighdeán idirnáisiúnta cearta daonna a bheadh mar bhunchloch de Phoblacht 32 Chontae sa todhchaí.
- 2) Do rannpháirtíocht na vótálaithe a mhéadú. Toghcháin a eagrú don deireadh seachtaine. An íosaíocht vótála a laghdú go 16 bliain d'aois. Coimisiún Toghcháin Neamhspleách a bhunú a bheadh freagrach as oideachas is clárú na vótálaithe. Vótálaithe a chlárú go huathoibríoch chomh luath is atá siad i dteideal vótála, ag úsáid uimhreacha an PSP chun calaois a sheachaint.
- 3) Do chead vótála a shíneadh do shaoránaigh Éireannacha atá ina gcónaí agus atá ag obair lasmuigh den dlínse, de réir an ghnáis a úsáidtear i bhformhór na ndaonlathas nua-aimseartha. Ba cheart go ndéanfaí iniúchadh ar mhodhanna atá i bhfeidhm i dtíortha eile chun an modh is oiriúnaí le feidhmiú anseo a fháil amach. D'fhéadfaí go mbeadh sé i gceist sa mhodh seo srianta a chur isteach a bheadh bunaithe ar an tréimhse ama atá caite acu thar lear.

- 4) Do chead vótála a shíneadh do shaoránaigh nach bhfuil de chuid na tíre seo iad a bhfuil cúig bliana caite go dleathach acu sa tír seo.
- 5) Don dóigh a dtoghtar an Dáil a leasú. Trian den Dáil a thoghadh ó chóras liosta; agus an dá thrian eile a thoghadh ó dháilcheantair sé shuíochán, bunaithe ar an IC-AI.
- 6) Don Seanad mar atá sé faoi láthair a dhíothú.
- 7) Do thuarastail airí a chaidhpeáil ag €100,000; agus tuarastail na TDanna a chaidhpeáil ag €75,000.
- 8) Do rochtain feabhsaithe ar an Dáil a chur ar fáil don phobal; líon na laethanta a fheidhmíonn an Dáil a mhéadú agus uaireanta suí na Dála a thacaíonn le teaghlaigh a chur isteach.
- 9) Do chumhacht na TDanna a fheabhsú chun an Rialtas a choinneáil cuntasach agus chun ceisteanna a chur ar an Taoiseach agus ar airí faoi chúrsaí a bhfuil tábhacht acu gan fógra a thabhairt dóibh maidir leis na ceisteanna roimh ré.
- 10) Do chumhachtaí fiosraithe a thabhairt do choistí na Dála agus cathaoireacha ar an gcoiste a dháileadh go cionmhar de réir láidreacht an pháirtithe, gan aon tairbhe airgeadais ag gabháil leo.
- 11) D'ionadaíocht ón Tuaisceart sa Dáil - tabharfar ballraíocht den Oireachtas do 18 AP de chuid Westminster.
- 12) Do dhealú cuimsitheach ar eagraíochtaí neamhrialtasacha nach mór uathrialaitheach agus ar chomhlachtaí neamhthofa le diomailt a laghdú agus le follasacht agus le héifeachtúlacht i gcinnteoireacht a fheabhsú. Ní choinneofar ach na gníomhaíochtaí a mbeidh a bhfeidhm neamhspleách riachtanach maidir le leas an phobail.
- 13) Do bhoird an Stáit go léir a bheith freagrach don Oireachtas trí choistí is airí oiriúnacha agus a mbeidh follasacht agus éifeachtúlacht acu i gcinnteoireacht.
- 14) D'Fhóram Sibhialta Comhairleach Parlaiminteach uile-Éireann a bhunú agus an tAthbhreithniú ar Chomhlachtaí Feidhmiúcháin uile-Éireann a chur i gcrích, agus an cás ar son comhlachtaí breise go háirithe a bhreithniú.
- 15) Do dheireadh a chur le ceapacháin pholaitíochta ar bhoird an Stáit - is gá go bhfuil córas ceapacháin ar bhoird an Stáit oscailte agus follasach.
- 16) Don dlí a athrú chun táinseamh nó baint den Dáil aon TD a bhfuil baint aige le héillitheacht, le mí-úsáid d'aon ghnó d'airgead poiblí agus le calaois a cheadú.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a widespread public belief that the political system has failed the people of Ireland.

