

Budget 2019

A New Ireland – where no one is left behind

Pearse Doherty TD, 9th October 2018

Check against delivery

Introduction - The long scam

Minister, lets remind ourselves of the backdrop to this Budget.

10,000 citizens are homeless, and 4000 of them are children.

4000 lives, 4000 childhoods forever altered because Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil are simply unable to present a Budget that takes their side.

These are children whose only offence was to be born to parents who fell on hard times.

How many times must stories like Amanda, a teenage girl living in a hotel room and whose life is passing her by, grip the nation before you finally present a Budget capable of addressing this crisis?

When a teenage girl, made homeless by the policies of this government, your government Minister, has to pour her heart out on national radio to get noticed, what can be said of your government?

When you announced your first Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil confidence and supply Budget - Amanda was in Emergency Accommodation. During the second confidence and supply Budget - Amanda was in Emergency Accommodation. And now as you announce your third Budget together today - Amanda is still homeless.

Minister there are 10,000 Amandas – and for them Budget day is groundhog day.

Why should anyone trust that Budget 2019 will be any different.

Will we be standing in this chamber again, this time next year talking about yet another Amanda.

We didn't get here overnight.

No event of the past ten years has shaped the values and attitudes of the people of this island more than the banker's crash of 2008.

It shook this island, every family and every community to their core.

And out of the ashes emerged a type of bargain that was foisted on the Irish people, forged in the crisis boardrooms of the political and financial class.

With the economy on its knees, with fear and worry lingering over families in this state, a grand scandal was invented. It is the long scam.

It was a story that somehow the Irish people were to blame for the greed and negligence of a privileged, untouchable few.

This story went that 'we all partied, we must all pay'.

It was written from the pen of mostly nameless bankers in white collars, the architects of the economic chaos – men who became obscenely wealthy at the expense of the livelihoods, trust and dignity of Irish people.

It was a story absorbed and dispensed by the political class, the parties in this chamber.

It was a story with a single minded purpose – to deflect blame from those who caused this crisis

All of a sudden it became the creed of those who should have felt the force of this anger:

"As a society we splurged, as a society we must pay"

And so the people of Ireland paid, they suffered, they endured.

This day, Budget day, became a practice of blame and scorn of the Irish people.

It was a grim litany of one of the greatest frauds and ideological scandals ever concocted by the leaders of this state.

But it was endured because the story only worked when it rested on the other part of the bargain.

Again and again the Irish people were told - "Pay the cost now, reap the rewards later".

All the while they dangled the hope of a better future in front of them.

And so the people waited.

Isolated rural communities watched as their way of life collapsed in front of them, and an entire generation of our best and brightest young people were forced from their homes.

Countless families watched as their incomes disappeared and the costs of simply raising a family in this state became too much.

But the story and the bargain continued, 'suffer now, and enjoy later'.

Minister no doubt as you presented the Budget to the House today, with an election looming you could convince the Irish people that the story was at its end.

But now is the time to be honest.

Níl aon baint ag an bhuiséad seo nó aon cheann roimhe leis an bhob a bhí á bualadh agaibh ar daoine le deich mbliana anuas. Ní raibh sé seo déanta ar mhaith le beartais déine a chur i gcrích nó le nithe deise a thabhairt amach ag an am ceart.

Níorbh botún sealadach, dosheachanta ab ea an cruatan a bhí curtha ar mhuintir na hÉireann le dornán blianta anuas.

Every step taken in this journey by the political class was calculated, and deliberate.

They were choices grounded in a set of ideas, ideas advanced by people who saw their moment to pounce in a time of crisis.

The dividends following years of hardship endured by Irish people are not being shared fairly by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil.

Austerity was the excuse then, stability is the excuse now, and when the time is right, another excuse will be found.

This Budget is the latest step in a vision for Ireland.

It is a vision that sees Ireland as a land divided, between elites and the struggling.

It sees two sets of rules, those who prosper must always prosper, those who struggle, will always struggle.

It's a vision that fanned the embers of the culture of greed that corrupted this state.

It breathed life into the rotten culture of banks and the wealthiest in society saying – don't worry, your day will come again.

These are the families that suffered, they played their part in this bargain, so where is their reward?

Will Budget 2019 give them a health service they can rely on? Will they all have a place to call home? Will it result in shared prosperity? Will it check the excessive wealth and power at the top? The answer is no.

The government has presented a Budget that attempts to buy their silence.

That attempts to sell Irish citizens a status quo that offends their sense of decency, and which they know is wrong.

They have watched as this Minister for Finance, and many more before him, presented Budget after Budget to the Irish people that is simply blind to the human suffering all around us.

The people of this island were raised on a set of values that said how we treat those most in need is the real measure of a person.

Indeed, it is the only truly meaningful measure of a society.

100,000 citizens do a day's work, only to return home to a life of poverty because their wages can't cover the cost of living.

One in every five citizens in the state sits on a waiting list for basic medical care, in one of the richest states on earth.

Almost one quarter of Irish workers are low paid by international standards.

Too many parents, mostly women, must give up on their career ambitions because they are beggared by the cost of childcare. Countless more are heartbroken and in work, their young children minded by others, because the high cost of living demands that two wages be earned to keep the household going.

Too many families have no rainy day fund of their own. They are doing fine now – but they are only ever a few pay checks away from difficulty. A kitchen appliance failing, the car breaking down, an illness striking – any number of things could quickly become a game changer. The dividends of recent growth should be shared fairly and effectively. That means they have to be targeted in the right way.

