



A BETTER IRELAND | ÉIRE NÍOS FEARR

ALTERNATIVE BUDGET 2017



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**500**

retired public sector workers costing state €50 million per year.

**€13 billion**

in lost tax from Apple pending appeal.

**€220 million**

in loss to the Irish public purse because of Project Eagle.

**530,000**

the record number of people on public hospital waiting lists.

**2,368**

the number of children in emergency accommodation in August 2016, compared to 796 in August 2014, a 197% increase.

**€2.7 billion**

potential loss to Irish GDP if Brexit proceeds

# INTRODUCTION

Fairness needs to be at the heart of this budget. That means that no community is left behind and no individual is left behind.

2017 must be a year of change; it must be a year when this government starts to do things differently and better. The days of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael governments agreeing backroom deals with wealthy corporations on sweetheart tax deals must end.

Things are starting to improve for some people and in some parts of the country and this is welcome. For hundreds of thousands of others, though, the reality continues to be worries over money, having a roof over their head or paying hospital bills or back to school costs. The high cost of living and struggling public services means that many families are working long hours and still can't make ends meet. September should be a time of excitement for parents as children continue their school journey, not a time of worry, stress and struggle.

There are still many others who are forced to live and work abroad because Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael still think that mass emigration is a necessary safety valve.

Budget 2017 needs to create an Ireland for living, not for merely getting by. We need to start using money wisely, by investing in the future, reducing the cost of living and providing proper public services. We need a real plan to bring our young people home and this time ensure that "no longer shall our children, like our cattle, be brought up for export".

We need to plan all-Ireland. The outcome of the Brexit referendum has brought the absolute necessity of the all-Ireland economy into stark reality. Brexit is bad for Ireland, north and south – it will slow economic growth, undermine trade, make our exports more expensive and increase the cost of doing business. It will cost jobs. The only way to protect against this is to act now to ensure that the North, along with the rest of Ireland, remains in the EU. An All-Ireland Forum needs to be established to look at options that would allow this to happen, regardless of what happens in England and Wales, and we need to work with others across Europe for change.

## **Sinn Féin's priorities for Budget 2017 are straightforward:**

- » **Reduce the cost of living and invest in public services.**
- » **Increase capital investment to build homes, schools, health facilities, flood relief works and roads.**
- » **Develop the all-Ireland economy and invest in long-term economic growth.**
- » **Fair taxation**

### In Budget 2017 Sinn Féin will:

- » Put an additional €1.25 billion into capital projects to help deliver more than 7,000 new homes, build new schools, repair local roads, provide flood relief works and upgrade water infrastructure.
- » Allocate a fund of 111 million to support families by reducing the cost of childcare fees by an average of €96 per week for children between 6 months and 3 years of age.
- » Abolish water charges and the property tax, costing €498 million combined.
- » Invest an additional €500 million in education to build and repair school buildings, reduce the pupil-teacher ratio at primary level, tackle third-level fees and create 1,000 additional apprenticeship places.
- » Invest €267 million in health to provide 500 additional hospital beds, reduce the prescription charge by €1 per prescription, increase ambulance cover and improve mental-health services.
- » Support older people by providing an additional €270 million, for a range of financial supports including to increase the state pension by €5.70 a week for more than 190,000 pensioners as well as restoring the full state pension to 65-year-olds who retire from work, i.e. an increase of €45 per week.
- » Back rural Ireland by supporting job creation, reversing staffing cuts to small schools, restoring the farm assist payment and investing in rural transport and roads.
- » Prioritise investment in disability services, including employing more Speech and Language Therapists and Resource Teachers, increasing respite care services by 20% and increasing disability and carers allowances.
- » Our investment programme will help create 23,500 jobs next year and create additional jobs in the local economy.

## Overall Balance Sheet

	€million
<b>Current Expenditure</b>	
Spend	€1,819.76
Savings	€133.77
<b>Net current expenditure</b>	<b>€1,686</b>
<b>Capital Expenditure</b>	
Spend	€1,225.75
Fiscal space used *	€316
<b>Tax</b>	
Spend	€738
Income	€1,740
<b>Net tax increase</b>	<b>€1,002</b>
<b>Fiscal Space</b>	<b>€1,000</b>

	€million
<b>Current Expenditure</b>	€1,686
<b>Capital Expenditure</b>	€316
<b>Tax increase</b>	€1,002
<b>Balance</b>	<b>€-1,000</b>
<b>Fiscal Space</b>	<b>€1,000</b>

\* To encourage government investment in capital which constitutes Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) the Fiscal Rules allows this investment to be averaged over a four year period, meaning that an increase in GFCF will only use one quarter of the fiscal space that an equivalent increase in current expenditure would use in the first year. However certain capital grants do not constitute GFCF and are not subject to smoothing and accordingly have been excluded.



# SINN FÉIN BUDGET 2017 PROPOSALS

CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME	TOTAL €1.23 billion
Delivering new homes	€491m
Hospital and health infrastructure	€150m
School build, repairs and IT	€179m
Water infrastructure	€200m
Local and regional roads	€110m
North South projects	€20m
Flood relief works	€49m
Harbour, piers and moorings	€7m
Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht	€15.75m
Sport	€4m

<b>REDUCING THE COST OF LIVING, INVESTING IN THE ECONOMY AND PUBLIC SERVICES</b>		<b>TOTAL €1.82 billion</b>
Health		€462.8m
Housing, Local Government and Community		€79.4m
Education		€278.93m
Childcare		€252.25m
Supporting SMEs		€25.725m
Regional Development & The Gaeltacht		€34.08m
Rural Ireland		€39.53m
Supporting All-Ireland Bodies		€10.1m
Garda Resources		€19.433m
Public Transport		€23.66m
Arts and Culture		€15.5m
Public Sector Workforce, Pay and Pensions		€69.1m
Social Protection		€503.15m
Overseas Development Aid		€5m
Equality and Budgetary Advisory Body		€1.1m

<b>SAVINGS</b>	<b>TOTAL €133.77million</b>
Reduce excessive pay	€10.92m
Regulation of the Financial Sector	€69m
Wind-down JobBridge scheme	€4.8m
Cancel Gateway scheme	€5.2m
Greater use of JobsPlus	€28m
Phased withdrawal of private school annual state subsidy over five years	€15.85m

<b>TAX FAIRNESS – SUPPORTING FAMILIES AND WORKERS</b>	<b>TOTAL €738million</b>
Abolish property tax	€440m
Abolish water charges	€58m
Increase subsidy group water scheme	€1.5m
Take workers earning €19,752 or less out of the USC	€78m
Increase tax credits for the self-employed	€51m
End motor tax installment penalties	€72.7m
Increase PRSI bands in line with minimum wage increase	€14.8m
Expand start-up relief for entrepreneurs	€5m
Refund VRT/VAT on wheelchair accessible taxies	€12.5m
Tax credit for children on Gaeltacht courses	€4.5m

<b>TAX – PAYING A FAIR SHARE</b>	<b>TOTAL €1,740m</b>
<b>Capital and Property taxes</b>	
Re-introduce second home charge at a rate of €400	€110m
Increase Capital Acquisitions Tax by 3% to 36%	€29.3m
<b>Excise Duties and Levies</b>	
Increase Betting Shop & Online Betting tax applied to customers to 3%	€95m
Increase excise duty on a packet of cigarettes 50c	Cost neutral
Introduce a volumetric Sugary Sweetened Drinks Tax at a rate of €24.64 per hectolitre	€101.3m
Increase bank levy	€25m
<b>Commercial stamp duty</b>	
Increase commercial stamp duty from 2% to 3%	€117m
<b>Ending a tax break</b>	
VAT on hotel beds removal of 9% rate	€175m
<b>Income Tax</b>	
Increase the tax paid on individual income over €100,000 by 7 cent in each euro.	€464m
<b>Pensions</b>	
Reducing earnings limit for pension contributions	€137m
Reducing the Standard Fund Threshold	€120m
<b>PRSI</b>	
New rate of 15.75% Employers PRSI on salary over €100,000	€331.4m
<b>Fighting Tax evasion, black market activity</b>	
Increase Revenue Commissioners staffing by 125 to tackle tax avoidance and black market activity.	€35m
Closing down tax avoidance schemes	

# INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

## Capital investment in homes, hospitals, roads, flood relief and water

Ireland is at a crossroads. We need serious capital investment yet the minority Fine Gael/Independent government is committed to cuts in taxes and the further privatisation and downgrade of essential services. The current level of public investment is simply too low to provide the housing, the services and the infrastructure that is so desperately needed.

The need for public investment has been highlighted by groups and organisations as diverse as IBEC, ESRI, NERI, TASC, the EU Commission, the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council and Social Justice Ireland.

The Government's Capital Investment Plan puts capital investment at just 1.9 percent of GNP in 2017. Given almost ten years of underinvestment and unmet demographic pressures, this shockingly low level of capital investment is reckless and unsustainable.

Sinn Féin is committed to a sustainable capital investment programme, one that sees housing, health, education and transport as essential social and economic pillars. Our plan is equivalent to 2.5% of GNP for 2017. This is the base from which to rebuild our society after the devastation of Fianna Fáil's bank bailout and Fine Gael and Labour's austerity agenda.

This investment programme will help create an additional 23,500 jobs next year, not including jobs that will be created in the local economy as a result of our other budget measures. It will also sustain economic growth into the future.

## HOUSING: DELIVERING 7,066 SOCIAL HOMES COST €491 MILLION

In 2017 Sinn Féin is committing to delivering 7,066 homes through local authorities and approved housing bodies. More than doubling the output of real social housing on the government's expected output in 2016.

### **Increase capital funding to local authorities 4,000 units - €315 million**

We will increase capital funding to local authorities in 2017 by €315 million, bringing the total allocation to €843 million, to deliver 4,000 units through an ambitious programme of acquisitions and new builds.

### **Funding to the Housing Agency 1,066 units - €140 million**

We will allocate €140 million to the Housing Agency to purchase, on behalf of local authorities, 1,066 units in the possession of banks and not currently on the open market.

### **Voluntary Housing sector 2,000 units**

We will work with the National Council of Social Housing to develop and coordinate a fund of at least €360 million from the Irish League of Credit Unions and other non-State sources to provide 2,000 units via the voluntary housing sector.

Sinn Féin is committed to increasing the delivery of real social housing to an average of 10,000 units a year every year until the State has a sufficient supply of social housing to meet current levels of demand.