The 1916 Proclamation guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and a commitment to cherish all the children of the nation equally.

These words are a solemn pledge to every Irish citizen that they can share in the dignity of humankind, as equals with equality of both opportunity and outcome, that they can enjoy freedom, educate our children, provide for our families and live together with tolerance and respect for each other.

The two states imposed by the partition of Ireland have failed to deliver these principles. Both have been characterised by economic failure, by emigration, by backwardness on social issues, by inequality and by the failure to protect the most vulnerable of our citizens.

While the Good Friday Agreement has introduced fundamental political change in the North, nevertheless partition continues to have a damaging political, economic, cultural and social impact.

Irish reunification makes sense. It makes sense politically. It makes sense economically. Uniting the people of Ireland makes sense.

In the 26 Counties, public disillusionment with politics has grown as the role of the Government and the Establishment parties in bringing about the economic crisis has become more apparent. This has been exacerbated by revelations of corruption, outrageous expenses claims and a dull and ineffectual Oireachtas.

For many citizens the political institutions on this island are exclusive, inaccessible and unaccountable.

The corrupt, clientelist and inept system of politics in the 26 Counties squandered the fruits of the economic boom and bears a significant share of the responsibility for the current recession. The political system is dominated and corrupted by the privileged, paralysed by clientelism and dynastic politics, and resistance to change. The Oireachtas has consistently failed to exert sufficient scrutiny over the Government and public bodies. A partitionist political system which is a carbon-copy of the British model, largely unreformed since partition, does not equip Ireland to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Those parties that have been in government over recent decades – and who are now talking about political reform – have failed to implement any meaningful reforms during their time in office. Protecting the interests of the governing party has always been their main concern.

Sinn Féin is committed to fundamental political reform. The trust of citizens in the political institutions and the electoral system must be restored. The number of citizens participating in and engaging with our political system at all levels must be maximised. Such reform needs to include meaningful mechanisms to give ordinary citizens a direct input into decision-making, electoral reform, Oireachtas reform as well as the reorganisation of local government.

2. CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE TO PROTECT THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS OF CITIZENS.

The current constitution, which is meant to uphold the rights of citizens, is flawed and outdated. Laws that have their foundation in the 1937 Constitution do not protect the rights of children, women nor the socio-economic rights of citizens. The rights of Irish-speakers also need to be enhanced in the Constitution and electoral and Oireachtas reform also require significant constitutional change.

While many proposals have been brought forward to reform and update the Constitution, including by the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution, few have been implemented.

Many believe it is time for a new Constitution, fully reflective of the values and aspirations of this island today, soundly based on democratic principles and international human rights standards, and which would form the basis for a future 32-county Republic.

A new Constitution must expressly enshrine and protect social and economic rights as well as civil and political rights. It needs to be written in clear language that is understandable to all citizens.

PROPOSALS

- » Establish an all-Ireland Constitutional Forum drawn from representatives of both legislatures on this island, civic society, business and trade unions to discuss and bring forward proposals for constitutional change. Using best international practice, this to be done within 18 months. The Forum would involve consultation at grassroots level and ensure participatory governance.
- » The goal would be to bring forward proposals for constitutional change to create a Constitution fully reflective of the values and aspirations of the Irish people today and which would form the basis for a future 32-county Republic. This would draw upon the equality provisions in the Good Friday Agreement to safeguard citizens' rights and be soundly based on democratic principles and international human rights standards.
- » The Constitutional Forum should consider issues including a one-chamber (unicameral) or two-chamber (bicameral) parliament.

