

AILG

Association of Irish Local Government
Aontas Rialtas Áitiúil na hÉireann

AILG Analysis of the 2020 Programme for Government – Our Shared Future”

Implications for the Local Government Sector

June 2020

Introduction

The overall theme of the Programme for Government (PFG) document is one of facing not alone the challenges post Covid-19 but also the existing climate and bio-diversity emergency. The PFG seeks to action the delivery of a better quality of life for all, equality within society and a deeper sense of connection to the natural world around us, and each other.

The PFG commits to be a programme of recovery of our economy, a rebuilding of our society, renewal of our communities, and responding to the challenges we face both nationally and internationally (i.e. Brexit & Climate Change). The PFG commits that the incumbent government will be one of enterprise, creating new jobs, preparing for the jobs of the future, driving our economic recovery, and improving the quality of life for all our people.

Key Vision Commitments in Words

1. Economic recovery through stimulating the economy by investment in public infrastructure, and critical areas such as housing, healthcare, transport and energy.
2. The wellbeing of our nation - government will use wellbeing indicators as well as economic indicators to point out inequalities and help ensure that policies are driven by a desire to do better by people.
3. Deliver a better quality of life - facilitate and support remote working, reduce the time wasted in our cars and ensure that families have more time together.
4. Balanced regional development - invest in rural Ireland, ensuring global connectivity and ensure that all parts of our country are prosperous, sustainable and resilient.
5. Address challenge of Brexit, our relationship with the UK, Europe and a shared island with Northern Ireland
6. Commitments to arts and culture, the Irish language, sport to inspire us to healthier and better lives, tourism, ability for people to raise their children with real care, encourage youth political participation, promote digital safety and value our older people.
7. Helping people to repair our lives post Covid-19 with relevant support including mental health support.
8. PFG themed as a programme of recovery and reform.

Reforming and Reimagining our Public Life

Key Local Government Commitments (PFG pg. 132 – 133)

The overall commitment in the PFG on local government is to make;

- ❖ local government stronger, more accountable & more responsive to the communities it serves.
- ❖ ensure that people have a role in shaping the economic and social development of their own area with participation in local government actively encouraged and facilitated.
- ❖ further strengthen the relationship between citizens, councillors and councils.
- ❖ give towns a strong voice at the heart of local authority decision making.
- ❖ ensure that development of our towns is done sustainably, economically and in line with climate action goals.

Areas for consideration (**Areas identified in red are of particular relevance for the AILG**)

- Consider the expected Institute of Public Administration review of municipal districts with a view to strengthening local democracy and to identify local needs and initiatives needed to strengthen and grow our communities, villages and towns in a sustainable manner. This review will examine **the addition of directly elected, democratic bodies** in such areas and **below the municipal district level**.
- Examine ways to further streamline the commercial rates system post COVID-19.
- Build the capacity of local authorities to lead locally and engage citizens on climate change and biodiversity.
- Pass legislation to allow the first directly elected mayor in Limerick to be elected in 2021. We will support the first directly elected mayor with a financial package to deliver upon their mandate.
- **Allow for plebiscites to be held in 2024 in any local authority that wishes to have a directly elected mayor. Demand will be demonstrated at the request of the local authority or by way of a petition from 20% of registered voters.**
- **Where directly elected mayors are being established, we will transfer powers from the city and county managers to mayors directly elected by the people for a five-year term.**
- Establish in 2021 a Citizens' Assembly in 2021 to consider the type of directly elected mayor and local government structures best suited for Dublin.
- Examine devolving more powers to the local authorities through the legislative process to strengthen and enhance local democracy.
- **Provide tailored and appropriate training to local authority members.**
- **Implement the Moorhead Report on the Role and Remuneration of Local Authority Elected members within twelve months.**
- **Enable councillors to access research and training to support them in their duties.**
- Require each council to publish an annual statement of accounts to all homeowners and ratepayers giving a breakdown of how revenue was collected and how it was spent.