Budget 2019 should have focused on reducing the cost of necessities so that people's incomes can go further. So that ordinary people can live a good life now without fear of the future.

But Budget 2019 has fallen short.

Booming banks and vulture funds have more backing from this government than the renters whose wages continue to fill the bulging pockets of landlords.

As you present this Budget, this is the real story of Irish society.

'Seo de bharr an cleas a bhí á imirt ag Fine Gael agus ag na haicmí polaitíochta agus é fós atá á imirt acu.

Raising incomes & cost of living

And most citizens know the story too well.

A cost of living crisis which has made it impossible for countless families to make ends meet or plan for their future.

This is because this government simply doesn't understand.

You've had seven years, seven Budgets, and three in lockstep with Fianna Fáil. What has changed for those young people, and those without a stake in society?

Cha dtuigeann tú an anró atá ag baint leis an rogha atá le déanamh ag daoine agus iad idir dhá chomhairle faoi cé acu an íocfaidh siad as an chuart doctúra nó an íocfaidh siad as na hearraí grósaera don seachtain.

Ní thuigeann tú an imní atá ar daoine nuair atá an carr le tabhairt don mheicneoir nó nuair atá an éide scoile le deisiú.

You rule as a minority, for a minority. This is their Budget.

It is an insult to the struggling majority, who see little in today's Budget for themselves.

It's a Budget for landlords, it's a Budget for banks and their tax holiday, and it's a Budget for a status quo that has outright failed the people of Ireland.

No further proof is needed than the minimum wage proposal presented today.

Irish workers who get up early, put in a hard day's graft for wages which can't cover the basic cost of living day to day.

These are the wealth creators in our society, and today you have given them nothing to lift the worry, to help them pay the bills.

At an increase of 25cents, these workers deserve at least three times what government are proposing.

These workers should be looking forward to a pay rise of about €1500 instead they face into next year with their financial hardship every bit as stifling as before.

Civil service and public sector workers will wait too.

They will wait for a living wage, which this government still has not delivered, and they are waiting for the right to basic pay equality.

This government continues to stand over a reprehensible policy of paying public sector workers less pay for the exact same work as their colleagues.

Tell them Minister why they must wait until 2025 to have this basic right recognised, while you and your Fine Gael colleagues will enjoy a cosy pay rise over the coming weeks?

Income tax/USC changes

Over the past four Budgets Minister you have thrown over €2bn out of the income tax base while creating crisis after crisis in our basic public services. Today he has announced another hollowing out of the tax base with €284m being cut.

Token tax cuts will not lower the cost of living for the overwhelming majority of families today.

They will not make it cheaper to rent a home, or be able to work and have the peace of mind that your children are being cared for.

We have been here before. A clamber for tax cuts driven by certain sectors leaves us exposed and vulnerable. The Minister thinks we can afford it because Corporation tax receipts are making it up. Replace Corporation Tax with Stamp Duty and we are back to 2007.

Promise tax cuts to keep the base happy, undermine our public finances, and run our public services into the ground.

Minister for you and your party have for too long been spreading fear about tax in our society, taxes on which society itself depends.

This is fear mongering, and Sinn Féin rejects it out of hand.

You are also incapable of taking on the issue of high wealth individuals and their tax responsibilities. There are more millionaires and billionaires in the State than ever before while others suffer from week to week.

The recent report by the Comptroller and Auditor General made it clear just how easy it is to avoid tax in Ireland if you have the wealth to do so. The C and AG stated that:

“Looking at taxable income, 140 High Wealth individuals (42%) had taxable income of less than €125,000.

Of these, 83 (25%) had taxable income of less than the average industrial wage.

Minister, it is your job to make these people pay their fair share- you don't seem interested in doing so, why not?”

Tá bród orm mar Úrleabhraí Airgeadais Shinn Féin agus ar mo pháirtí, gur thig linn a rá go léireodh muid dea-rialachas ó thaobh beartais cánachais, agus go gcuirfeadh muid deireadh leis an ionsaí atá á dhéanamh ag an rialtas seo ar seirbhísí poiblí.

Sinn Féin, and I as Finance spokesperson, are proud to be a party that says we will tax fairly and sensibly, and bring this government's attack on public services to an end.

This means a 45% tax on income over €140,000- that is a tax on the 1%.

The other revenue raising measures introduced or updated today – VAT changes, gambling duty for example are fundamentally needed.

And they are needed because this government has increasingly allowed our tax base to be built on sand.

The cycle repeats itself every Budget time.

Betting tax does have to increase but increasing to 2% is the worst move possible in my view. It means Paddy Power and their likes will be able to absorb this increase while the high street bookies won't be able to and will become uncompetitive.

The rate should, go to 3% to cover the Horse and Greyhound fund and should be charged on the punter so that high street local bookies would not be unfairly hit.

VAT Changes

But fair taxes must also be stable, and have a clear and transparent intent.

The decision to lower the VAT rate to 9% on Irish hotels was broadly welcomed, and reflected the difficulties facing the tourism industry.

Today's decision to reverse the rate drop was long overdue. I understand the anger but policy makers cannot let bad policy go on indefinitely. Huge international investors are effectively pocketing hundreds of millions in subsidies on Dublin and Cork and Galway Hotels.

The hotel argument is over, the facts speak for themselves the average room occupancy and price no longer justify any sort of subsidy.

I do not agree with the full restoration of restaurant and pub prices too. . I do not believe the case for a 13.5% rate has been won for these businesses.