### **Traveller Accommodation - €36 million**

Following the Carrickmines tragedy and the ongoing underprovision of adequate, secure and culturally appropriate accommodation for travellers, Sinn Féin is committed to restoring the traveller accommodation budget to its 2008 level of €40 million. We will achieve this by increasing the allocation by €36 million in 2017.

## EDUCATION COST €179 MILLION

Significant and sustained capital investment is required to reduce class sizes in schools, modernise our educational facilities and ensure our third level sector compares well internationally.

### Prefab Replacement Scheme - €10 million

Over 200 schools across the State own or rent prefabricated accommodation. The government has committed to replacing all prefabs with permanent accommodation under the Programme for Government but this will not commence until 2019. Sinn Féin proposes an initial outlay in year one of €10 million to allow this to proceed.

### Investment in IT Infrastructure - €30 million

In order to implement the digital strategy, Sinn Féin will invest in wireless connections to schools and establish a grant for schools to apply for funding to purchase or maintain IT equipment.

### Increase in Summer Works Scheme - €20 million

Sinn Féin will increase the funding available to schools to complete necessary and immediate works during the summer months. We are proposing an increase from €40m to €60m.

### Additional Classroom Accommodation - €60 million

Sinn Féin will provide an additional investment in the construction of new schools and the reduction of class sizes.

### Third Level - €40 million

Sinn Féin will provide additional funding for the minor works grant and equipment renewal at third level.

### Curriculum Reform - €9 million

Sinn Féin will allocate funding for the practical requirements of Junior and Leaving Cert reform specifications – in particular IT and equipment for science and practical subjects.

### Further Education - €10 million

Sinn Féin will allocate a capital budget to the Further Education Sector in order to improve or construct campus and training centre equipment and infrastructure and to carry out necessary works to bring former FÁS centres in line with Health and Safety requirements to deliver the Further Education Strategy.

## HEALTH COST €150 MILLION

### 20 year capital programme for our health service

In government, Sinn Féin will carry out a full review on which to base a 20-year capital programme for our health service. Overall, much investment will be required to compensate for years of underinvestment by successive governments.

### Building on Recovery insufficient

The capital investment in health proposed by the government in ‘Building on Recovery: Infrastructure and Capital Investment 2016 – 2021’ is grossly insufficient. Between 2008 and 2013 public capital expenditure on health was cut by 45%. Under the government’s plan, capital investment in health will not even recover to its 2008 level by 2021.

### Increase capital investment in health - €150 million

It has been estimated that 75% of the Capital Allocation for Health through to 2021 will be needed for just five major projects. Yet minor works, routine maintenance and refurbishments are required across the entire system, not least to comply with HIQA standards. And capital spending in this area cannot be confined to construction alone.

Funding is also overdue and badly needed for ICT (e-health strategy), diagnostics (including in the community) and equipment.

For Budget 2017, Sinn Féin proposes an additional €150 million in capital investment in our health system above that proposed by the current government

## **REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COST €117 MILLION**

### **Investing in regional and local roads - Cost €100 million**

Our regional and local road network is slowly disintegrating. Over half of all secondary roads recently surveyed were found to be in a significant state of disrepair. This trend needs to be reversed.

For too long rural communities have dropped down the priority list. This investment would go some way to addressing that imbalance and giving rural communities across the state roads that are fit for purpose and that will stand the test of time and weather.

The government's allocation for regional and local roads in 2016 is €254m. Sinn Féin would increase this by €100m, giving a total investment of €354m.

### **Wheelchair access for public bus stops - Cost €10 million**

Access to transport can mean the difference between inclusion and exclusion for people with disabilities. Sinn Féin is committed to using a combination of tax incentives, accessibility clauses in public procurement contracts and direct investment to promote transport inclusion. Alongside the €12.5 million scheme to refund VRT/VAT to taxi drivers who purchase wheelchair-accessible vehicles, we are proposing a capital investment of €10 million to make all bus stops wheelchair accessible. This is another important step on the road to inclusion.

### **Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Capital Programme - Cost €7million**

Ninety harbours, mooring and piers benefited from the Local Authority Harbour Development and Marine Leisure programme in 2016 in counties Clare, Cork, Donegal, Galway, Kerry, Louth, Mayo, Sligo, Waterford, Wexford, and Wicklow. The funding paid for repairs, dredging, resurfacing, extensions, improvements and replacements.

We propose an additional €7 million to the Fishery Harbour and Coastal Infrastructure Capital Programme. This is a 39% increase on 2016 funding.

## **NORTH/SOUTH PROJECTS COST €20 MILLION**

### **A5 Upgrade - €10 million**

Sinn Féin recognises the value of all-Ireland infrastructure and cooperation. We are determined to ensure that the commitment to the A5 Dublin-Derry road project is delivered on. For that purpose, we propose an additional €10 million be allocated to this project.

### **Narrow Water Bridge - €10 million**

The Narrow Water Bridge would link the Cooley Peninsula in County Louth with the Mourne District in County Down, benefiting local and cross-border economies, including tourism, and creating employment opportunities in the region.

## FLOOD RELIEF WORKS COST €49 MILLION

This state has seen significant flooding in recent years causing considerable damage to homes, businesses and roads across the state. Cities, towns and villages have been left vulnerable due to inadequate flood defences. The 2016 budget for expenditure on capital flood relief works in 2016 is €52.561m. This is woefully inadequate. We recommend an additional €49m allocated to these works to provide better flood protection to families, homes, businesses and communities.

## UPGRADING WATER UTILITIES COST €200 MILLION

An ambitious capital investment programme funded through general taxation must bring our water and sanitation services up to adequate standards.

Sinn Féin will increase capital investment in upgrading the water and sanitation system by an additional €340 million in 2017, bringing the total to €873 million. This will be achieved through an additional €200 million in direct capital investment from revenue and the re-profiling of €140 million of unspent water meter funds. The additional funding would be invested in projects targeted at meeting the State's commitments under the Urban Waste Water Directive and the Water Framework Directive.

## ARTS, HERITAGE AND THE GAELTACHT COST €15.75 MILLION

Sinn Féin recognises the multiple benefits from investment in the arts, heritage and the Gaeltacht, which enhances tourism, job creation, our national language and the cultural quality of life and wellbeing of all our citizens.

### **Funding increase for Heritage (including funding for Moore Street) - €5 million**

Given its role in preserving heritage sites such as Moore Street and promoting heritage and activity tourism, the Heritage division capital budget is a key element of investment strategy.

### **Funding increase for National Cultural Institutions investment programme - €2 million**

For example, the National Library of Ireland has a genealogy division and frontline service. It is a key tourist and visitor centre in terms of future growth in numbers.

### **Allocation increase for Film Board - €3.75 million**

The increased grant allocation of €3.75 million to the Film Board will increase support to films by more than one third.

### **Funding increase to Gaeltacht Division - €5 million**

Údarás na Gaeltachta plays a crucial role in providing stimulus through job creation in rural areas of acute disadvantage. Údarás funding was slashed by Fianna Fáil from €26 million to €6 million, and the Fine Gael-Labour Government reduced it further. We would increase funding by €5m from its current low base.

## SPORT COST €4 MILLION

Sinn Féin recognises the importance of sport to our mental and physical health, community and inclusion. Sports clubs across the State were suspended in limbo well into the summer of 2016, waiting to see if the Minister would release funds under the Sports Capital Programme. Sinn Féin believes this grant must be annualised and the allocation for 2017 increased by €4 million, a 14% increase on the 2015 figure.

# REDUCING THE COST OF LIVING AND INVESTING IN PUBLIC SERVICES

## HEALTH

Our health service has suffered from decades of underinvestment and an overreliance on expensive outsourcing and agency staff. Trolley numbers remain unacceptably high and delayed discharges and closed beds place further pressures on our health service and those who work in it. Primary care has been neglected and as waiting lists spiral out of control the government have proved time and again that they have no real plan to address this. Meanwhile, our nurses, doctors, health professionals and support staff continue to leave to work abroad.

Sinn Féin has a plan to begin to address these problems. We have a plan for a health service which people want to work in and which works for those who need it. Our blueprint for the health service is outlined in full in our Better4Health document. It details a five-year programme of investment in the capacity of our health system and presents a plan to transform our public health system into the system of choice for patients and staff alike. Our measures will improve access to healthcare by investing in primary care, resourcing our acute hospital system, and more importantly, ensuring the employment and retention of staff to deliver that care.

### **Medical Card Reform Cost - €19 million**

Some of our sickest and most vulnerable citizens continue to go without medical cards. This is despite promises by government to build compassion into the system. We must begin by providing an automatic medical card for 11,000 children with significant needs arising from serious illness or disability.

- » *Extend medical card entitlement to all children in receipt of Domiciliary Care Allowance - €19 million*

### **Increase Maternity Resources - Cost €22.9 million**

Ireland had the highest per capita birth rate of all 28 Member States of the EU in 2014. Despite this, the sector has been traditionally underfunded over the last 20 years and Ireland is lagging behind international standards. Maternity care has been left in crisis, with shortages of staff in hospitals across the State. Our maternity services are severely understaffed, lacking both midwives and obstetricians.

- » *Increase the number of midwives by 250 - €15.2 million*
- » *Increase the number of obstetricians/gynaecologists by 47 - €7.7 million*

### **Emergency Department & Trolley Crisis - Cost €153 million**

Emergency Department (ED) services have been at crisis point for some time, as regularly highlighted by the 'Trolley Watch' survey carried out by the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation. The trolley crisis is a symptom of the malaise that is endemic across the wider health system. There were 862 less hospital beds in 2015 than in 2008. This is not just a bed problem; there are insufficient staff in the acute hospital system, insufficient exit packages and insufficient nursing home beds or home care options. The HSE have advised Sinn Féin, through parliamentary question, that the annual running cost for one bed is €306k, which is inclusive of staffing, theatres, laboratories, non-clinical staffing and other running costs. It is a fully absorbed cost.

- » *500 additional hospital beds - €153 million*

### **Address High Cost of Prescription Charges and Medicines - Cost €56 million**

The overwhelming body of evidence shows that charges for drugs can lead to higher costs on the health budget in the medium to longer term, not to mention the serious strain and ill-effects they can have on the health of those who need medications. Prescription charges for medical card holders were originally introduced under the Fianna

Fáil-led Government and were subsequently increased by Fine Gael and the Labour Party, despite pre-election promises to reverse them.