- **Enable Local Authorities to lead and collaborate on a 'Town Centres First' type approach to regenerate our towns and villages.**
- **Review participatory structures to enhance statutory Part VIII processes.**
- **Carry out a comprehensive review of PPNs and LECs to ensure they are fit for purpose for climate action and community development.**
- **Incentivise local authorities to bring forward pilot participatory budgeting projects.**
- Mandate the establishment of climate action SPCs in each local authority.
- **Consider the introduction of an alternate/substitute candidate list to cover parental and caring leave, long-term illness leave, resignation, career breaks and death in office.**
- Review and modernise of key performance indicators for local government learning from metrics used in other jurisdictions.
- We will seek to encourage the provision of public cultural and creative spaces as part of local development plans.
- We will develop a scheme between local authorities and Irish Water to provide drinking water fountains nationwide.
- Local authorities will have regard to the National Planning Framework and alignment to the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) when drafting development plans.
- We will enhance local government environmental enforcement capacity.

Greater diversity and gender equality in Local Government

Commitment in PFG for greater diversity and gender equality in local government, in particular where there are far too few women involved in elected politics. Practical measures will be introduced that will encourage more women to stand in local elections in 2024 including;

- Empower local authorities to encourage improved gender and ethnic mix in local elections.
- Require local authorities to be more flexible with meeting times and to use remote working technologies and flexible work practices to support councillors with parental or caring responsibilities, including childcare and reduced travel times and absences from work.
- Examine further mechanisms informed by best practice internationally to encourage political parties to select more women for the 2024 local elections.
- Consider the recommendations of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) report on 'Women beyond the Dáil, More Women in Local Government' with a view to reporting in 2021.

Other Priorities contained in the PFG that will have a Local Government/Elected Member Impact

1. Better Quality of Life for All

Acknowledgement that existing measures of economic performance often fail to measure real quality of life issues. Issues of equality of opportunity, distribution of wealth and income and only value public expenditure on the basis of the inputs used, not the outcomes achieved are often overlooked in measuring quality of life issues.

Commitment to develop a broader set of indicators for policy making, to include;

- I. A set of well-being indices to create a well-rounded, holistic view of how our society is faring.
- II. A balanced scorecard for each area of public policy focused on outcomes and the impact that those policies have on individuals and communities. **Initially this will be focused on housing**, education and health.

2. Town Centre First

Commitment to develop a Town Centre First policy i.e. implement a strategic approach to town centre regeneration by utilising existing buildings and unused lands for new development, and promote residential occupancy in our rural towns and villages. (use of the NPF as the template)

Priority will be given to

- Prioritising a Town Centres First collaborative and strategic approach to the regeneration of our villages and towns, using the Collaborative Town Centres Health Check (CTCHC) framework to gather data and lead actions.
- Bring forward an expanded Town and Village Renewal Scheme to bring vacant and derelict buildings back into use and promote residential occupancy.
- Provide seed capital to local authorities to provide serviced sites at cost in towns and villages to allow individuals and families build homes.

3. Transport

Commitment to promote cycling and pedestrian safety and enable this through improved design, increased separation and better signage and marking. Spending on walking and cycling infrastructure includes committed funding from Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport for active travel, greenways and an agreed pedestrian and cycling allocation. Initiatives to include;

- I. The Government will commit to an allocation of 10% of the total transport capital budget for cycling projects and an allocation of 10% of the total capital budget for pedestrian infrastructure. (Set at €360m per year for the lifetime of the Government)

- II. This commitment will deliver a five-year, multi-annual funding programme linked with a specific target of new separated cycling and walking infrastructure which will be delivered or under construction by end 2024.

Role for Local Authorities will include;

- Mandate that every local authority, with assistance from the NTA, adopts a high-quality cycling policy, carries out an assessment of their roads network and develops cycle network plans which will be implemented with the help of a suitably qualified Cycling Officer with clear powers and role.
- Expand and enhance the expertise on active travel needed to dramatically improve infrastructure and participation both in the NTA and local authorities, including by establishing Regional Cycle Design Offices, co-located in the seven Regional Design Offices for roads, to support local authorities.
- Dramatically increase the number of children walking and cycling to primary and secondary school by mandating the Department of Transport to work with schools across Ireland, local authorities, the Green Schools programme and local initiatives, including Cycle Bus and School Streets.
- Conduct a review of road traffic policy and legislation to prioritise the safety of walking and cycling.
- Development of an integrated national greenways strategy including an integrated national network of greenways which will be delivered in a coordinated approach between central government, local authorities and agencies.