- » Constitutional changes must include enshrining and protecting social, economic and cultural rights as well as civil, religious and political rights. The equal rights of minorities, including a future unionist minority within a united Ireland, should be expressly protected.
- » Proposed constitutional changes would be put to the people in referendum.

3. ELECTORAL REFORM TO INCREASE THE PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS AT ALL LEVELS.

Our electoral system and the Oireachtas are not fit for a modern democracy. The Oireachtas is largely male, middle-class and middle-aged. It is unrepresentative.

Many people are not on the electoral register or they do not vote.

Those most estranged from our electoral system and from politics are young people and those who come from the most disadvantaged communities.

Any reform to our political system must aim to increase the participation of citizens. Women are still not fully represented. Only 13% of those currently elected to the Dáil are women while only 16% of elected councillors are women.

Getting on the electoral register should be simple and straightforward, using PPS numbers to avoid fraud. The process needs simplification, starting with automatic renewals of registered voters and including other outreach and affirmative action measures to maximise electoral participation, especially among under-represented or otherwise marginalised sections of society.

115 countries, including most developed nations, have recognised the benefits of ensuring their emigrants remain enfranchised by giving them some form of elected political representation. It is time to identify and implement a fair system of voting rights for Irish citizens abroad.

Proportional representation should be strengthened through the introduction of larger multi-seat constituencies. Increasing the number of seats per constituency would ensure a much more accurate representation of the public's voting intentions based on their percentage vote, in contrast to the current system that favours the largest parties, especially in three-seat and four-seat constituencies.

List systems are a common part of electoral systems in other countries. They play an important role in increasing the diversity of those elected. The introduction of a partial list system has the potential to contribute a move away from the 'parish pump' politics that have dominated the Irish political system for decades.

There are advantages and disadvantages to a two-house or bicameral system of parliament. There is a greater risk of gridlock where both houses have similar powers or a lack of purpose to the second house where it doesn't have a clearly-defined, separate role. Advantages can include increased checks and balances on the legislative process.

The Seanad in its present form is undemocratic and should be abolished. It is wrong that the Seanad is elected by an elite group of TDs, county and city councillors and some (but not all) third-level graduates and to which the Taoiseach of the day can appoint 11 members of their own choosing.

Such a body which has powers and responsibilities in relation to law-making should be directly elected by the people. There should be a debate on whether a second chamber is needed. A second chamber could be democratically elected in such a way that it would represent different sectors of society. Such a Seanad could serve our democracy well and act as an important counter-balance to the political party-dominated Dáil. Ultimately, it is for the people to decide.

As stated above, the Constitutional Convention tasked with framing a new Constitution should consider whether a one-chamber (unicameral) or two-chamber (bicameral) parliament would best serve the country. If it recommends a bicameral system, the Convention needs to define clearly the roles of both houses and their relationship to each other.

PROPOSALS

- » Reduce the voting age to 16. Increase the voter education component of CPSE in the secondary school curriculum.
- » Reduce the age at which a person can run for the Dáil from 21 to 18. There should also be a reduction in the age at which a person can run for the Presidency (currently 35).
- » Establish an Independent Electoral Commission to be responsible for voter registration and education. The commission to be tasked with maximising voter turn-out and numbers contesting seats at all tiers of representation, including the development of programmes for proactive enfranchisement of and increased participation by traditionally under-represented groups. The Electoral Commission should also take on responsibilities currently held by the Constituency Commission, the Standards in Public Office body (SIPO) and the Referendum Commission. The original function which required the Referendum Commission to set out the pros and cons of a referendum proposal should be restored.
- » Simplify voter registration. Automatically register all 16-year-olds to vote. Use PPS numbers to avoid fraud. Ensure there are automatic renewals of registered voters.
- » Extend the right to vote for Irish citizens living and working abroad. Give Irish citizens living outside the jurisdiction the right to vote, as is the norm in most modern democracies. Models in place in other countries should be examined to find the best model to apply here, which could involve restrictions based on the length of time that a person has been abroad. A proposal should be brought forward and implemented within 12 months.
- » Hold elections at weekends to increase voter turn-out.
- » Dáil elections.