Corporation tax windfall

Tá cáin iontach tábhachtach mar bhraitheann seirbhísí sláinte agus seirbhísí poiblí air, agus ar a chobhsaíocht

With each passing year more and more corporation tax flows into the state coffers.

As of the most recent boon, the state will collect €9.5bn this year.

Minister this will not be here forever.

Sinn Féin have long made the case that it is the responsibility of the Irish government to shore up and stabilise our public finances.

This Budget fails in this regard, and of corporate tax paid, you as Minister for Finance have failed to ease to concentration from where it is collected.

Clearly this is a threat to our economic stability, and it must be addressed.

But it must also be seen as an opportunity, a temporary one, through which we can try to undo the utter neglect this government has shown.

It is an opportunity to use this moment in time to do what you should have done years ago – to build houses, to upgrade and invest in infrastructure.

You have gone to great lengths to lecture the nation about prudence over the past year – building our health funding on sand in a time of crisis is negligence of the highest order.

Our tax base needs stability, and our health service deserves the same.

This Budget is not an opportunity for accounting tricks and short cuts.

Seamus Coffey in his report on Ireland's Corporation Tax system argued for the end of the 100% rule that allowed huge multinationals write off intangible assets onshored here to be written off against profit at a rate of 100%.

It is still impossible to understand why Minister Noonan ever brought in this rule but when he limited it to 80% last year the current Minister purposefully excluded those assets already onshored. Taxing these assets going forward would bring in €750m a year.

That won't last forever but for Sinn Féin should be used to invest in our capital infrastructure especially housing for our people.

Housing

This will be three Budgets with Fianna Fáil that you've both shamelessly called housing Budgets.

You stood in this chamber two years ago and you told us how your Budget would transform housing. The Fianna Fáil Finance Spokesperson stood in this chamber last year and said this Budget will be judged on its record for housing above all else.

With 10,000 people homeless as they present another 'housing' budget today, their third on the trot, the people of Ireland are casting judgement once and for all.

They are demanding that you bring your disgraceful housing and homelessness crisis to an end, or move aside for someone who will.

They are the thousands of citizens, young and old, who crowded the streets outside this building to demand their rights.

Minister they were demanding change, real change, lasting change.

So what have you given them in this Budget?

More of the same! Tinkering around the edges, and making sure anything you do for the people of this island doesn't get in the way of landlords.

It won't get in the way of the privileged, the real estate investors making a fortune off of a social tragedy that you've created.

It's never been a worse time to be a renter Minister; and it's never been a better time to be a landlord.

After this Budget, nothing will have changed.

Nothing will have changed for Orla.

Orla is 28, she's a nurse, and like too many nurses she sees emigration as her only choice.

She contacted me, so that as I speak to you today, I could give voice to an Irish citizen abandoned by their government.

Orla wants to give all she can to help those in need in Irish hospitals. And right now she's doing just that, giving everything to help others in need.

But like too many people forced to the edge each month, she's worried sick about bills.

She dreams of one day having a family, but she feels that she simply cannot afford to.

She's a nurse, the lifeblood of our health service, who says she avoids going to a doctor when she's sick because she simply can't afford it.

What a travesty Minister, what a failure. What a failure of your government and all that it stands for.

She wants to be successful and give the best care she can to Irish citizens – but she's forking out €500 for a single room in Dublin?

Orla's story is the story of an endless cycle of Ireland's most devoted and most talented citizens.

They have care in their hearts, they love their home country, but they've been let down by their government.

Orla has been forced to endure a housing crisis that is forcing her to consider giving up her job, her dreams, and her home.

Minister, you and this government believe that it is not the states job to provide housing. You want to leave it all to the market. Well the market has clearly failed.

You are happy to leave renters to the mercy of landlords. But all too often landlords are using loopholes to evict tenants and jack-up rents.

Between yourselves and Fine Gael, today you've presented more solutions for landlords than for struggling tenants and those in dire need of a home.

These are landlords who today are collecting rents that are more expensive than at any point in the state's history.

The vast majority of landlords who will benefit from the increased landlord mortgage interest relief announced today are already raking in fat profits. By itself this measure is entirely useless.

Minister this Budget is full of handouts and incentives for landlords. But this isn't a landlord's crisis, it is a renters' crisis.

For another Budget you've refused to give citizens any relief from this crisis.

Freezing rents to give citizens a break and real certainty is what's required.

Time and time again you've failed to bring this unforgiveable mess to an end because you believe the market will clean it up for you.

You're blinded to the solutions because you don't believe in them.

But Sinn Féin have proposed the construction of some 15,000 social and affordable homes in our alternative Budget for 2019.

We've proposed an emergency rent freeze.

We've proposed tax relief to renters equal to a full month's rent.

We've put forward a radical and ambitious housing package, targeting the core pillars of the crisis in affordability and supply.

But this Budget is starved of the ambition and focus needed to end this crisis.

How out of touch, Michael Martin and the Fianna Fáil party, could you possibly be to hold a straight face and call this a housing Budget?

How many times must the names and memories of citizens deprived of a basic human right, the right to a home in their own country, how many times will they ring out in this chamber?

Minister as I said at the beginning of my speech, for what will soon be three Budgets that you and Fianna Fáil have declared 'housing Budgets', Amanda will be homeless.

She says her life is being robbed from her – it's being robbed by this government!

And you're robbing the life chances of 10,000 homeless citizens.

This isn't a mild political problem that you can ignore.

This is now a social tragedy of historic proportions for which you, and your government will forever be blamed.

Nothing you can do now will heal your reputation as an administration.

And rightfully so.