Other Transport Areas

- Essential road and public transport maintenance and upkeep budgets will be fully protected to ensure continued public safety and connectivity.
- Develop and implement the existing strategies for our cities such as the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy, the Galway Transport Strategy, the draft Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy, as well as strategies being developed for Waterford and Limerick, and other projects progressing through planning.
- Develop and implement a sustainable rural mobility plan including an expanded Local Link service.
- Prioritise public transport projects that enhance regional and rural connectivity, in line with the National Planning Framework
- Review and extend the statutory remit of the NTA. This will allow the NTA to work with local authorities to develop transport strategies with a strong legal basis in our cities, towns and regions.
- Review and reduce speed limits where appropriate to address both road safety issues and carbon emissions and we will ensure greater compliance.

4. Jobs-led Recovery

Commitment to lead a jobs-led recovery to the Covid-19 crisis including a commitment to create 200,000 new jobs by 2025 with a focus on SME's, self-employed and large companies.

Proposed initiatives (that will have a local government impact) will include:

- Establishment of the Recovery fund as a targeted stimulus to increase domestic demand and employment with delivery of balanced regional growth being a crucial priority of this fund.
- Ensure a Just Transition as we end fossil-fuel dependence
- **Review the Business Restart Grant and consider further grant supports for SMEs**
- **Set out how commercial rates will be treated for the remainder of 2020**
- National Economic Plan to chart our longer-term jobs led recovery.
- **Expand the role of the Local Enterprise Offices (LEO), so they can go further in supporting local job creation and allow them to provide direct grant support to businesses with more than 10 employees**
- **Put in place the structures to enable a seamless transition from LEO to Enterprise Ireland so that ambitious and high performing companies, regardless of size, are supported in scaling and achieving their potential.**
- **Streamline the process when applying for LEO or Enterprise Ireland support so that SMEs have a clear roadmap of progression.**
- Leverage existing hubs and national and local networks which have developed in recent years to help deliver local job creation.
- Publish the National Retrofitting Plan as part of the National Economic Plan. This plan will set out our commitment to develop a new area-based and one-stop-shop approach to retrofitting to upgrade at least 500,000 homes to a B2 by 2030. Provision will also be made to group homes together to lower cost, starting in the Midlands area.

5. Local Property Tax

- We will bring forward legislation for the Local Property Tax on the basis of fairness and that most homeowners will face no increase.
- We will also bring new homes, which are currently exempt from the LPT, into the taxation system.
- **All money collected locally will be retained within the county. This will be done on the basis that those counties with a lower LPT base are adjusted via an annual national equalisation fund paid from the Exchequer, as is currently the case.**

6. National Planning

- The planned review of the National Development Plan (NDP) will be brought forward from 2022 and the review will set out an updated NDP for the period to 2031.
- The updated NDP will be aligned with the National Planning Framework (NPF).

- The NDP & NPF will recognise the crucial importance of balanced regional development, clustered and compact growth and improved connectivity to deliver economic prosperity and environmental sustainability.

(See Section on Balanced Regional Development at no. 13 below)

7. Tourism

Recognition that tourism is one of Ireland's most important economic sectors and its significance as a source of local employment and regional development. Commitment that tourism is placed at the centre of the proposed National Economic Plan and for the sector to contribute strongly to the overall target of creating 200,000 jobs by 2025 and reverse unemployment in communities throughout the country.