Reduce the number of constituencies but increase the number of seats per constituency from 5 to 7 (in line with the size of constituencies as originally envisaged under PRSTV). The new constituency boundaries would be determined by the Electoral Commission and county

boundaries should be respected.

Introduce a partial list system. Elect one-third of the Dail from a closed list system, the other two-thirds from seven-seat constituencies based on our current system of PRSTV.

These changes must also involve consideration being given to reducing the number of TDs in the Dáil.

- » Northern representation in the Dáil. Northern MPs to automatically be accorded membership of the Dáil, with consultative and speaking rights.
- » A time limit of 90 days for the holding of by-elections should be set down in law.
- » Abolish the Seanad in its current form.
- » EU elections: the whole island – or until that can be achieved, the 26 Counties – to be considered as one EU constituency, electing members under a closed PR list system.
- » The term of the Presidency should be reduced from seven to five years and the process of nomination should be changed to allow a specified number of citizens to nominate a candidate for the presidency, rather than the current system where only members of the Oireachtas or county councils can nominate. Voting rights in Presidential elections to be extended to citizens in the Six Counties.
- » Increase representation of women in the Dáil to ensure gender parity. Start by introducing a gender quota for political party nominations to the list system which, under proposed reforms, would elect one-third of the Dáil.

4. AN EFFECTIVE DÁIL THAT HOLDS THE GOVERNMENT TO ACCOUNT AND ENABLES ALL TDS TO PLAY A VALUABLE, TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE ROLE AS PUBLIC REPRESENTATIVES

The Oireachtas has consistently failed to exert sufficient scrutiny over the Government and public bodies. This is largely because it has not had the powers to perform these functions and its members are distracted by clientelism.

The Dáil needs to play a stronger role in holding the Government to account. The role and power of TDs needs to be expanded.

The Dáil needs to be much more spontaneous than it is at present. Big changes are required in terms of how legislation is brought through the Oireachtas and how the committees work. Non-Government TDs must be given the opportunity to have an input into the formulation of legislation, rather than the present system where they are given time to speak on virtually-completed Bills.

There needs to be a parallel reform and empowerment of local government in Ireland. Clientelism has developed against a background where people's rights and ability to access public services and other entitlements have been unclear and difficult to obtain.

PROPOSALS

- » Cut Ministerial salaries by 40% and TDs' salaries by 20%. Junior Ministers should be paid the same as TDs.
- » Tackle expenses corruption by ending the payment of unvouched expenses and reducing what is allowable as expenses for both public representatives and senior civil servants.
- » Introduce a five-year limit on the length of time those elected to the Dáil can keep their teaching positions open.
- » More Dáil time needs to be allocated to the Opposition parties to enable them to hold the Government to account.
- » The Taoiseach should answer Leader's Questions on all Dáil sitting days.
- » Written Questions to the Taoiseach and to Ministers should be replied to all year round (including when the Dáil is in recess).
- » Spontaneous questioning of the Taoiseach and Ministers. The ordering of Dáil business should be reformed to allow TDs to raise with the Taoiseach and Ministers issues of national importance without the requirement to submit such questions in writing in advance. Leader's Questions, which is only open to party leaders, currently operates in this way.
- » Recognition of parties in the Dáil (for the purpose of access to speaking time, private members' time, leader's questions and priority questions) should be based on a party having two TDs and achieving 5% of the popular support. Allocation of private members' time and priority questions should be based on a combination of the number of TDs and the proportion of popular vote which each party achieved in the last election. It should continue to be open to seven or more TDs who do not qualify for recognition as a party to form a technical group, as is the case at present.
- » Legislation should also start in the committees, allowing all members to have a real influence in the formation of legislation and all members should be allowed to bring forward draft legislation for consideration by the committee of which they are a member.
- » Committee chairs should be allocated proportionally based on party strength and should not have any additional financial reward attached to them – they should not be a reward for loyal backbenchers of whatever party is in government. No TD should sit on more than one public Dáil committee
- » Committees should be given investigative powers and there should be an obligation on the Government to consider proposals put forward by a committee.
- » More Dáil sitting days. The Dáil should sit approximately 46 weeks a year with sitting days based on normal work hours (9am to 5pm). Each week should be broken into three Dáil days and one committee day.
- » Make the Dáil more accessible to the public. While the Constitution states that sittings of the Dáil should happen in public, the reality is that members of the public need to have a member of the House facilitate them in doing so. This should change.
- » Introduce a system of proofing all policies, laws and budgets – including a public consultation component to increase public input and participation as well as transparency – to ensure a system equivalent to the Section 75 EQIA powers in the Six Counties.
- » EU legislation – addressing the democratic deficit. Introduce a system where Government Ministers have to appear before the Dáil European Affairs Committee before they adopt a stand at EU level on any major EU legislative proposal.