All you can do now is do the right thing, and do it fast.

But for another Budget you've failed.

They need a rent freeze. They need rent relief. And they need to see a doubling of social and affordable housing in 2019.

Minister, your government is running out of excuses, and Amanda, Orla and the people of Ireland are running out of time.

So on the day when you have condemned this state to yet another year of widespread and systemic housing policy failure, let us not mince words:

This government is responsible for creating, and repeatedly deepening, one of the worst social crises in the history of this state.

The housing crisis is the direct result of the policy failures of the two parties passing the Budget before this house today.

They alone are responsible for the failure to invest adequately in social and affordable homes. And they alone will be held responsible by the people of Ireland.

Healthcare

And what is most frustrating for people, and myself as a public representative and Finance spokesperson, is that all of this is avoidable.

There is no reason as to why this 'supplying incompetence' agreement between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil has brought forward three budgets now which have completely under-budgeted for our health service.

Health is our most important public service; for some time now in budget after budget we've witnessed the systematic underfunding of the health service. The inevitable outcome of this is that the health service cannot deliver the services people need without going over budget because it was underfunded in the first instance which has resulted in what you like to call an 'overspend'.

This budget offered the opportunity to set out a sustainable and credible funding path for health to address capacity issues, funding shortages, and deliver a sustainable delivery plan for Sláintecare.

But what did we get? We got financial chicanery and budgetary deceit.

You have not offered a sustainable way forward for the health service and your measures have put it at a huge risk in the coming years.

You have used unexpected and unreliable corporation tax receipts for a quick, short term fix for the health budget.

You have done this on the back of a corporation tax bonanza announced during the weekend.

And what have you done? You have blindsided the opposition and the public, and responded to your chronic underfunding of health by throwing volatile multinational tax receipts at our hospitals and our primary care centres instead of putting them onto a sustainable footing.

The short-termism of funding a health service off a once off corporation tax windfall is not just deceptive, but extremely dangerous.

We have been here before, short term populism through volatile revenue. Fianna Fáil's fingerprints are all over this document.

And as you scramble to plug the gap this year, with corporate tax receipts which are volatile and heavily concentrated. They simply can't be depended on.

I will remind you of the consequences of your neglect.

1 in 5 people are stuck on waiting lists for basic, emergency care.

They need it, but they can't get it in a broken and underfunded system overseen by Fine Gael for 7 years now.

They are children with acute illnesses whose chances in this life are being thrown away.

They're pensioners whose lives have been put on hold until they can see a surgeon.

Minister if this is all the health system can offer citizens in a society as wealthy as ours, then this is the sign of an unprecedented failure.

Around the world citizens can have their needs met on time, and as a right, not as a customer.

This is what the Irish people deserve. Nothing else will do.

But tinkering around the edges will not deliver the health service that is their right.

You have proposed to reduce Prescription charges for over 70s by 50c and the Drug Payment Scheme threshold by €10. Prescription charges are a tax on ill health and any measure to lower them is welcomed.

But your moves today on prescription charges and the drug payment scheme are unambitious and should have gone a lot further. It is unfortunate that it seems they will only be reduced for over 70s, these costs are a huge burden to working families as well.

Sinn Féin had budgeted for a €1 reduction in prescription charges across the board as the fairest way to reduce this unfair tax on ill health. Indeed, we also budgeted to lower the Drugs Payment Scheme to €100 so it is disappointing that the government are only suggesting they will reduce this to €124.

Medicines are completely unaffordable for countless families in this state, and you've done the least you possibly could to change this reality.

Today you have once again failed to end the staffing crisis which is impacting on public health.

Nurses and midwives are balloting to reject your pay agreement and we have the distinct possibility of a strike amongst these professions and yet you chose not to address these issues which are causing a recruitment and retention crisis across the health service.

You've made it clear to them that they'll be waiting until this government is swept aside.

Our health service needs real investment, sustainable investment into the future, you have not done this today, you have used volatile corporation tax receipts to fund current expenditure in health, you have used the health service as an election tool and you put it at danger of collapse in the coming years because your investments are not sustainable.

You announced new funding for the NTPF – this has Fianna Fáil's fingers all over it – it's siphoning public monies to line the pockets of private healthcare.

Are private healthcare operators vying for top spot on the Fianna Fáil gravy train with property developers? Because it looks that way.

The NTPF is short term populism.

As Sara Burke of the Centre for Health Policy and Management in Trinity College has pointed out – 'over a decade of pouring hundreds of millions into the NTPF is proof it does not address the underlying causes of the long waits for public patients in the first place'.

Diverting public money into private healthcare is not only wrong; it doesn't make any financial sense in the long run.

And while we welcome the extension of GP care to 100,000 people, this is the first acknowledgement that the government care at all about giving Irish people the healthcare they deserve.

But you haven't announced how we will increase capacity to deliver this.

From speaking to GPs this morning it seems there has been no consultation about delivering this.

Currently there is not the capacity to deliver the levels of care we currently have. And you have done nothing to change this.

There should have been dialogue and investment firstly in increasing the number of doctors on the GP training scheme so we can increase the number of GPs and the capacity to deliver services.

This would have enabled patients to be seen for free in a timely manner and not forced to wait weeks for an appointment or be forced to attend an Emergency Department for treatment.

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. But your government completely ignores their concerns and opinions and you do nothing to tackle the capacity crisis in primary care.

Expanding primary care must be the start of a long term plan of investment in health, towards a truly universal system based on need and we must have the capacity to deliver that.