- » *Reduce prescription charge by €1 per prescription - €50 million*
- » *Lower the Drug Payment Scheme monthly limit from €144 to €132 - €6 million*

### **Increase Investment in Dental Care - Cost €41.87 million**

There has been a drastic scaling back across the three main fields of public-funded dental provision: the Dental Treatment Benefit Scheme (DTBS), the Dental Treatment Service Scheme (DTSS) and the Public Dental Service (PDS). These cuts have inflicted unnecessary pain and suffering. They have caused an increase in the use of more complicated and expensive emergency treatments as a direct result of the removal of opportunities for prevention and early intervention. This situation has undoubtedly led to a deterioration in public dental health.

- » *Extend an annual dental check to everybody who is not currently entitled to one - €14.7 million*
- » *Reintroduce Protracted Periodontal Treatment (gum cleaning) and a six-monthly scale and polish for medical card holders and an annual scale and polish on the DTBS - €21.17 million*
- » *Directly recruit 100 PDS staff, including dentists, orthodontists and dental nurses - €6 million*

### **Increase Ambulance Cover - Cost - €19.2 million**

Many communities across the State experience long and dangerous waiting times for ambulances. The government must guarantee basic levels of care across the State. The National Ambulance Service (NAS) is a key public service. The NAS Capacity Review Report showed that capacity needs to be increased to meet demands. It pointed to the need for increased resources in terms of personnel, vehicles and technology.

- » *Recruit 110 advanced paramedics to shore up staffing deficits across the existing ambulance fleet arising from the recruitment embargo - €7.5 million*
- » *Purchase, equip and staff 12 new ambulances (3 per HSE region) - €11.7 million*

### **Support for Older People - Cost €32.4 million**

Sinn Féin is committed to the provision of healthcare services and social care services with equal access for all, based on need and to the greatest extent that resources allow. This right is especially relevant for older people and the provision of support for older people is becoming increasingly important as our population ages.

- » *Increase home help hours by 10% - €20 million*
- » *Increase homecare packages by 10% - €12.4 million*

### **Prioritising Disability Services - Cost €54.812 million**

Disability is a societal issue, affecting people of all ages and their families, directly and indirectly. We want to see a society in which all citizens, including those with disabilities, can play a full and independent part in all aspects of life, relying, as far as possible, on mainstream services for health, education and employment but with the support of tailored disability services where necessary.

- » *Employ 600 additional front line staff including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, physios and psychologists - €30.4 million*
- » *500,000 additional personal assistance hours - €12.2 million*
- » *Neuro rehab teams and transitional services - €3.412 million*
- » *Increase respite care services by 20% - €8.8 million*

### **GP Care - Cost €12.9 million**

General Practitioners are the cornerstone of our primary care services and we must ensure that we have a supply of GPs for the whole of the State. This means training more GPs and lifting the burden of uncertainty created by self-employment by directly employing GPs. Our primary care centres must be fully and appropriately staffed so that we can deliver a wide and full range of care in our communities, taking pressure off the acute hospital system.

- » *Increase the annual GP training intake to 200 for 2017 - €7.8 million*
- » *Introduce 25 salaried GP posts plus practice nurses and medical secretaries - €5.1 million*

### **Mental Health - Cost €44.91 million**

Mental health is an area in which successive governments have failed to provide an adequate level of service. Sinn Féin believes that the 'A Vision for Change' strategy for mental health must be implemented fully. A PNA/RCSI report found that there had been an overall reduction in mental health staff numbers since 2006. The HSE's Delivering Specialist Mental Health Services Report 2014-2015 found that Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services staffing was half the recommended level.

A failure to provide community-based mental health services to replace now closed institutions has left many to fall through the cracks. Too many people in mental health distress, at risk of suicide, are being forced to present to A&E and to the Gardaí because there are no appropriate services outside of office hours.

We intend to address staffing-level shortcomings, with a particular focus on staffing Child and Adolescent Mental Health teams, the provision of suicide critical assessment nurses and mental health intellectual disability posts and by increasing access to the Counselling in Primary Care service.

- » *Increased investment in frontline mental health nursing, including Suicide Crisis Assessment Nurses (SCAN) in housing liaison and Emergency Departments and mental health intellectual disability nurses - €3.04 million*
- » *14 additional community CAMHs teams in line with A Vision for Change - €13.87 million*
- » *Triple the budget for counselling in primary care - €5 million*
- » *Additional investment in community mental health services in order to advance towards 24/7 crisis support services across the State and the establishment of Crisis Houses as recommended by A Vision for Change - €20 million*
- » *Fund counselling and other mental health services for people currently in Direct Provision - €1 million*
- » *Additional funding for the National Office for Suicide Prevention - €2 million*

### **Increase Funding for the National Drugs Strategy - Cost €5.77 million**

Problem drug use is a public health issue. In the nine years from 2004 to 2012, drug abuse played a role in the deaths of 5,289 people. That's more than one death every single day. But despite the threat to the lives of so many, predominantly young men, funding for the vital health services to save lives has been severely cut.

- » *Measures include increasing the number of addiction counsellors, establishing a low threshold residential stabilisation service and piloting a medically supervised injecting centre - €5.77 million*

## HOUSING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY

The housing and homelessness crisis continues to deepen. 140,000 households are on local authority housing waiting lists, over 4,000 adults and 2,300 children are living in emergency accommodation, nearly 80,000 mortgages are in long-term distress and rents continue to spiral upwards. At the centre of the crisis is a failure of government to invest in real social housing. Increasing the supply of local council and housing association housing relieves pressure on the private sector, reduces the overall cost for renters and buyers, and addresses the critical needs of those in emergency accommodation and on waiting lists.

Sinn Féin is committed to increasing the delivery of real social housing to an average of 10,000 units a year every year until the State has a sufficient supply of social housing to meet current levels of demand. We are also committed to increasing funding for a range of essential services.

**Introduce rent certainty measures linking rent increases and decreases with the consumer price index**  
 Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil are directly responsible for out of control rents. Latest Residential Tenancies Board rent figures (September 2016) show rents rising again by 10% with Dublin rents now 3.9% higher than at the peak of the boom in 2007. Last June Sinn Féin tabled our rent certainty bill. If passed this would have put a break on spiralling private sector rents. It would have saved working families up to €2000 per year.

### Domestic Violence Refuges - €8 million

Ireland needs to dramatically increase the provision of refuge places to meet the needs of those forced from their homes as a result of domestic violence. Sinn Féin is committed to trebling the funding for these supports over five years, from €20 million in 2016 to €60 million in 2021, starting with an additional €8 million in 2017.

### Homelessness - €24 million

While Sinn Féin will continue to support the Housing First response to long-term homelessness, there is a need to increase funding for short-term emergency accommodation until the current levels of homelessness start to reduce. We are committed to increasing funding for homeless accommodation by €24 million in 2017. We will also work with Local Authorities to ensure that an appropriate level of allocations on new social units go to those in emergency accommodation and to start ring-fencing a portion of the homeless budget to secure additional housing units for Housing First tenancies.

### Housing Adaptation Grants - €15.75 million

Many people, particularly older people and those with disabilities, are trapped in unsuitable accommodation and urgently need home adaptations. The existing local government adaptation grant schemes are chronically underfunded. Sinn Féin is committed to increasing the central funding of these grant schemes by 50% through the allocation of an additional €15.75 million in 2017.

### Warmer Homes Scheme - €10 million

Sinn Féin will invest in retrofitting of housing as a means of carbon reduction and tackling fuel poverty. We will extend the Warmer Homes Scheme over two years to include window and door insulation and increase funding to the grant system. This will cost €10 million.

### Local Government Fund - €16.65 million

In 2016 funding for local authorities was reduced by €16.65 million as a result of the 2015 utility and commercial rate revaluations. The Department of Environment, Community and Local Government met this funding shortfall. However, for 2017 councils have been told to fill this gap from existing resources. Sinn Féin is committed to continuing this funding of €16.65 million to ensure that local services do not suffer.

### **Local Community Development - €5 million**

Local Community Development Projects were once a vibrant, community-based network providing essential supports to many of the most deprived communities across the State. Successive governments undermined the CDPs with funding cuts and mergers into Local Partnerships.

Sinn Féin believes that CDPs should be revived through restoration of their funding and independence to enable them to continue their work to empower local communities. In 2017 we would commence a five-year programme of funding restoration, starting with an initial expenditure of €5 million to fund 33 projects across the State.

## **EDUCATION**

Education has suffered hugely as a result of significant underinvestment and harsh cutbacks in recent years. Supports for children with special needs have been cut so they now have less time with Special Needs Assistants and Resource Teachers. Student fees have been increased and grant supports have been cut, meaning that many third-level students have had to leave their courses.

Students are being taught in overcrowded classrooms while school principals struggle to cover the basic costs of running a school. Increasingly, the costs of ‘free education’ are being passed on to parents and are presenting a real burden to children of lower- and middle-income households. Cuts in Guidance Counselling provision have further affected the least well off.

Sinn Féin has proposed an investment package of almost €500 million in capital and current spend for 2017. These measures aim to tackle the underinvestment in our education system, to create more equal access to education while establishing a firm foundation for our State to compete on the international stage through a well-resourced public education system.

### **Reduce the Pupil-Teacher Ratio at Primary School by 1 point - Cost €6 million for 2017 (full year cost €18 million)**

Figures provided by the Department of Education show that almost two thirds of all mainstream primary school pupils are currently being taught in classrooms of 25 or more pupils, while the average class size in Europe is 21.

### **Increase School Capitation rates by 2% - Cost €7.2 million**

The cuts imposed by successive governments have resulted in an 11% reduction in the overall capitation paid to schools. Parents are increasingly pressured to make up the shortfall through ‘voluntary contributions’, while principals struggle to pay for essential services such as lighting, heat and insurance.

### **Restore Guidance Counselling provision in secondary schools - Cost €47.6 million**

Cuts to guidance counselling have meant that there has been an overall reduction of 27.6% in the provision of the service since 2012, when the cuts were introduced. The ESRI has found that this cut has impacted those from disadvantaged backgrounds disproportionately. Sinn Féin is committed to fully restoring this service on the basis of 1 guidance counsellor per 500 pupils outside of the existing pupil-teacher ratio.