Proposed initiatives (that will have a local government impact) will include:

- Seek to emulate the success of the Gathering in 2013 by making 2023 the Year of the Invitation.
- Develop a new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy.
- Further develop the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and Ireland's Ancient East to bring further sustainable benefits to rural communities.
- Work with local authorities and appropriate agencies to continue development of an integrated national network of greenways to be used by commuters, students, leisure cyclists and tourists.
- Support cross-border greenway projects, such as the Sligo-Enniskillen Greenway, and continue to fund longer-term projects across the country like the Galway to Dublin Greenway, Fingal Coastal Way and the extension of the Waterford greenway into the city centre.
- Invest and promote blueways and recreational trails for the benefit of the local community and tourists alike.
- Expand the Walks Scheme to achieve a target of 80 trails
- Prioritise the work of Údarás na Gaeltachta in strengthening the identity and branding of our Gaeltacht areas and the development of a Tourism Strategy for the Gaeltacht areas.

8. Climate Action & A New Green Deal

The PFG commits to an average 7% per annum reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030 (a 51% reduction over the decade) and to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. The 2050 target will be set in law by the Climate Action Bill due to be introduced in the Dáil within the first 100 days of government alongside a newly established Climate Action Council. The Bill will define how five-year carbon budgets will be set. Every sector will contribute to meeting this target by implementing policy changes as outlined throughout this Programme for Government.

In order to achieve net zero emissions by 2050, the PFG states that "it is vital that there is adequate time and effort devoted to working with communities and sectors in designing and delivering the

pathway to achieve the goal in a fair way. This will mean creating fresh opportunities for those sectors most exposed by the transition and supporting those in our community least equipped to make the changes. This fundamental step change in ambition and broadening of our target horizon to a 7% reduction average per annum will be underpinned by the core philosophy of a Just Transition. We are committed to ensuring no sector of society or community is left behind in the movement to a low carbon future.”

Proposed initiatives (that will have a local government impact) will include:

- Delivery of a National Aggregated Model of Retrofitting reaching over 500,000 homes by 2030 as part of the EU Renovation Wave
- An unprecedented modal shift in all areas by a re-orientation of investment to walking, cycling and public transport.
- A new sustainable rural mobility plan.
- Give cross-government priority to the drafting of the Marine Planning and Development Bill so that it is published as soon as possible and enacted within nine months
- Finalise and publish the Wind Energy Guidelines having regard to the public consultation which has just taken place.
- Increase the target for the number of Sustainable Energy Communities.
- Support a new Green Flag programme for communities building on the successful programme in schools.
- Conclude the review of the current planning exemptions relating to solar panels to ensure that households, schools and communities can be strong champions of climate action.
- New standards to reduce emissions from F-gases and new requirements to make lighting more energy efficient
- Ensure that Bord na Móna is required to take into account climate, biodiversity, and water objectives as they deliver on their commercial mandate, through an amendment to the Turf Development Acts 1998.
- Ensure that local development plans are developed to stimulate economic activity for those areas which were expecting economic development arising from new fossil fuel infrastructure
- Publish and start implementing a new National Waste and Circular Economy Action Plan.
- Ensure that public procurement leads the transition to the Circular Economy
- Phase out the use of single use plastics.
- Ensure that every local authority has a sufficient number of biodiversity and heritage officers among their staff complement.
- Review the protection (including enforcement of relevant legislation) of our natural heritage, including hedgerows, native woodland and wetlands.
- Encourage and support local authorities to reduce the use of pesticides in public areas.

- Support local nature groups and local authorities to work in partnership on local biodiversity projects.

9. Water & Waste Water

The PFG commits to retaining Irish Water in public ownership and commits to continue to invest in infrastructure that is required to ensure continued supply of good quality drinking water and appropriate treatment of wastewater to protect our waterways.

Proposed initiatives (that will have a local government impact) will include:

- Develop a scheme between local authorities and Irish Water to provide drinking water fountains nationwide to reduce plastic bottle litter.
- Continue to help fund upgrades to wells.
- Continue to help fund upgrades to domestic wastewater treatment systems, including septic tanks.
- Continue to review and work to improve the inspection regime for the 500,000 domestic wastewater systems and incentivise upgrading works
- Launch a new revised and strengthened River Basin Management Plan in 2022 drawing on a collaborative approach between all stakeholders.
- Continue to support the Local Authority Waters Programme and expand the Community Water Development Fund.
- Continue to invest in a multi-annual capital funding programme to improve the quality of drinking water in group water schemes, while protecting water quality.