If you were serious about free GP care you would have delivered on this – but you are not – so you didn't do that.

The only end point for our health service is a universal system of world-class care, free at the point of need for every Irish citizen as a birthright.

If we want a system truly worthy of the compassion and duty of care Irish citizens show each other, then the government has to fund it and fund it in a sustainable and long term manner.

You were faced with the choice today to sustainably address the systematic problems which were the result of underfunding the health service over many years and you chose to engage in the same type of voodoo economics which drove us to financial ruin.]

Your actions today regarding the health service put the future sustainability of this most essential public service at even greater risk.

Childcare

Childcare costs are increasing faster than subsidies are matching them. Despite the measures introduced today, which are welcome, many families will continue to pay the equivalent of a second mortgage.

With the exception of what citizens must pay for a fundamentally broken system of housing provision, childcare is now a primary burden on family incomes.

In fact for many people, overwhelmingly Irish women, the only means by which it can be avoided is to sacrifice their career ambitions.

This says to these women that their lives are not equal.

How many careers were set aside because care for children was simply out of reach?

Tackling the cost of childcare is one thing, but introducing meaningful reform to the sector is also important.

Sinn Féin have proposed to slash the cost of childcare.

But importantly we would also make an allocation to make the minimum entry level wage for childcare workers a real, living wage.

This would be a core component of a new and comprehensive sector wide agreement that improves working conditions and quality of service across providers in the state.

Furthermore, we would also increase capitation grants to childcare providers next year to enhance core funding and drive quality improvements.

These are the decisions needed to give Irish people the public services they deserve, and the services they have earned having endured your austerity programmes for years.

Brexit & SMEs

It's also these years that has undermined our economy and our society as we face the uncertainty of Brexit.

If recent weeks are anything to go by, the DUP-Tory alliance is hell-bent on inflicting as much economic damage to this island as is within their power.

Citizens need their rights protected, and businesses need certainty.

This will be one of the biggest political and economic challenges of a generation, and the Irish people need a proactive government, willing to step in and invest in their needs.

This is with or without a hardening of Britain's border in Ireland.

Whatever the outcome of Brexit, the outcome for Ireland won't be good.

As a priority, we need to do all that we can to prepare the economy for many rocky Brexit years ahead.

This means investing more into education across all levels.

This means capital investment.

And this means investing in the full potential of small and medium businesses on this island.

These are urgent objectives for government, and this Budget shows another missed opportunity to achieve them.

What is needed to help upgrade the capacity of small and medium businesses is a further investment in their digital profile.

1/5 businesses have no digital presence, and 1/3 can't process orders online.

But nothing in this Budget will give struggling SMEs this backing.

This Budget needed to drive productivity among small businesses at a time of uncertainty.

Making R&D tax credits more accessible to small enterprises would be of vital importance to their fortunes in the future. And also increasing from 25% to 30% the rate at which they can benefit from these.

If this is a Brexit Budget, and it must be, then it has failed to give the investment needed to get our economic house in order.

Sinn Féin would increase funding to Enterprise Ireland to a record €300m, with an increased allocation of €27m.

IDA must be supported to continue to drive FDI in difficult times ahead.

But it must do so with a focus on those parts of our island which have been left behind by the surge in foreign investment.

And while this Budget delivers a €1.5bn increase in capital spending this year, this is just barely enough to undo the damage done by years of neglect by this government.

Having allowed this bottleneck to develop, there are also doubts about your ability to even deliver on this spending.

To give real certainty to any capital plans, this Budget needed to invest in a new generation of Irish workers.

It needed thousands of more people learning trades, and getting involved in apprenticeships.

It needed investment to support these positions, and to encourage more women to learn these essential skills.

Quite simply Minister, it failed to deliver on any of this.

And as part of Brexit, there is an opportunity to develop a long-term, and more sustainable vision for Irish industry and enterprise.

Unsurprisingly, it is an opportunity not seized in this Budget

The productivity gap between booming multinationals, and our indigenous sector, is growing.

In many ways, this is creating two economies on our island:

A high profit, high wage and extremely low tax environment for billionaire tech firms.

And a much lower wage, less productive cohort of small and medium businesses, whose biggest markets and opportunities for growth are now receding from the world.

In recent years the exports of small enterprises on this island have become increasingly concentrated in Britain and the United States, the President of the latter referring to these exports as his 'foe'.

World-class public services must be supported by a dynamic and cutting edge private sector.

But it must be socially responsible, rooted in community, and workers have a real stake.

Sinn Féin wants to rebalance our economy, and we believe Ireland and its workers deserve a new and ambitious industrial policy.

This must rebalance meaningful and productive economic activity to ensure it takes place in every community on our island.

With the damaging impact of Brexit becoming increasingly clear, there is an increased urgency for the development of a more stable vision for our economy.

More stable and transparent economic growth.

More stable and dependable corporate tax receipts.

A greater diversity of more reliable export markets.

And attracting high value added operations to our border, rural and western hinterlands.

Now is the time to invest and now is the need to give Irish business and Irish citizens a bold vision for the future.

Social Protection

And when support is needed, it will be needed most of all for the most vulnerable in society. You and the Taoiseach have said many times now that this Budget will reverse all cuts to social protection payments made in the past.

This is categorically untrue.

What about the blatant discrimination against young people in search of work – is their need of a basic income any less than someone a year or two older than them?

18-24 year olds expected to live on €112.70 a week while almost 8,000 of them are long term unemployed - pushing them further into poverty.