### **Increase resource teaching hours for children with special educational needs by 15% and increase funding for SNAs - Cost €82.3 million**

Children with special educational needs are not getting the resource teaching hours they need and which are recommended for them by expert clinicians. This measure would increase the number of resource teachers by more than 1,100. Sinn Féin would also make funding available to hire an additional 100 SNAs in 2017.

### **Increase Funding for Educational Psychologists - Cost €3.5 million**

Recent figures from the Department of Education show that the ratio of psychologists has declined since 2012 and the capacity of the service appears to be limited to an average rate of assessment or referral to the service of just over 2 pupils per school per year. This measure would allow for the recruitment of 43 additional psychologists and the provision of additional administrative support to enhance capacity.

### **Reverse Staffing Cuts to Small Schools - Cost €2.5 million for 2017 (full year cost €7.5 million)**

This measure would reverse the changes to the staffing schedule for schools with less than 86 pupils and help to protect small rural schools as well as gaelscoileanna and minority schools that have been adversely impacted by these measures.

### **Restore Funding for the School Completion Programme to 2010 Levels - Cost €6.3 million**

Funding for the school completion programme has declined since 2010, despite the fact that the school completion rates in DEIS schools is lower than the national average by 8 points. Sinn Féin proposes the immediate restoration of funding for this programme to give young disadvantaged students the supports they need to complete secondary education at the same rate as their peers.

### **Tackle Back to School Expenses - Cost €35.6 million**

The costs of sending children back to school have become a huge financial burden on low and middle income families. Research by Barnardos shows that the average cost of sending a child into first year of secondary school is €775. Sinn Féin has proposed a number of measures that would help ease this burden:

- » *Increase funding for School Books Grant by 30% - €4.8 million*
- » *Increase funding to the School Meals Programme by 40% - €16.8 million*
- » *Increase the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance by €50 - €14 million*

### **Increase Funding to the School Transport Scheme by €7 million**

Between 2008 and 2014 there has been a €14 million reduction in funding for school transport and new rules make it harder for children to access this service. Sinn Féin is providing an initial funding increase of €7 million in order to provide for a more accessible, flexible school transport system.

## **INVESTING IN THIRD-LEVEL EDUCATION**

The recently published Cassells Report laid bare the extent to which higher-level education has been underfunded, jeopardising the education of our students and potential economic growth as a result. Sinn Féin is committed to increasing investment in higher and further education.

### **Reduce the Student-to-Staff Ratio in Institutes of Technology by 1 point - Cost €9.83 million for 2017 (full year cost €29.5 million)**

The current student-to-staff ratio in Institutes of Technology stands at 23:1, well over the OECD average of 16:1. Institutes of Technology currently have the highest rates of non-progression and the high student-to-staff ratio has contributed to this. As an immediate measure we would reduce it by 1 point.

### **Increase Core Funding to Higher Education Institutions - Cost €19.2 million**

Since 2008, the core funding to Higher Education Institutions has dropped by 20% per student and there is now a funding crisis in our higher education system. As an immediate measure, Sinn Féin will provide an increase of 2% in the core grant funding to HEA institutions, with a plan to increase the overall funding by 20% over a ten-year period.

### **Reduce the Student Contribution Charge by €500 - Cost €32 million**

Hikes in the Student Contribution Charge are putting undue hardship on many families, effectively pricing some out of education. The economic, employment and research impact of higher education is to the benefit of the whole of society, not just students and graduates.

### **Increase Funding for the Student Assistance Fund and the Scheme for Students with Disabilities by 7% - Cost €1 million**

Increased rents, fees and travel costs with reduced supports have meant that many students experience financial hardship. A recent survey by the Union of Students in Ireland states that many students have to skip meals in order to manage the costs of further education.

### **Reinstate the Solas Training Allowance - Cost €6.7 million**

The abolition of the weekly payment to Solas trainees has placed a significant burden on those who take up a training opportunity in terms of travel, lunch and other expenses. The restoration of this allowance will make training more accessible to those in a position to benefit from it.

### **Abolish Apprenticeship and PLC Course Fees - Cost €5.6 million**

The introduction of pro-rata fees for PLC courses and apprenticeships has added a significant financial burden on young people seeking further training or skills. Given the relative lack of funding support available for these programmes, Sinn Féin believes these fees to be unfair.

### **An Additional 500 Places on the Momentum Scheme for People with Disabilities - Cost €1.6 million**

The Momentum Programme funds the provision of free education and training projects to allow jobseekers to gain skills and to access work opportunities in identified growing sectors. However, young people with disabilities are excluded from participating. We would fund an initial additional 500 Momentum places for young recipients of Disability Allowance.

### **An extra 1,000 apprenticeship places - Cost €5 million**

In 2015, there were 3,610 less apprentices than in 2008. The National Skills Bulletin 2015 states that Skilled Trades is the largest growing occupation type, with growth of 35%. This initial investment would provide an additional 1,000 places in 2016.

## **CHILDCARE**

The childcare crisis remains a critical issue for families across the State. Affordable and accessible high-quality childcare remains precarious for many parents and children. Childcare providers are finding it increasingly difficult to keep their doors open due to high costs in running their services. Childcare workers are finding it impossible to make ends meet on minimum wage salaries while extending themselves to burnout point. It is not sustainable. Sinn Féin is introducing a series of measures in our Budget 2017 proposals to alleviate the urgent childcare crisis for all those involved.

While addressing the urgent need for high quality universal childcare for families, we also fully support a parent's choice to remain at home with her or his child during the first year of the child's life and thereafter.

There is a long way to go in achieving an early-years model we can be proud of - one that is child- focused and which is part of a wider Early Years Strategy. In the absence of an Early Years Strategy, changes to the sector will continue to be ad hoc. We believe that the measures in our Budget 2017 proposals will make significant steps towards both improving the quality of childcare and providing financial relief for young families. Ultimately, we want to create a system that is universal and equal in its treatment of all children and parents, while supporting providers and educators in their provision of best possible care.

### **Increase Maternity Benefit by €40 and Extend by 2 Weeks - Cost €65 million**

Studies show that the presence of parents in the first year of children's lives is vital to their development. Maternity supports have been eroded significantly in recent years through a combination of cuts and taxation, with the result that many mothers have no option but to return to work early. Ireland ranks poorly on maternity pay, 32nd out of 34 OECD States.

### **Subsidise Childcare for Children Aged 6 Months to 3 Years - Cost €111 million**

Children between the age of 6 months and 3 years do not benefit from ECCE. We propose to provide a fund of €111 million in order to assist parents with the cost of this childcare. Parental fees would be reduced by €4,994 per child per year on average, or approximately €96 per week, if current participation rates are maintained. The subsidy would be higher where childcare is more expensive, and lower where less expensive. The scheme would be administered by Pobal's Programme Implementation Platform and it would be open to anybody in employment, education or training, regardless of means, with pro rata part-time provision.

Childcare facilities would have to sign up to certain criteria to avail of this payment, which would include the regulation of fees. Participation will likely increase, with a consequent reduction in the value of the average subsidy. However, for 2017 the pace of any participation increase will be limited by employment growth and the capacity of the childcare system. Future Budgets must continue to expand investment in universal childcare provision.

### **Extend Learner Fund to Support Progression to Level 7 and 8 Qualifications - Cost €1.5 million**

To enhance the quality of early education and care, those already working in childcare should be encouraged and supported to further their studies. This investment would be a large step towards the further professionalisation of the childcare sector, which would in turn provide workers and employers with further protections.

### **Extend the ECCE Scheme to 43 Weeks - Cost €44 million**

The current free pre-school year or ECCE contract is not fit for purpose as it does not allow sufficient margin for additional bills or costs. Many service providers operate at a loss, with many owner-managers taking no salary and staff signing on the dole during the summer months. Extending the programme by five weeks will, as an initial measure, contribute towards childcare costs for parents during the summer period for that age group and contribute to easing financial hardship for employees in the sector, who tend to avail of State benefits in summer months due to the precarious nature of 38-week contracts.

### **Roll out of Síolta and Aistear - Cost €500,000**

The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education curriculum should be immediately rolled out through the County Childcare Committees (CCCs). This would ensure swift national coverage with minimum cost, since the CCCs have access to all childcare providers nationally, are linked to local training agencies and are supporting the administration of the Learner Fund. A directive should be issued to all relevant departments to this effect to ensure that all education and training boards and private training companies fully engage.

### **Increase the Higher and Lower Capitation Grants for ECCE Scheme - Cost €30.25 million**

Capitation rates are paid by the State to crèches and pre-schools for each child participating in the ECCE programme. A higher capitation grant is paid where the education and care is led by a level 7 graduate, a reflection of the quality provided in the crèche. However, the rates are inadequate and providers have begun to request 'voluntary' contributions from parents to make up the deficit. Sinn Féin proposes to increase capitation grants for the Free Pre-School Year by €6 per week, from €64.50 to €70.50, and by €9 for the higher capitation rate, from €75 to €84.

## SUPPORTING SMES

Sinn Féin is committed to the creation of a sustainable labour market where workers have decent pay and good working conditions. Central to this are our SMEs, which employ 70% of those working in the private sector. These businesses are the engine of our economy and it is imperative they are supported.

Our capital investment programme will help create 23,500 jobs next year and we are also proposing targeted measures to assist high-potential start-ups along the Border, assistance for SMEs that are exporting or looking to export, and help for businesses to get online.

### **Export Support Fund: Funding to Help Businesses Diversify & Innovate - Cost €10 million**

Enterprise Ireland figures show that indigenous firms only account for 11% of exports. Sinn Féin intends to build on this figure, with a market diversification and product innovation strategy for SMEs in Ireland. This would focus on increasing exports to other EU and international markets and investing more in product development. State agencies (Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland) must be provided with the necessary resources to support market development – in-market intelligence; in-market promotion, and in market trade support in the EU and other markets for our regional SMEs, including those in our agri-business sector.

### **Encourage High-Potential Start-Ups (HPSUs) along the Border Development Corridor - Cost €5 million**

In line with the Oireachtas All-Island economy report, Sinn Féin is allocating an additional €5 million to foster new SMEs across the Border Development Corridor with export potential, especially in higher value-added sectors and, where possible, to do this in association with the diaspora.

### **Double Current Trading Online Voucher Scheme for 2016 - Cost €2.725 million**

Retail is a vital sector of the economy. Many shops are still struggling and have yet to feel the recovery. Of increasing concern is the change in people's spending patterns away from stores towards online purchasing. Government figures show online is expected to reach €21bn by 2017, yet 75% of these sales are going outside the State. We will double the current trading online voucher scheme.