5. A CRACKDOWN ON CRONYISM AND CORRUPTION IN PUBLIC LIFE

The cronyism which has been at the heart of the political culture here for so long was central to the failure to regulate the banks and the development of a property bubble.

For too long, connections to those in government have allowed certain groups and individuals to enjoy positions of privilege. Government policy was designed to help developers and speculators to make huge profits for which ordinary taxpayers are now expected to pay.

A bank without any systemic importance to the state was bailed out to the tune of €30billion because of connections between those involved and those in government.

An elite from the most privileged in society, far removed from the lives of ordinary people, have made up the judiciary.

Corrupt politicians and those who have fiddled over-generous expenses regimes have not been held to account. All of this needs to change.

Sinn Féin is clear on where we stand and whose interest we stand for. Sinn Féin will dismantle the 'golden circles' that have for too long been nurtured and protected by the Establishment parties. There will be absolute accountability and transparency in how taxes are gathered and spent.

PROPOSALS

- » End political appointments to State boards. There needs to be an open and transparent system of appointments to State bodies where all vacancies are advertised and where it is open to the general public to apply. Remuneration should only be what is required by appointees to carry out their responsibilities on the board. Giving the relevant Oireachtas committee a role in scrutinising appointments to State boards should be considered.
- » Sack those in charge of State bodies where they act against the public interest.
- » Cap wages in the public sector at €100,000.
- » Crack down on white-collar crime, strengthen laws and give the Garda Bureau of Fraud Investigation additional resources to target corporate criminals in a systematic way.
- » Change the law to allow for the impeachment or removal from the Dáil any TD involved in corruption, deliberate misuse of public money or fraud.
- » Make whatever legislative change is required to go after and secure for the State the personal assets of those developers and bankers involved in NAMA and the bank bail-outs.
- » A significant cull of QUANGOs and unelected bodies to cut back on waste and improve transparency and efficiency in decision-making, retaining only those agencies whose independent function is essential to the public interest. All State boards to be answerable to the Oireachtas through relevant committees and Ministers.
- » The annual publication of independently audited accounts by political parties, including income and expenditure accounts and a party balance sheet.

- » Reverse the dilution of the Freedom of Information Act brought in by Fianna Fáil and extend the operation of the Freedom of Information Act to include a wider array of bodies, including NAMA.
- » The introduction of legislation to prevent former Ministers or senior civil servants moving straight from Government – and taking insider knowledge with them – to bodies trying to wield influence over Government policies.
- » Introduce legislation to protect whistleblowers.
- » Establish a register of lobbyists.

6. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

Local government needs to be reformed. Local authorities in the 26 Counties have become dysfunctional. They have been stripped of powers and continue to be under-funded. A dysfunctional local government impacts on the functioning of the Dáil and the amount of time TDs are expected to spend dealing with ‘parish pump’ politics.

Local government in the 26 Counties has a much narrower range of powers and functions than in most other EU states. There is no real local control over most essential public services or economic development. This is bad for democracy and needs to change.

Local government structures should give people the opportunity to participate directly in decisions that affect them and their families.