You have continued Fianna Fáil's discrimination against our young people - and you have widened the gap between young jobseekers and those over 26 years of age by €92.70.

What about social welfare recipients suffering from coeliac disease who used to get a little supplement to help towards the high cost of their medically necessary diet?

What about the sufferers of throat cancer and stroke forced on to a liquid only diet? Your government abolished that supplement back in 2014 – did you reverse that cut?

And while you've increased social welfare payments, you're forcing those living week to week to wait until March to access it!

You have not completely reversed the so-called era of austerity; you're prolonging some of the most vicious cuts made to social welfare.

And while you've finally invested some of what is needed in people, don't pretend that it's nearly enough to cope with the costs of living you've forced on them.

Don't pretend Minister that you've not prolonged the suffering by people with disabilities, lone parents and their children, by making them wait until you're ready to pay them.

But you carry on with the spin, that yours is the party for those in need.

Fianna Fáil brought forward a Dáil Motion in April, passed by the House to provide an occupational pension for 1,250 CE Supervisors and Assistant Supervisors in line with a 2008 Labour Court recommendation - clearly Fianna Fáil did not bother to negotiate for this in this Budget.

Instead those CE Supervisors who gave so much to their local communities will be left with nothing to show for it at retirement

And Sinn Féin welcome confirmation of the Christmas bonus this year.
It will go some way in lifting the hardship of families at a crucial time of year.

This is during a time of year when many citizens across the state become more vulnerable, and their state must be there to offer a helping hand.

This is especially true for those who consistently endure fuel poverty throughout the harshest months of the year.

The evidence also points to growing hardship among one parent families, those facing in work poverty, and citizens with disabilities.

These citizens are Sinn Féin's priority, and these are the citizens facing financial distress as a direct result of your policies to date.

Education

Education too is crying out for investment.

Class sizes across the state are growing, already among the biggest in Europe.

Our seats of public learning, in Universities and Institutes of Technologies, are falling behind the world.

For the first time in many years, there is no Irish institution in the top 100 in the world.

This isn't some arbitrary ranking to be achieved for its own sake.

It is an indication of how this society, and this government, value publically funded education.

And the verdict from this Budget is clear, Minister.

This government doesn't care enough about education in this state to give it the investment it needs.

There is little value placed on the children with special needs, who are hoping to win a lottery just to get a diagnosis.

The social and economic benefits of placing education at the heart of society are profound.

But clearly you're blind to them Minister.

A lack of investment is undermining our economic potential, and squandering what should be the greatest every generation of Irish pioneers and innovators.

This is simply ignoring a central pillar of any society wishing to lead the knowledge and digital economy opportunities of our time.

And while this undermines the quality of education, you're also doing your best to make education unaffordable too.

The Student Contribution Charge should be a thing of the past.

No government should be charging it's citizens thousands of euros to expand their minds and contribute to our society.

Sinn Féin would do what this Budget has once again failed to do, and we would begin to make it a thing of the past.

Rural Ireland & Irish Language

And no one in rural Ireland is expecting this Budget to change their lot any time soon.

I note the silence of many in Fianna Fáil who in previous weeks were making the closure of rural post offices a red line issue.

What is happening the people of rural Ireland isn't some natural culture change, or the result of young people having their hearts elsewhere.

Growing up surrounded by our natural heritage, and protecting that heritage, is the great pride of rural Ireland.

But is a pride that is becoming harder and harder to enjoy.

In fact, living as their families before them lived is becoming almost impossible.

People aren't leaving for the good of their health – rural Ireland has been pushed into a slow, steady decline for decades.

This Budget does nothing to make life easier on isolated rural communities.

And what little community services remained in villages across the state, have been under attack from this government.

Basic broadband is still a pipe dream for many families, and economic development remains Dublin centred.

This Budget needed to be a clear statement of intent – we are investing in rural Ireland, and we are supporting rural areas.

Infrastructure, public services, resourced gardaí, promotion of tourism and the Irish language – another year without investment in a new beginning for rural Ireland.

Is am cinniúnach é don Ghaeilge – tá sí mar theanga phobail i mbaol an bháis. Tá titim oll-mhór ar infheistiú sna heagrais Gaeilge agus Gaeltachta le deich bliain anuas. Agus an toradh ar sin ná go bhfuil titim suntasach ar líon na cainteoirí dúchasacha Gaeilge anois – 11 fán gcéad ar fud na ceantracha Gaeltachta de réir an daonáirimh is déanaí. Sin titim 11% i gceann cúig bliana amháin. Is tubaisteach an toradh é agus rachaidh cúrsaí chun donais mura ndéanann an rialtas infheistiú fhiúntach san earnáil seo.

Ach ní mar atá.

Agus muid i lár 'Bliain na Gaeilge' is maslach é an méid suarach atá faighte ag an nGaeilge agus an Ghaeltacht. Níl dóthain maoiniú faighte ag an pleanáil teanga. In athuir, tá an rialtas ag déanamh neamhaird ar Phlean Infheistíochta Conradh na Gaeilge. In athuir, tá an rialtas ag déanamh neamhaird ar an Ghaeilge a fhorbairt mór-thimpeall an stáit.

Tá an rialtas ag caitheamh céatadán fíor bheag den bhuiséad iomlán ar an Ghaeilge agus an Gaeltacht. Níl ach LEATH á chaitheamh acu i mbliana is mar a bhí i 2008. Ní haon ionadh go bhfuil géarchéim teanga buailte linn.