### **Community Services Programme - Cost €3.8 million**

Sinn Féin will increase funding to the Community Services Programme to enable these social employers to afford the recent increase to the minimum wage and the further 50 cent increase proposed by Sinn Féin in this Budget.

### **Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities - Cost €4.2 million**

People with disabilities were forced to wait ten years for this strategy to be developed and since its publication it has been sitting on a shelf with no funding allocated to action it. Alongside the increased personal assistant hours and various employment supports for jobseekers with disabilities outlined elsewhere in this document, Sinn Féin would invest €4.2 million to give this vital strategy the kick-start that it needs.

## REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT & THE GAELTACHT

On top of our regional development capital investment plans we are also proposing targeted measures to assist those living in rural areas and Gaeltachtaí.

### **Increased funding for LEADER - Cost €20 million**

LEADER has been an important funding stream for rural communities and many of these are concerned about the impact of changes brought in by the government. Sinn Féin will ensure that the Exchequer make up the shortfall in cuts to LEADER funding at EU level, beginning with a €20 million increase in funding in 2017.

Sinn Féin will also ensure appropriate balancing of both the social inclusion and economic development aspects of LEADER and increased co-ordination between all programmes and agencies tasked with rural diversification and economic development.

### **Increase Funding for Foras na Gaeilge - Cost €7.58 million**

Foras na Gaeilge is the North-South public body created under the Good Friday Agreement, with responsibility for support and promotion of the Irish language. It is financed through matching funds: 2/3 from the Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht vote and 1/3 from the Department for Communities in the Assembly. It has suffered large cuts under the FG government significantly reducing its capacity to deliver. Sinn Féin will increase its funding by €7.58 million.

This funding will enable it to deliver on the widely endorsed policy platform ‘Investment in the Irish language and in the Gaeltacht from 2016 onwards’ including the 5 pillars: planning and structure for the promotion of the Irish language in the community; support for learning Irish in the community; household support; the Irish language in enterprise/employment creation and; use of the Irish language as preferred language.

### **Language Planning - Cost €1.5 million**

Sinn Féin has committed an additional investment of €5 million for Údarás na Gaeltachta in our Capital Programme to assist in job creation in the Gaeltacht. We are committing a further €1.5 million to implement the Gaeltacht language planning component of the Gaeltacht Act 2012.

### **Relocation packages for returning emigrants - €5 million**

A pilot scheme for resettlement to encourage and support certain emigrant families and individuals to relocate home. With a relocation package of up to €5,000 including flights for certain qualifying emigrant families to return and a package of up to €1,500 for certain qualifying individuals.

### **Gaeltacht Tax Credit - €4.5 million**

Sinn Féin wants to make living in the Gaeltacht more affordable for hard-pressed families, while also boosting the numbers of students studying in the Gaeltacht. This would involve the provision of a 20% tax credit in relation to expenditure incurred by parents for children for Gaeltacht courses, set at a maximum at €950 per child. For children whose parents are not working, Sinn Féin would grant a deduction at source of 20% of fees for those with medical cards.

## RURAL IRELAND

Successive governments abandoned rural Ireland. It received little investment during the boom to redress the imbalance of failed policies, and the subsequent austerity policies have all but devastated rural counties. Cuts have hit communities, families, public services and the local economy. Austerity has taken away the opportunity for people to live and work in rural Ireland and has forced a generation to emigrate.

Sinn Féin wants to make rural Ireland a sustainable place to live and work, where the quality of life is matched by the quality of public services; a place where young educated graduates have the opportunity to stay and build their future and a place that welcomes back emigrants, including those forced to leave over recent years.

Together with the full suite of capital and current investment proposed by Sinn Féin across this document the below measures will further aid in the delivery of a fair recovery for rural Ireland.

### **Restore Farm Assist - Cost €6.6 million**

This measure reduces the assessment of means from self-employment, including farming, to 85%, and reinstates the deductions from income in respect of children that were discontinued in 2013.

### **Additional 500 places on the Rural Social Scheme - Cost €3.8 million**

This measure will expand the current number of scheme places by 500.

### **Increase Funding for the Rural Transport Programme - Cost €2.1 million**

Sinn Féin will increase funding for the rural transport programme, which is vital for those in rural Ireland not served by existing train or bus services.

### **10% Increase in Funding for Farm Safety - Cost €870,000**

Farm safety needs to be a vital consideration for those working in agriculture. Sinn Féin will increase funding in this area by 10%.

### **Tillage Crisis Aid - Cost €5 million**

Tillage farmers in Ireland are currently experiencing their fourth consecutive year of low prices. Mounting losses in this sector have caused the cereal area to fall by close to 100,000 acres since 2012, and a recent prolonged period of bad weather has dramatically reduced the harvest yield for farmers, particularly along the western seaboard. Without political intervention, the sector is in danger of collapse.

Therefore Sinn Féin proposes allocating €5m in crisis aid for this sector. Sinn Féin has called for an EU-wide aid scheme to be established and will set aside this amount to co-finance such a scheme.

### **Livestock Crisis - Cost €11.1 million**

Severe volatility in the dairy market has caused plummeting prices for farmers, who have been selling below the cost of production for some time. On 18th July 2016, the European Commission announced €11.1m in support for Irish farmers, and relaxed state aid rules so that the national exchequer could co-finance.

Sinn Féin proposes matching this figure of €11.1m, in order to ensure a meaningful contribution to dairy and other livestock farmers struggling to manage the current income crisis.

### **Establish Horticultural Industry Forum - Cost €60,000**

Sinn Féin propose €60,000 be provided for the establishment of a Horticultural Industry Forum to represent and defend the industry which is in crisis. Horticulture does not receive basic farm payments and is competing with imports and dealing with big supermarkets' demands for cheap produce which is then sold on below cost.

### **Beef Data and Genomics Programme – Cost €10 million**

The BDGP was launched in May 2015 and by the closing date for applications, some 29,000 farmers had submitted applications to take part in the scheme. The success of uptake of the scheme and the merits to be gained by increased participation, including the introduction of animals of a higher merit to the national herd and improving the quality and efficiency of the suckler herd to reduce GHG emissions, warrant a reopening of the scheme. Sinn Féin therefore allocates €10m for the reopening of the scheme to allow new participants for a further period.

### **Farming Tax support**

Sinn Féin proposes adopting an Income Equalisation/Averaging Scheme for farmers to cope with the issue of income volatility in the long term. This would involve farmers having to pay reduced levels of tax in a year where their income drops significantly, to be carried forward and paid in full over a three year period when their income rises. Schemes such as this have been successful in other jurisdictions and will go a long way to rectifying cashflow problems on Irish farms.

Sinn Féin supports the IFA's proposal that a farmer determine his or her preliminary tax liability for an "opt-out" year based on 90% of his or her current tax year.

## **SUPPORTING ALL-IRELAND BODIES**

### **InterTrade Ireland - Cost €1.1 million**

InterTrade Ireland is a Cross-Border Trade and Business Development Body that supports businesses, through innovation and trade initiatives, to take advantage of North/South co-operative opportunities to improve capability, drive competitiveness, growth and jobs. To date, the body has created 9,000 new jobs and offers a return on expenditure of 12:1. Sinn Féin will increase funding for InterTrade Ireland by 15%.

### **Tourism Ireland - Cost €6 million**

Tourism Ireland is responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas as a holiday and business tourism destination. It delivers world-class marketing programmes in 23 markets across the world and reaches a global audience of up to 600 million each year. Sinn Féin will increase funding for Tourism Ireland by €6 million, bringing its funding from the State back to 2012 levels.

### **Waterways Ireland - Cost €3 million**

Waterways Ireland manages, maintains, develops and promotes over 1,000 kilometres of inland navigable waterways, principally for recreational purposes. The waterways under the remit of the body are the Barrow Navigation, the Erne System, the Grand Canal, the Lower Bann, the Royal Canal, the Shannon-Erne Waterway and the Shannon Navigation. This vital organisation has suffered numerous funding cuts in recent years. Sinn Féin will increase funding to Waterways Ireland by €3 million, to bring its funding level by the State back to 2013 levels.

## **GARDA RESOURCES**

Since 2011, Garda numbers have been depleted by approximately one thousand, leaving the current strength of the force at under 13,000. In order for the force to be fit for purpose and meet the demands of community policing, the government must increase investment in Garda personnel to bring numbers back to pre-recession levels.

We must further increase and direct Garda resources towards diversionary projects as part of a wider, holistic and real solution to crime.

### **Increase Trainee Gardaí by 800 - Cost €17.558 million**

We have provided in our costings for the intake of trainee gardaí to rise to 800. This is the maximum number that the Templemore training facility can accommodate.

## **15 New Garda Youth Diversion Projects - Cost €1.875 million**

Firefighting has long been the approach to tackling youth crime, especially in more urban areas, where young people are subjected to environmental influences in the form of criminal gangs. We feel that this funding increase is required to stem the flow of young people who see criminal activity as a viable way to earn a living. Sinn Féin is taking a proactive stance on the issue of urbanised crime in marginalised areas by creating 15 new focused projects in areas of perceived deprivation. A model of early intervention and prevention is the best way to go about this, as it targets those identified to be at risk at an earlier stage than current policy and guidelines allow.

## **PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

### **Increase CIE subvention by 10% - Cost €23.66 million**

The subvention to CIE, which covers Iarnród Éireann, Bus Éireann and Dublin Bus, has been massively slashed since 2008, with a 23.3% cut to 2016. Sinn Féin proposes to increase the subvention to bring us in line with comparative subventions in other EU States. This increase would help to expand routes, improve services, make fares more affordable and assist in resolving industrial disputes.

## **ARTS AND CULTURE**

Sinn Féin is committed to developing a world-class industry from the ground up.

We recognise the importance of bringing more voices into discourse and practice, recognising the true diversity of the arts.

Since 2011, Fine Gael have been reckless in their governance of cultural policy. The launch of a ten-year cultural policy, 'Culture 2025', has given little confidence to cultural activists. The centenary year of 2016 saw increased investment for the arts. Sinn Féin believes this should not be reduced.