Initiatives to empower citizens and communities need to be examined. Genuine democracy requires citizens’ participation in solving the problems that affect their lives. We need to borrow from the best practice internationally and look at whether citizens should be given the ability to initiate referenda and to set priorities for local budgets as well as social and planning objectives. ‘Town Hall’ meetings where citizens are given the opportunity to engage with elected representatives need to become the norm.

Properly functioning, modern local government structure needs to be run on the basis of democracy, accountability and the expansion of powers and responsibility. It also needs to be properly funded and have the powers to raise revenue.

PROPOSALS

- » A major transformation of local government. This must include the expansion of the powers and responsibilities of local authorities including control over education, employment, environment, housing and social services as well as the ability to raise revenue. Increase, or where they have been removed, restore the powers which councillors have over planning,

- housing, transportation and waste management and correspondingly limit Managers' powers.
- » End the systematic under-funding of local government. Until the creation of local powers of taxation, central government must provide sufficient and stable funding for multi-annual local budgeting based on long-term planning at both local government and central government levels. Funding levels must respond to local need and be sufficient to provide the public services for which the local authorities are responsible.
 - » The removal of the Minister for the Environment's power to abolish local councils.
 - » Introduce mechanisms at the heart of local government for real community participation in local decision-making and ensure communities and their representative organisations are meaningfully consulted on major decisions affecting them. Borrow from the best practice internationally and look at whether citizens should be given the ability to initiate referenda and to set priorities for local budgets as well as setting social and planning objectives.
 - » Introduce appropriate local participatory budgeting mechanisms such as those used successfully in more than 200 municipalities worldwide to ensure full transparency and accountability in the setting of rates and charges and in spending.
 - » Build towards Irish unity by increasing local, regional and cross-border co-ordination and integration of council work in development planning and service provision.
 - » Mayors should be directly elected and should assume many aspects of the council management and oversight currently held by unelected Managers.

7. BUILDING ON THE ALL-IRELAND STRUCTURES OF THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

Political reform must assist the process of transition to a united Ireland. Irish unity makes sense – politically, socially, culturally and economically. Unity offers the best future for all people of Ireland. Significantly, the Good Friday Agreement recognises the principle of self-determination, including the provision for a feasible constitutional route to a united Ireland.

For the first time ever, the British Government is signed up to such a commitment, should a majority in Ireland wish it. Together with the clear economic, demographic, social and political trends, there is a strong argument that Irish unity is a realistic and feasible objective within a meaningful timescale.

Sinn Féin is taking practical steps in every elected forum to promote increased all-Ireland integration. Sinn Féin Ministers in the Six Counties have established new All-Ireland and Equality Directorates in three government departments. In the all-Ireland Ministerial Council we are systematically building the opportunities for expansion.

A core requirement for Sinn Féin will continue to be the embedding of the all-Ireland political architecture and the progressive expansion of the all-island bodies, building on the Good Friday Agreement.

PROPOSALS

- » A referendum on Irish unity.
- » Introduce an all-Ireland Charter of Rights as provided for under the Good Friday Agreement
- » Appoint a Government Minister with specific responsibility to ensure a successful transition towards a united Ireland, including the integration of public services, infrastructure and economic policy, the referendum on Irish unity and negotiations with the British Government and elected representatives from the Six Counties.
- » A Joint Committee of the Oireachtas on Irish Unity to be created to work with the Minister in monitoring, assessing and reporting back on progress.
- » A Green Paper on Irish Unity to be commissioned by An Taoiseach and published within 12 months.
- » Northern representation in the Dáil. MPs from the North to automatically be accorded membership of the Dáil, with consultative and speaking rights.
- » Voting rights in Presidential elections to be extended to citizens in the Six Counties.
- » Systematically build the opportunities for expansion in the all-Ireland Ministerial Council.
- » Broaden and expand all-Ireland co-ordination and integration in economic development, service provision and planning.
- » Establish an All-Ireland Parliamentary and All-Ireland Consultative Civic Forum and complete the Review of the All-Ireland Implementation bodies with particular consideration of the case for additional bodies.