Is gá infheistiú sa Ghaeltacht agus sa Ghaeilge mar ábhair práinn. Is gá seirbhísí sásúla a bheith ag muintir na nGaeltachta agus na nOileáin maraon. Is gá deireadh a chur leis an bhéalghrá agus dul i ngleic leis an chreimeadh teanga go hionraic agus go sonrach.

Táim bródúil go bhfuil an Ghaeilge mar theanga náisiúnta againn. Tá gníomhaire teanga den scoth againn. Tá grúpaí pobail díograiseacha, diongbháilte againn. Ach is gá don rialtas aitheantas a thabhairt don phráinn atá ann i leith na Gaeilge de agus beart a dhéanamh de réir a briathar.

Prudence and the Rainy Day Fund

But as you've failed to provide what is truly needed for healthcare, to help renters, to build enough houses, to lower the cost of childcare and to increase incomes for struggling citizens...you've found money for some PR trickery.

It will be no surprise to you Minister that I refer to your so-called Rainy Day Fund.

It will also be no surprise that it has already been rejected by business and workers groups alike.

And there are many good reasons for this.

With the exception of a select few commentators, this proposals has been roundly dismissed, including by a majority of parties present here today.

What this suggests Minister is that this proposal isn't being guided by economic policy concerns.

So you took the hand me down Fianna Fáil Rainy Day Fund and you made it your own.

This is policy on the hoof, as it is clear its final design was being made up as you went along.

Now we know it was.

An FOI response obtained by Sinn Féin makes it clear that you can only use this fund to capitalise the banks.

I'm glad to put it on record, because the ordinary citizen doesn't believe for a second that this government and all it has done to them are putting away €500m a year in investment for their benefit.

Pull the other one Minister.

Their experience under both Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil is that they are first on the government's cut list and last on its bailout list when the economy hits the rocks.

They will share Sinn Féin's belief, that this is nothing but a nice-sounding bailout fund for the elites in this society, when their interests are threatened once again.

This is but another chapter in the long scam, the latest in a long list of excuses as to why this Fine Gael government refuses to invest what is needed in our society.

This is a sorry proposal, and alone it makes clear what this Budget is all about.

A Budget for a minority, while the majority pay the price of your government.

And we'll not forget that Fianna Fáil backs this proposal, presumably because they have realised that their original proposal was absolutely bananas.

Had we been burdened with the last Fianna Fáil manifesto, we would be putting almost €3 billion euro, aside this year in a so-called Rainy Day Fund.

I can only imagine how different this Fianna Fáil summer might have been – this wouldn't be a so-called housing Budget, because there wouldn't be a budget!

Fianna Fáil's idea of planning for the future means cuts to our public services to pay for it.

Furthermore, you present it to this house without any assurance that you can even legally use it for your stated purpose.

And this is why tonight across Ireland families will dream of the possibility of having their own Rainy Day Fund.

They can only imagine the security of having a few euro left over at the end of the month to prepare for life's unexpected surprises.

But they can't.

If their wages aren't disappearing into the pockets of landlords, or to banks charging twice the average EU interest rate for mortgages, they're lost to some of the highest childcare bills in the world.

By investing this Rainy Day money in public services, and in struggling families, you could choose to bring the spiralling costs of living to an end.

But for another Budget you have chosen not to.

If this money is for Irish society when we hit hard times, what do you call a homelessness epidemic and a health service which you've brought to its knees?

Is the sun shining on the families sleeping in Garda waiting rooms?

The clouds are out Minister, and it is pouring.

And this Budget you've made clear again that the people in emergency accommodation and on hospital waiting lists are still at the back of your queue.

And when there is another down turn, and it's raining even harder, they'll still be at the back of the queue.

This isn't a Rainy Day Fund Minister – it's a charade.

The ongoing Bailout

But, of course, no one should be surprised at this.

The policies of your government and how it has chosen to side with banks over people, are nothing short of disgraceful.

I shouldn't need to remind you Minister, that you represent a government which is the majority shareholder on some of the biggest banks in the state.

Like any shareholder, never mind one which commands the majority share, you have the opportunity to direct the values and principles of these banks.

In emergency circumstances, you have the opportunity to intervene.

So why Minister did you sit on your hands this summer as billions of euros worth of mortgages on Irish family homes were handed over to the rabid vulture funds.

These are billionaire funds preying on some of the most financially vulnerable citizens in the state.

Why, Minister has another Budget passed where you encourage the rank exploitation by foreign investors by presiding over a tax system which offers them tax breaks and tax neutrality?

Why will you not intervene?

It's because in the mind of this government the rights of international funds such as these trump the rights of Irish citizens in distress.

So blinded is Fine Gael by their deference to the market, they allow it scrape the maximum possible profit from Irish citizens, many in their greatest hour of need.

When they need their government, charged with protecting their rights, it is busy allowing their mortgages to be flogged off for an easy profit.

This is the long scam come full circle

Not only was there never the light of a new society at the end of the tunnel, your policies have allowed the elites in this society and the culture which drives them, to regroup.

There can be no other explanation.

Ten years on, the Irish people's bailout of the banks has allowed them to rise to the top of Irish society once again.

Who else in our society is allowed to forgo their taxes for up to 20 years at a time when they see profits of over €1bn?

Sinn Féin would bring back in the cap on losses the profitable banks can use to write off against profits so that they would be limited to 25% in a year and would run out after ten years. This, this year alone and for the next decade, would bring in €175m that could be funding public services.

But the banks must come first.

Who else in our society would be allowed to charge interest rates on mortgages that are double the European average?

Who else in our society could effectively rob Irish citizens of hundreds of millions of euros and be confident that they will never be held accountable?