We are proposing an increase of €15.5 million in current funding, along with our capital investment programme of €15.75 million for 2017. It represents the beginning of a process focused on repairing Ireland's cultural landscape, including our national cultural institutions, film industry, the Arts Council and Culture Ireland – as well as plans and a longer-term financial commitment towards the development of a national youth arts strategy.

### **Increase Investment in the Arts Council by 16.5% - Cost €10 million**

In recent years funding to the Arts Council has been cut by over €23 million. The arts support almost 21,000 jobs and are a significant part of our economy. Despite the effects of austerity, 3,500 artists continue to seek support from the Arts Council. Public investment in the arts is imaginative, directly impacts on employment and ensures a sustainable dividend for the State. Sinn Féin also proposes to better engage both Arts Councils on this island through increased North/South touring schemes and the co-funding of cross-border organisations.

### **Increase Investment in Culture Ireland - Cost €500,000**

Culture Ireland promotes Irish arts across the globe. It financially supports Irish artists and organisations presenting works at venues and festivals abroad including the Edinburgh festivals and Venice Biennales. These projects also make contributions to developing and promoting our cultural tourism offering, benefiting the domestic and foreign tourist.

### **Increase Investment in National Cultural Institutions by 13.6% - Cost €5 million**

National institutions including the National Archives, the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the National Museum depend on public investment. These institutions have endured cuts in excess of 40% and as a result day-to-day operations, opening hours, staffing numbers and programming have all been affected. The National Library of Ireland (NLI) has seen a staffing reduction of 24% since 2008. We propose increasing funding by 13.6% - €5 million.

### **Commence Development of a Youth Arts Strategy**

Sinn Féin want to see the development of a National Youth Arts Strategy, promoting participation, progression and provision developed. In 2017 the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, working alongside both the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills, should carry out research, planning and consultation on a National Youth Arts Strategy. A three-year implementation programme with a funding allocation of at least €5 million should follow the initial research, planning and consultation phase.

## **PUBLIC SECTOR PAY AND PENSIONS**

Many of those working in the public sector have been under increasing pressure in recent years due to pay cuts, increased taxes, cuts to allowances and cut to payments of public sector pensions. In Budget 2017 we would begin to tackle this by reintroducing certain public sector allowances for new and recent public sector workers. We would also move to restore cuts made to certain pensions.

### **Reintroduce Certain Public Sector Allowances for New and Recent Public Sector Workers - Cost €42.8 million**

This figure includes the following:

- » Rent allowance (gardaí, firefighters, prison officers),
- » Living Out allowance (in respect of non-consultant hospital doctors)
- » Community allowance (nurses)
- » Qualification allowances (teachers)

### **Redress Cuts to Those on Public Sector Pensions up to €34,132 - Cost €6.8 million**

Following the bank crisis the government used emergency powers under the FEMPI acts to cut the payments of public sector pensions. These cuts are slowly being restored under the Lansdowne Road Agreement. However, we believe for certain pensions, the pace should be quickened. We propose in Budget 2017 to combine the Public Service Pension Reduction amendments for 2017 and 2018 into a one year adjustment for those on a gross pension income band on or below €34,132 per year.

### **Introduce a Living Wage across the Civil Service - Cost €3.5 million**

Ireland has one of the highest rates of low pay in the developed world. This is one of the key factors behind the wave of mass emigration of the under 35s. Sinn Féin is committed to the introduction of a living wage as a key measure to stem the tide of low paid work. As the largest employer in the State, the government must lead the way. We would introduce a living wage of €11.50 p/h across the civil service.

### **Public sector workforce – Cost €15m**

We are including a provision of €15 million to be ringfenced to ensure additional posts in the public service sector that are urgently needed can be filled.

### **Increased Resources for Comptroller & Auditor General - Cost €1 million**

The Comptroller and Auditor General conducts a vital function promoting the efficient use of resources and minimising wasteful expenditure across departments. Investing in its work reaps dividends for public services and achieves maximum value for public money.

## TACKLING HIGH PAY AND REIGNING IN WASTEFUL PUBLIC SPENDING

### **Reduce Oireachtas pay (€75,000 TDs, €60,000 Senators) and reduce by 50% allowances to the Taoiseach and Ministers - Save €3.06 million**

The Oireachtas pay and allowances to the Taoiseach and Ministers are excessive. There are far more deserving areas of public expenditure to which this can be allocated.

### **Other pay reductions - Save €2.5 million**

Cap Government Special Advisors' pay, withdraw Super Junior Ministers' allowances, Oireachtas Officeholders' allowances and Oireachtas Committee Chair allowances. Combined, these proposals would save €2.5 million.

### **Reduce Excessive Pay at Management Level in the Public Services - Raise €5.36 million**

Those at the top of our civil and public service are highly paid by European Standards, while many of our Gardaí and nurses just get by. Sinn Féin are committed to fairness. We will ensure that high pay in our civil and public service is brought into line with other European countries. Accordingly, we would reduce the pay for top earners with a 15% reduction on income earned between €100,000 and €150,000 and 30% on income over €150,000. We would also reduce the CEO salaries in commercial, non-commercial semi-state bodies, local authorities and the Education and Trainings Boards by 10%.

### **Regulation of the Financial Sector - Save €69 million**

At present the Irish public, with certain exceptions, subsidises 50% of the cost of the Central Bank's regulation of certain financial service providers. Sinn Féin would take this charge from the Irish public and move the entire cost of regulation of the financial sector onto the industry.

### **Wind Down JobBridge Scheme - Save €4.8 million**

While some individuals have had a positive experience, overall the JobBridge scheme displaces existing paid work, defers real job creation, depresses wages and exacerbates underemployment. The JobBridge scheme is beyond repair. We would close it to new applicants, meaning that the scheme would become obsolete over the course of 2017.

### **Cancel Gateway Scheme - Save €5.2 million**

Participation on Gateway is not voluntary and it does not involve meaningful accredited training. Sinn Féin opposed the introduction of the Gateway scheme in 2014. We would cancel the Gateway scheme in Budget 2017.

### **Greater Use of JobsPlus - Save €28 million**

This scheme involves real jobs with real pay, terms and conditions. Employers receive a subsidy from the State when they recruit an employee who is long-term unemployed and on the live register. We would reassign the department staff, efforts and other resources currently focused on JobBridge to the promotion of JobsPlus with the aim of placing an additional 5,000 in employment via the scheme.

## SOCIAL PROTECTION

The austerity agenda pursued by Fine Gael, Labour, and Fianna Fáil places the heaviest burden on the most vulnerable in our society. According to Social Justice Ireland, there are more than 750,000 people living in poverty in Ireland today. These budget proposals are about addressing the unacceptable decline in the living standards of those on the lowest incomes in society. The following proposals focus on older people, lone parents, children and low income earners and seek to reverse some of the harshest cuts inflicted.

### **Increase Family Income Supplement Payments by 10% - Cost €41 million**

This payment supplements the incomes of parents in low paid employment. This measure will further support people on low income and in turn help to support their family.

### **Raise the Cut-Off Age of the One Parent Family Payment to 12 Years and Increase the Earnings Disregard to €120 - Cost €28.4 million**

This measure will go some way towards helping to support lone parents in the workforce. The current cut-off age is 7 years old which ignores the barriers faced by lone parents trying to access work.

### **Increase Jobseekers Allowance and Supplementary Welfare Allowance by €40 for the Under 26s - Cost €61.2 million**

This measure is the first step in ending age discrimination by restoring equality for young Jobseekers. Over two Budgets, Sinn Féin are committed to restore the full rate of both payments to those aged between 18 and 26.

### **Increase the Back to Education Allowance for Under 26s to €188 - Cost €5.2 million**

This cut has proved a barrier for young people wanting to return to education and to achieve qualifications. We would restore this payment to €188 from its current rate of €160.

### **Increase the Fuel Allowance by 3 Weeks - Cost €27 million**

It is estimated that 28% of households in Ireland experience energy poverty. Previous cuts to the Fuel Allowance have been detrimental, especially to older people. We want to see the Fuel Allowance extended by three weeks. This measure would provide a value of €67.50 to each recipient.

### **Introduce a Bereavement Grant of €600 - Cost €15 million**

One of the harshest cuts taken by Fine Gael and Labour in 2013 was to abolish the one-off Bereavement Grant. This targeted families at a very difficult time and left many struggling to afford funeral expenses. The introduction of this grant would go some way in assisting families when they need it.

### **Inflation Proof the State Pension by Increasing it by €3.50 Per Week - Cost €103.9 million**

This increase would protect the elderly at a time when the cost of living has dramatically increased and they face additional taxes and charges.

### **Raise Pensioners' Living Alone Allowance by €9.50 per month - Cost €22.5 million**

Many older people living alone without additional financial support from another person find it difficult to manage. This additional money would help and cover the cost of renting a telephone landline to facilitate the use of a panic alarm. Recipients of Disability Allowance and Blind Pension Living Alone would also benefit from this measure.

### **Restore State Pension Band Rates to their Pre-September 2012 Position - Cost €50 million**

The previous government made changes to the calculation of State Pension entitlements with the result that thousands of older people – predominantly women – found their weekly payment far short of expectations come retirement age. For example, a person with a yearly average of 29 contributions, who qualified for the State Pension before September 2012, gets a pension of €228.70 per week. Whereas a person with the same yearly average who qualified post September 2012 gets a pension of just €198.60 – a reduction of €30 per week.

### **Reinstate the State Pension (Transition) - Cost €78 million**

Fine Gael and Labour raised the pension age to 66. This forced many older people, obliged to retire at 65 in keeping with their employment contracts, inappropriately onto Jobseekers payments. Sinn Féin believes this is unacceptable and is committed to reinstating the Transitional payment for those aged 65.

### **Increase Disability Allowance and Blind Pension by €5.50 - Cost €38.9 million**

Standard poverty measures based on income levels significantly underestimate the extent and depth of poverty experienced by people with disabilities and their families. This measure will begin to recognise some of the additional expense of disability.

### **Increase Carer's Benefit and Carer's Allowance by €3 Per Week - Cost €8.8 million**

The increased cost of living in recent years is especially felt by the most vulnerable in society. Carers save the government millions every year and Sinn Féin recognises this. An increase of €3 will also protect the value of the payment from inflation-based erosion.

### **Secure and Replicate the WALK PEER Programme - Cost €1.1 million**

The WALK PEER programme is an example of a positive pilot programme encapsulating all that the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities is supposed to be about. WALK PEER supports young people on disability allowance to move into paid positions of employment in the open labour market and further education or training in mainstream settings. It is at grave risk of expiration due to government's refusal to provide a sustained extension of funding. We want to ensure the positive working concepts developed by WALK PEER continue and are replicated by others.