10. Healthcare & Health Promotion

- The HSE Board is now in place and must now bring forward detailed proposals on the six new regional health areas to deliver services for patients locally that are safe, high quality and fairly distributed.
- Ensure all local authorities embed actions on obesity prevention in future County and City Development Plans.
- Introduce planning restrictions on outlets selling high calorie 'junk-food' and beverages adjacent to schools.
- Embed ageing in place options for older people into the planning system as the county and city development plans are redrawn this year.
- Drawing on the Housing Need and Demand Assessments, develop demographic reporting tools and population projections to gain a better national understanding of the needs and location of housing options for older people.

- Increase the provision of smaller homes in developments, ensuring that older people can remain living in their communities close to essential services and facilities.
- Task local authorities to work with Approved Housing Bodies, co-operatives, private developers and Age Friendly Ireland on the development/redevelopment of older person housing.
- Maintain support for the Housing Adaptation Grant Scheme

11. Housing for All

Commitment that everybody should have access to good quality housing to purchase or rent at an affordable price, built to a high standard and located close to essential services offering a high quality of life. The PFG reiterates that provision of more affordable housing has a profound benefit socially and economically and believe the State has a fundamental role in enabling the delivery of new homes and ensuring that best use is made of existing stock.

The PFG states categorically that local authorities are central to delivering housing. (Pg. 60 PFG)

Proposed initiatives (that will have a local government impact) will include:

Over the next five years the PFG commits to

- Putting affordability at the heart of the housing system.
- Prioritise the increased supply of public, social and affordable homes.
- Progress a State-backed affordable home purchase scheme to promote home ownership.
- **Increase the social housing stock by more than 50,000, with an emphasis on new builds.**
- Tackle homelessness.
- **Ensure local authorities are central to delivering housing.**
- Work with the private sector to ensure an appropriate mix and type of housing is provided nationally.
- Improve the supply and affordability of rental accommodation and the security of tenure for renters.

Public and Social Housing

Commitment in the PFG for the State to play a greater part in directly providing affordable public and social homes. Commitment to invest in housing as a social and economic imperative focused on low and middle-income earners and developing sustainable mixed tenure communities.

Proposed initiatives (that will have a local government impact) will include:

- Increase the social housing stock by over 50,000 over the next five-years, the majority of which are to be built by local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies and State agencies.

- Ensure an appropriate mix of housing design types is provided, including universally designed units, accommodation for older people and people with disabilities.
- Put in place the appropriate controls to allow local authority discretionary funding to increase from €2m to €6m for social housing projects.
- Expand the role of Vacant Homes Officers in local authorities and support local authorities to bring vacant stock into productive use.
- Work on a package of reforms with Approved Housing Bodies to ensure they can access finance and move off balance sheet.
- Introduce a package of social housing reforms to:
 - a) Introduce a social housing passport to allow households move from one local authority list to another.
 - b) Maintain the right of social housing tenants to purchase their own home, but require them to be in situ for ten years, reduce the discount to a maximum of 25% and give local authorities the first call on purchase.
 - c) Standardise the differential rents regime across the country to ensure fairness.
 - d) Create a website to allow for choice based letting on a nationwide basis.
- Ensure that procurement policy for social housing has strong social clauses, is in line with the new Green Public Procurement policy and delivers strong value-for-money protections for public funds. Local authority direct build housing projects, specific timelines and all gateway approval processes will be transparent and open to public oversight

Housing for Travellers and Roma

- Ensure that the housing needs of the Traveller Community are met by local authorities and ensure that existing funding is fully drawn down and utilised.

Homelessness

Commitment made in the PFG to reduce and prevent homelessness as a major priority. Commitment to focus efforts on reducing the number of homeless families and individuals and work with local authorities and housing agencies to support them into long-term sustainable accommodation.