When the Central Bank produced its Report on banking culture some weeks ago, I denounced it as a statement of the very obvious.

Irish citizens know that the banks they raised from the dead tower above them once again.

So as you propose another Budget together today, the real question is this:

Why do Fine Gael and Fianna Fail support policies that amount to an ongoing bailout of the banks at the cost of the Irish people?

You aren't tackling the culture. You are the culture. You embody it, you bring it to every Budget, and it guides your vision for Irish society.

You've brought it to this Budget – for another year at least you've ensured the untouchables can fill their pockets on the backs of Irish citizens.

A new economy, a new Budget

This way of government, these values that reek of injustice and elitism, must be cast aside.

Sinn Féin bring to the table a new set of values, values on which a new economy and a flourishing society must be built.

These values underpin our Alternative Budget, a roadmap to something better than the stale and harmful vision for Ireland presented by Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil

Every cent of it is costed. Costings are then confirmed by the Departments of Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform.

And every year, Sinn Féin balances the books.

We balance them while also accounting for the inevitable budgetary mess and under-budgeting of our health system.

And our Budget, like the governments, will be in a surplus this year.

This year our Budget proposals also reach the EU's Medium Term Objective, and will continue to lower the state's gross debt to our 60% of GDP target in the same year as government.

This is important to Sinn Féin because a government charged with stewardship of the economy, and investing in the full potential of every citizen, can do so only with well-managed and sustainable public finances.

It's also important because when Sinn Féin engage with the Budget process and produces our comprehensive alternative, we do so with two fiscal principles in mind:

Do these proposals create sound and future-proofed public finances?

Do they address the social and economic needs of Irish citizens?

These two benchmarks cannot be separated.

The health of our economy relies first and foremost on the economic opportunities available and taken by our citizens.

It relies on how inclusive our economy is, and what stake citizens truly have in it.

How many women are excluded from the workforce because of extortionate childcare?

How many people with disabilities are excluded by barriers that can and should be removed?

How much talent has been driven from our shores in the past decade?

How many communities have been cast aside and forgotten because they don't have the right postcode?

How many young people with big ideas living in rural Ireland can't get them off the ground without access to basic broadband?

We cannot have a truly sustainable economy until everyone is included in it, and their full potential is cherished and developed.

But the government is blinded by an ideology that sees people as mere cogs in a machine whose sole purpose is to serve one narrow minded agenda.

They have driven a narrative which says to the people 'you can have one, but not the other'.

They have turned the concept of a balanced budget into a byword for inaction, another term for waste, and ideologically-driven neglect.

When the finance minister says he's balancing the books, he means for another year he's letting hundreds of millions of public money be squandered in tax breaks and PR tricks instead of investing in the needs of citizens.

I have been a Finance Spokesperson for Sinn Féin for many years.

I must say balancing the books is the easy part.

The difficult task among those who shape economic policy is to make this policy in a way that is consistent with a clear, and transformative vision for Ireland.

When Sinn Féin say we balance the books, it also means our public finances are resilient, and stable.

But crucially it gives people a peace of mind that in doing this, we are investing in the urgent and complex needs of Irish society.

A Budget should have real objectives, real values

Our Alternative Budget, and any Budget delivered by a Sinn Féin government, would be focused on achieving meaningful social advances.

We have a long-term economic vision, a journey on which we believe our economy must travel to give every citizen the living standards and opportunities they deserve, as a birth-right.

Presenting a different list of incoherent, electorally driven choices is not the bold strategy we need to transform society.

It won't deliver the change needed to keep pace with the rapidly changing world around us.

These objectives are simple, and are grounded in our clear economic vision for our island.

Our Budget would, for the first time, begin to create world-class, universal public services, free at the point of use, dramatically raising living standards and lowering the cost of living.

Our Budget would meet the challenge of Brexit.

Our Budget would take the first step to eradicate poverty on this island, while providing the necessary supports to root out its causes.

Our Budget would create an Ireland of equals, with community, solidarity at its core, and where everyone chips in their fair share.

Budget 2019 also needs to reflect the Big Conversation that is now ongoing – it needs to start preparing for a United Ireland.

These are objectives, and a Budget should be a step towards these objectives.

And these goals are rooted in values which puts the welfare and advancement of citizens above all else.

Conclusion

But this is another Budget rooted in the long scam.

This is another Budget which ignores the real issues facing Irish society, in the hope that we'll forget.

Unless the people of Ireland decide to bring this scam, and this sham government, to an end.

Sinn Féin is bringing new, modern leadership to Irish politics, and with it we bring a new set of values, a new and ambitious vision for what our society needs, and what it could be.

Where people come first, not profit.

Where we invest in Irish potential, don't let it rot away.

Where we don't run our state, our banks, our tax and housing systems, as plunder for the wealthiest in this state and beyond.

Where everyone pays their fair share.

Where we invest to give security, world-class services, and a life of fulfilment and dignity to all.

Where we treasure compassion and social solidarity, not social division.

So in closing Minister I'm thinking of Amanda and Orla, and countless citizens like her betrayed by Budgets like these.

She say's 'enough is enough'.

She say's 'The Irish people deserve better'

She say's 'Ireland needs drastic change or it won't be worthy of living in'.

I wholeheartedly agree Minister.

It is well past time for change, the Irish people are crying out for it, and to make Budget's like these a thing of the past.

Sinn Féin would bring this change and our vision to government, a government which would have its own single minded purpose:

To forge a new Ireland, where no one is left behind.