### **Increase Expenditure on the Reasonable Accommodation Fund - Cost €750,000**

The government's recurring underspend on a range of disability schemes, and failure to even set estimates for the Reasonable Accommodation Fund, is indicative of the lack of priority afforded to the promotion of equal employment opportunities. We would provide for an initial increase and proactive spending so that greater numbers of people with disabilities can find, or return to, employment.

### **Increase Funding for the EmployAbility Service - Cost €2.9 million**

This measure seeks to support an additional 1,000 people with disabilities to attain employment. Learning from positive pilots like WALK PEER should also be incorporated the EmployAbility Service's work.

### **Introduce an Additional 4,000 CE Scheme Placements - Cost €18.5 million**

CE schemes based on structured, accredited training should be extended and schemes that are exploitative or displace jobs such as JobBridge and Gateway should be ended.

### **Introduce Optional New PRSI Rate of 5.5% for the Self-Employed**

Sinn Féin believes that self-employed workers should have access to the same level of social protection as PAYE workers. As a first step in this direction, and in order to provide the self-employed with the option of accessing Invalidity Pension, we will allow for those workers to opt in to a voluntary scheme increasing their PRSI contribution from 4% to 5.5%.

### **Social Welfare Adequacy Commission**

Sinn Féin remains committed to the establishment of a Social Welfare Adequacy Commission. The statutory function of this Commission will be to examine the minimum income required by different household types in receipt of social welfare. It will also secure a minimum essential standard of living and make associated annual recommendations to the Minister for adjustments to social welfare rates of payment, including the state pension.

### **Establish an Equality and Budgetary Advisory Body - Cost €1.1 million**

In 2013 Sinn Féin proposed legislation to provide for equality-proofing of government policy and budgets and public bodies through impact assessments. This legislation would ensure that both government and public bodies exercise their functions in a manner designed to reduce the inequalities of government policy outcomes.

Sinn Féin wishes to introduce Equality Impact Assessments of government expenditure and taxation policy but the Department of Public Expenditure was unable to cost this proposed measure.

In addition, Sinn Féin believes the establishment of an independent Equality and Budgetary Advisory Body underpinned by legislation is necessary to secure equality of outcome for citizens and would be a progressive addition to the budgetary framework.

### **Overseas Development Assistance - Cost €5 million**

Sinn Féin is proposing an increase in funding of €5 million for ODA and for the State to resolutely work towards achieving its ODA targets. The UN target of 0.7% of GNI for aid spending must be a priority for the government. However, it must be noted that ODA is not a tap that can be turned on and off. There needs to be proactive consultation with relevant stakeholders, and short-, medium-, and long-term projects and targets, rather than simple yearly targets.

# FAIR TAXATION TO SUPPORT A FAIR RECOVERY

At the heart of the tax system must be a belief that everyone contributes their fair share, according to ability to pay, in order to deliver decent schools and hospitals, provide proper infrastructure to ensure business can flourish and support citizens when they need it, including older people and those with disabilities.

- » It is not fair that the government did backroom deals to allow massive corporations to avoid paying any tax.
- » It is not fair that the top 500 public sector pensioners cost €50 million a year.
- » It is not fair that the government continues to operate tax avoidance schemes such as Section 110 loopholes, ICAVs and Qualifying Investment Funds.
- » It is not fair to bring in tax cuts that benefit the wealthiest while introducing regressive taxes like water charges and the property tax.

Now is the time to draw a line in the sand and abandon the boom and bust politics that have caused havoc in the lives of the people of Ireland for generations. It would be scandalous to waste yet another opportunity. So, instead of throwing money away, let's develop a long-term economic strategy based on fairness that eases the burden on families, ends the era of tax avoidance for those at the top and invests in the economy and public services. This will leave us better equipped to deal with challenges in the future. Sinn Féin remain committed to introducing a tax of 1% on net assets over €1 million with exclusions. The measure is not included in this Alternative Budget document because it was not possible to estimate the revenue that would be raised due to deficits in the data held.

## In Budget 2017, Sinn Féin wants to start this work by:

- » Ensuring that everyone pays their fair share.
- » Abolishing water charges and the property tax and easing the financial burden on those on low and middle incomes.
- » Helping the self-employed by increasing the self-employed tax credit.
- » Ending tax avoidance by closing down loopholes and backroom deals.
- » Investing in schools, health, roads, water and flood relief works.

# PROVIDING RELIEF TO FAMILIES, WORKERS AND BUSINESSES

## Abolition of Property Tax - Costs €440 million

Many families are under severe financial pressure. The mortgage interest rates and motor insurance rip offs continue. Abolition of the family home tax will provide much needed relief to these families. It will save 1.8 million home owners on average €244 per annum. This saving will only increase in the years to come as the prices of houses increase and the temporary freeze on valuations ends.

## Abolish Water Charges - Cost €58 million

Domestic water charges have been the straw that broke the camel's back for a large majority of the Irish public. Double taxation for water is unacceptable and Sinn Féin will ensure its abolition.

The complete abolition of water charges alongside cessation of the water conservation grant would require €58 million of additional revenue.

### **Refunding charges post abolition**

Sinn Féin is committed to refunding those who have paid their water charges to Irish Water. In 2017 the government should establish a process to enable householders register for a refund, with full refund paid on January 1st 2018.

### **Increase Subsidy to Group Water Scheme - Cost €1.5 million**

In tandem with the abolition of water charges, Sinn Féin would increase the subsidy to Group Water customers to ensure that they would not have to pay for their domestic use. This would cost €1.5 million and ensure that no household would be paying directly for water.

### **Take workers earning €19,752 or less out of the USC net - Cost €78 million**

Sinn Féin will exempt workers earning at or below our proposed minimum wage of €19,572 (factoring in Sinn Féin's proposed 50 cent increase in the minimum wage) from the Universal Social Charge.

### **Proportionate increase in the Employee and Employer PRSI bands in tandem with minimum wage increase of 50 cent for 2017 - Costs €14.8 million**

Sinn Féin would increase the minimum wage by 50 cent an hour to €9.65. In order to make sure that this increase isn't swallowed up through taxes the PRSI bands have to increase too.

This means increasing the amount workers can earn before they are taxed at a higher PRSI rate by €20 a week. We would also increase the upper threshold for the 8.5% Employers PRSI rate to €386 per week so that employers are not paying a higher rate of PRSI.

### **Increase Tax Credits for the Self-Employed - Cost €51 million**

Sinn Féin acknowledges that the current taxation system discriminates against the self-employed in comparison to PAYE workers.

Accordingly, we wish to ease the burden for the self-employed by increasing the current self-employed tax credit to €1,300. The credit shall be available on earned income for the self-employed up to €80,000 and be reduced by 5% per €1,000, for gross income between €80,000 and €100,000, with no entitlement to the credit on gross income in excess of €100,000.

### **Removal of Regressive Tax for Motorists - Cost €72.7 million**

The extra cost to motorists who choose to pay their motor tax in instalments is a clear example of how unfair the tax system can be. In the age of computerised records there is no justification for this surcharge. We propose abolishing it.

### **Start-Up Relief for Entrepreneurship - Cost €5 million**

Sinn Féin will broaden the Start-Up Relief for Entrepreneurs (SURE) tax relief incentive scheme to encompass the self-employed. The scheme aims to incentivise individuals to start and invest in their own business by claiming income tax relief on investments in their business. However, to be effective it has to be made available to all self-employed people. Sinn Féin would provide relief of up to €15,000 for all approved investments.

### **Refund VRT/VAT to Taxi Drivers who Purchase Wheelchair-Accessible Vehicles - Cost €12.5 million**

We will introduce a scheme to refund VRT/VAT to taxi drivers who purchase a wheelchair-accessible vehicle, with a clawback provision should they cease to operate within a certain timeframe. This scheme will support the purchase of 1,000 wheelchair-accessible taxis, which would double the current number and bring us to almost 10% of all public-service vehicle licences.

## CAPITAL & PROPERTY TAXES

### **Reintroduce Second Home Charge & Double it to €400 - Raises €110 million**

In tandem with removing the family home tax, Sinn Féin would reintroduce the second home charge (Non-Principle Private Residence Tax) at a rate of €400 per annum.

### **Increase Capital Acquisitions Tax by 3% to 36% - Raises €29.3 million**

Capital Acquisitions Tax (CAT) is a tax on gifts and inheritance. CAT is a highly effective and fair means of redistribution of wealth.

We would raise the rate of CAT from 33% to 36%, however we would keep the current Group A, B and C thresholds in place as they are.

We are firmly opposed to the Programme for Government pledge to increase the tax-free threshold on inheritances from parents to €500,000 from the present €280,000. This measure is expected to cost the exchequer €75 million a year, however only 2,128 people had to pay tax on parental inheritances in 2014, when the tax-free threshold was €225,000. This €75 million, earmarked for a small cohort of people, can surely be put to better use cutting waiting lists and helping with overcrowding in our health service.

## EXCISE DUTIES AND LEVIES

### **Increase Betting Shop Tax & Online Betting Tax to 3% - Raises €95 million**

Sinn Féin will increase Betting Shop Tax & Online Betting tax to be applied to customers to 3%.

### **Increase excise duty on a packet of cigarettes by 50 cent**

Sinn Féin is conscious that thousands of people die from smoking-related illnesses each year and of the huge strain placed on our health service from providing care to those with long-term illnesses caused by smoking. Accordingly, we are committed on public health grounds to increasing the excise duty on a packet of cigarettes by 50 cent. In tandem with this increase, we will provide the Revenue Commissioners with additional funding to increase activity to clamp down on black market activity and protect against a rise in the illegal cigarette market. We have not included the revenue from this measure in our budget arithmetic as in costings provided to Sinn Féin and in the publicly available Revenue Ready Reckoner the Revenue Commissioners are clear that there may be no additional revenue from this measure. In fact, the increased excise could lead to a fall rather than an increase in revenue.

### **Introduce a Volumetric Sugary Sweetened Drinks Tax at a rate of €24.64 per hectolitre - Raises €101.3 million**

Only levies achieving a 10%-20% price increase will reduce consumption of sugary sweetened drinks (SSDs). Accordingly, we have committed to an eventual charge of €49.27 per hectolitre. However, we are conscious of the likely later timing of a similar measure in the North and therefore will be applying the tax at €24.64 per hectolitre to begin with.