Initiatives will include;

- Increase funding and work with stakeholders, case workers and homeless people on a suite of measures to help rough sleepers into sustainable accommodation.
- Continue to expand the Housing First approach with a focus on the construction and acquisition of one-bed homes and the provision of relevant supporting services.

- Ensure the HSE provides a dedicated funding line and resources to deliver the necessary health and mental health supports required to assist homeless people with complex needs.
- Ensure Rent Supplement and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) levels are adequate to support vulnerable households while we increase the supply of social housing.
- Move away from dormitory-style accommodation on a long-term basis and aim to provide suitable tenancies.
- Ensure that aftercare and transition plans and protocols are developed for vulnerable homeless people or those at risk of homelessness leaving hospital, State care, foster care, prison or other State settings.
- Develop a National Youth Homelessness Strategy.
- Continue the Housing Agency's Acquisition Fund to purchase vacant stock from financial institutions.
- Increase funding for drug free hostels.
- Continue to fund the Mortgage Arrears Resolution Service, Abhaile.

Affordable Home Ownership

Measures to be brought forward to enable home ownership for more people through increased supply and interventions that make home ownership more affordable including;

- Progress a State-backed affordable home purchase scheme to promote home ownership.
- The Minister for Housing will bring forward a target for the delivery of affordable homes over the lifetime of the Government to be available for qualifying purchasers as a matter of priority. Recognising the ambition of the Government in this area, these homes could be delivered through a number of channels including local authorities (Serviced Sites Fund), introducing affordable homes requirements to Part V and the Land Development Agency and will be sold through the State-backed Affordable Purchase Scheme.
- Extend the Serviced Sites Fund.
- Provide seed capital to local authorities to provide serviced sites at cost in towns and villages to allow individuals and families build homes.
- Retain and expand the Help to Buy scheme for new properties and self-build properties.
- Expand the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan.
- Explore expanding Part V to encompass affordable purchase and cost rental units.
- Strengthen the Mortgage to Rent scheme and ensure that it is helping those who need it.

Rental

Commitment to improve the standards, security and affordability for renters. Local Authority involvement in this area will include;

- Reduce our reliance on the use of HAP for new social housing solutions as the supply of social and public housing increases.
- Instruct local authorities as part of their housing strategies to undertake and publish a rental needs assessment.

Land Development Agency

PFG states that in order to properly manage and utilise state-owned lands the Government will legislate to establish the Land Development Agency (LDA) on a statutory basis as a matter of urgency. It will be tasked to work with government departments, local authorities, state agencies and other stakeholders to assemble strategic sites in urban areas and ensure the sustainable development of social and affordable homes for rent and purchase. The LDA is to operate to the highest standard of corporate governance and has strong accountability and transparency requirements within its legislation and ensure that all procurement carried out by the LDA has strong value-for-money protections and oversight.

Purpose of the LDA is;

- Ensure that development of sustainable communities is the core objective of the LDA delivering sustainable, climate resilient, low-carbon housing.
- Task the LDA with driving strategic land assembly to ensure the sustainable development of new and regenerated communities well-served by essential services.
- Provide homes for affordable purchase, cost rental and social housing through the LDA.
- Ensure the LDA Board includes a cross spectrum of housing, financial, governance and other independent experts needed to fulfil its remit.
- Allocate Compulsory Purchase Order powers to the LDA.
- Complete the audit of State lands, identifying land banks in public ownership which are suitable for housing and other purposes.
- Mandate the LDA to work with local authorities, State agencies and other stakeholders to develop masterplans for strategic sites.
- Ensure that the LDA is subject to Freedom of Information.
- Require the LDA to give regular updates to the Oireachtas and review the legislation underpinning the LDA after a three-year period.
- Ensure the LDA uses modern methods of construction, including offsite construction to deliver high quality sustainable homes quickly and at scale. Local supply chains and labour should be used to increase community gain.