### **Increase bank levy - Raises €25 million**

Sinn Féin is conscious of the huge damage borne by the Irish public as a result of banking recklessness. We recognise the Bank Levy as an important measure, however we feel the banking sector should be liable to a larger levy. We are proposing a 10% increase in the Bank Levy.

## ENDING A TAX BREAK

### VAT on Hotel Beds: Removal of 9% Rate - Raises €175 million

The hotel industry was given a special lower rate of VAT of 9% to spur job creation, support tourism and keep prices down at a time of high vacancy rates. Now, with high occupancy rates and increased room prices, this is no longer justified.

Sinn Féin will maintain the reduced 9% VAT rate for bars and restaurants (including those in hotels).

## NEW COMMERCIAL STAMP DUTY

### Increase Commercial Stamp Duty from 2% to 3% - Raises €117 million

According to the recently produced Tax Strategy papers, demand pressures in the commercial real estate market need to be closely monitored and policy tools activated if risks to financial stability emerge. Given the massive turnover in commercial property in recent years and huge increase in prices, Sinn Féin proposes the rate be increased to 3%.

## INCOME TAX

### New Income Tax Band and Rate - Raises €464 million

Sinn Féin will increase the tax paid on the portion of individual income earned over €100,000 by 7 cent in each euro.

## PENSIONS

While everybody pays for the tax reliefs on contributions to private pensions, a very wealthy minority benefit excessively from the regime. The way the State currently supports pension saving is regressive and unfair. Pensions policy must be overhauled. As a first step, Sinn Féin proposes €257 million of tax reliefs be ended for people on course to gold-plated pensions.

### Reduce Earnings Limit for Pension Contributions - Raises €137 million

The current earnings cap places an overall upper limit on the amount of remuneration/net relevant earnings that may be taken into account for the purposes of giving tax relief. The earnings limit is set at €115,000. We will reduce the earnings cap for pension contributions to €60,000 per annum, to raise €137 million.

### Reducing the Standard Fund Threshold - Raises €120 million

Sinn Féin will also reduce the Standard Fund Threshold to €1.7 million.

The current Standard Fund Threshold allows an individual to get tax relief on contributions up to a maximum of €2 million, which would entitle them to a pension pot of €60,000 per annum upon retirement. There is scope to reduce this significantly in the interests of equality.

Within five years we would reduce the threshold to €1.1 million, which would entitle an individual to build up a pension pot of roughly €35,000 per annum upon retirement, with tax-relieved contributions. This is more than fair, particularly as 83% of annual public pensions are under €35,000.

## PRSI

### Employers PRSI – Salary Over €100,000 - Raises €331.4 million

Sinn Féin will introduce a new rate of 15.75% employers PRSI on the portion of salary paid in excess of €100,000 per annum.

## FIGHTING TAX EVASION, BLACK MARKET ACTIVITY

### Tax Evasion & Black Market Activity - Raises €35 million

As part of its Comprehensive Review of Expenditure, the Revenue Commissioners identified how the tax take could be increased by hiring 125 qualified revenue staff to tackle black market activity and tax evasion, with 100 additional staff allocated to Audit departments and 25 additional staff allocated to compliance projects in areas such as fuel, tobacco and alcohol.

## TACKLING AGGRESSIVE TAX AVOIDANCE

Section 110 companies are the vehicle of choice for buying up distressed mortgages in Ireland. These companies operate in a tax-neutral manner. This, coupled with the massive profits they have been making, has resulted in a huge loss of revenue to the Irish public.

Irish regulated investment funds, QIAIFs and ICAVs, are the vehicle of choice for non-resident investors who invest in Irish property directly. These structures facilitate a zero-tax situation from income or gains for non-resident investors in Irish property. Of great concern is the scale of property in Ireland owned by non-residents through QIAIFs and ICAVs which is not subject to Irish tax.

In the interest of fairness and preserving the tax base, Sinn Féin is committed to tackling tax avoidance by S110s holding debt related to Irish property and Irish regulated investment funds that hold property directly. The tax foregone through these structures is needed for investment in our health, education and social services.

### Section 110s

The government's proposed changes to Section 110 companies to restrict their tax-neutral structure when their activities relate to Irish property mortgages is not acceptable, as this amendment will allow for a situation where all portfolios affected can be marked-to-market at 5th September. Accordingly, any unrealised gains on the uplift of Irish property debt up to 6 September will be unaffected by the amendment, leading to a massive loss in Capital Gains Tax to the Exchequer, given that the majority of uplift in value of the loan books affected has already taken place.

Sinn Féin is calling for all unrealised gains of the affected portfolios to be taxed in accordance with normal Capital Gains Tax rules, as is the case for all other companies paying corporation tax on the eventual date of sale of the affected portfolios. Strict anti avoidance must be put in place so that income from all affected portfolios cannot be written off against exorbitant interest payments.

### Irish Regulated Investment Funds - Qualified Investor Alternative Investment Funds (QIAIFs) and Irish Collective Asset Management Vehicles (ICAV) owned by non-resident investors

Irish income tax on rental income and Capital Gains Tax on the disposal of Irish property can be eliminated altogether for non-Irish resident investors when they hold Irish property through an Irish regulated investment fund (a QIAIF or an ICAV). Investment Undertakings ("funds") are not subject to Irish taxation on any income or gains they may realise from their investments. In addition, and also enabled through Irish tax legislation, there are no Irish withholding taxes in respect of dividends from these investment funds to investors who are non-Irish resident. This results in a full-circle tax-free investment for non-resident investors in Irish property through a QIAIF or an ICAV.

Sinn Féin is calling for those non-resident investors, who use QIAIFs or ICAVs to invest directly in Irish property, to be subject to Irish withholding tax of at least 20%.

### **The Double Irish**

Sinn Féin are calling for the immediate end of the use of the Double Irish instead of letting companies already operating continue using it until 2021.

# DEVELOPING THE ALL-IRELAND ECONOMY TO BOOST LONG-TERM ECONOMIC GROWTH

Achieving a single integrated economy on the island of Ireland is not merely a future political aspiration, it is a current economic imperative, something made all the more urgent as a result of the Brexit referendum.

Brexit is bad for Ireland. According to the Irish government, Central Bank, ESRI and many others Brexit is bad for the economy, north and south, both in the short and long term. It will slow economic growth, it will undermine trade, it will increase the cost of doing business, it will cost jobs.

- » The Irish Government Summer Economic Statement suggests Brexit could knock between €1.1 billion to €2.7 billion off Ireland's Gross Domestic Product. The Central Bank's third Quarterly Bulletin for 2016 stated that Brexit will have both short and long-term negative impacts and that growth predictions for Ireland have been cut by 0.2 per cent for 2016 and 0.6 per cent for 2017 due to Brexit.
- » The fall of sterling against the euro will make Irish exports more expensive.
- » The imposition of border controls will act as an extra cost on businesses and could delay the transport of goods. That will cost Irish companies money.

There is no way to mitigate against these negative consequences if Brexit goes ahead in the North. Therefore there is an urgent imperative to establish the all-Ireland Forum to establish options that would allow the North to remain in the EU, alongside the rest of Ireland.

## All-Ireland economy can drive economic growth

There are simply no advantages for a small island nation of 6.4 million inhabitants on the edge of Europe in having two separate tax regimes, legal systems, and competing economic development programmes. It clearly makes no sense for a small island nation to have disjointed, back-to-back health, education, transport and energy systems. This has weakened provision and increased costs.

Irish re-unification will be good for economic growth, jobs and living standards across the island of Ireland.

The recent published and peer-reviewed Modeling Irish Unification study by Professor Kurt Huebner of Vancouver University (2015), projected the total combined Irish economy would in a short number of years be greater than the two separate economies, North and South, by approximately €35 billion a year.

Modeling Irish Unification adds to the growing body of work pointing to the very substantial net economic benefits of Irish unification. No serious analysis or research exists that points to a contrary conclusion.

Island-wide trade in manufacturing generates €3bn or £2.4bn for Ireland. Removing barriers to this trade would undoubtedly lead to significant growth in this figure. Full economic integration would allow for fair and progressive taxation, regulation and trade. It would provide the tools for growth, employment and a better business climate across the island.

The different economic structures North and South undermine Irish economic growth. Companies and workers are impeded by currency fluctuations, different levels of vehicle registration tax; differing tax rates and differing costs.

A single, island-wide agency and policy would drive investment and integrate the current efforts of the IDA, InvestNI and InterTradeIreland.

A new, unified Ireland would promote the island as a location for investment and access to the Single European Market.

An integrated agricultural administration on the island would remove obstacles faced by farming communities. In recent years we have seen issues with country of origin labelling, two jurisdiction tagging systems, and diverging animal health regulations.

This will benefit farmers, North and South, and challenge the power of retailers and processors who have used such differences to manipulate prices.

Post-brexit, a United Ireland is more important than ever for the Agri-food industry. Unity would mean a single, cohesive voice, better placed to ensure a fair price for produce from meat plants and processors, regulate the power of supermarkets, and deliver better deals from CAP reform discussions. Agri-business will also benefit from the free movement of animals across Ireland.

The spatial planning process in both parts of the island would benefit from harmonised and integrated data sets on population, employment, transportation, housing, retailing and environmental indicators.

Sinn Féin will work towards delivering the following steps to build a strong and integrated economy for Ireland. Economic planning to be undertaken on an All-Ireland basis.

- » Campaign to ensure that the wishes of the electorate are respected and the north of Ireland remains in the EU, alongside the rest of Ireland, regardless of what happens in England and Wales.
- » Champion all-island co-operation and integration within public services.

**In Budget 2017 we are:**

- » Investing €17.58 million in Foras na Gaeilge, InterTrade Ireland, Tourism Ireland and Waterways Ireland.
- » Investing additional €20 million in the A5 and the Narrow Water Bridge;
- » Calling for the establishment of a committee under the auspices of the North-South Ministerial Council specifically tasked with harmonising and maximising cooperation on an All-Ireland basis for the mutual benefit of everyone;
- » Calling for the establishment of a Border Economic Development Zone to harmonise trade and maximise returns for border business.
- » Calling for the immediate establishment of an All-Ireland forum to look at options that would allow the north to remain in the EU.