- Ensure that any State lands being offered for sale, whether owned by a local authority, government department, commercial or non-commercial semi-state agency or any other agency, would automatically first be offered to the LDA.
- Ensure the public housing rental stock on public lands is under the control of local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies or other similar bodies.

12. Housing Planning and Reform

- Introduce a 'use it or lose it' condition for all planning applications of ten units or more.
- Review and reform the judicial review process so that such reforms come into effect upon the establishment of the Environmental and Planning Law Court, while always adhering to our EU law obligations under the Aarhus Convention.
- Examine the creation of an independent Building Standards Regulator to oversee building control nationwide and to act as custodian of the Building Control Management System, including the re-establishment of the Building Regulatory Advisory Body.
- Introduce a new scheme to expand and build on the Living Cities Initiative to encourage infill development.
- Review how community gain can be captured through a review of the development levy process, rezoning system and planning permission conditions.
- Ensure that the Planning Regulator is adequately resourced and proactively engages with all stakeholders in the planning system, including informing and assisting the general public in inputting into local and regional development plans.
- Ensure construction materials and standards adhere to UN Sustainable Development Goals, EU Green Deal objectives and our emissions targets.
- Work to ensure our ageing population has a range of options for living independently and alternatives to long-term residential care to support ageing in place in line with the policy statement 'Housing Options for Our Ageing Population'.
- Avoid over-concentration of particular housing types in areas by requiring local authorities to complete Housing Need and Demand Assessments to inform delivery of an appropriate mix of housing typologies to cater for the needs of disparate household types and sizes.
- Reform and consolidate Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) laws.
- Enhance skills and capacity in the construction sector by increasing training places for apprentices, reviewing the funding model and expanding shared apprenticeship initiatives.
- Strengthen enforcement of the Vacant Site Levy and the keep the legislation under review.

- Work to enhance productivity in the construction sector, including utilising modern methods of construction. This work will be guided by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.
- Continue to ensure Home Building Finance Ireland is funding SME builders and helping to bring down the cost of construction finance.
- **Not extend Strategic Housing Developments beyond their legislative expiry in eighteen months' time.**
- Examine ways to ensure unused or underused building stock in cities and other urban centres can be made available for upgraded and sustainable housing and further develop 'Live Above the Shop' measures.

13. Balanced Regional Development

The PFG will enact measures to revitalise and reboot the economy across our cities, towns, villages and rural areas by;

- Ensure that policy and planning across Government in relation to the future provision of services and infrastructure will be fully aligned with the National Planning Framework to ensure balanced and sustainable development in Ireland over the next 20 years.
- **Develop the cities of Cork, Waterford, Limerick and Galway as viable alternatives to Dublin and use Project Ireland 2040 to help regional towns prosper.**
- **Continue the Project Ireland 2040 Rural and Regeneration Fund and Urban Regeneration and Development Fund.**
- **Drive an informed and proactive engagement approach in the planning system. We will involve communities at an early stage and instil the concept of community gain. The new Office of the Planning Regulator will have a role in this regard.**
- Recognise the importance of agriculture, fisheries, tourism and other sectors that support balanced regional development and employment.
- **Pursue a coherent policy approach to the enterprise needs of every part of Ireland through the Regional Action Plan for Jobs.**
- **Acknowledge the ongoing importance and role of regional assemblies in management of European Union funding programmes.**
- **Where possible prioritise the siting of new State agencies, departments and enterprises in towns and cities outside of Dublin.**

Rural Development & The LEADER Rural Development Programme

PFG commits to progressive actions to be taken to support livelihoods and enhance the rural environment. Commitment to ensure our regional towns and villages act as hubs of sustainable development to serve a thriving hinterland.

Initiatives to include;

- Publish and implement a new Rural Policy to build on the progress of the Action Plan for Rural Development to promote rural recovery and development in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.
- Initiate a regular series of Rural Ideas Fora to foster ongoing contributions from communities to inform rural policy development and innovation.
- Invest in infrastructure, including broadband and waste and waste water infrastructure, to support the development of rural towns and villages.
- Prioritise the upkeep and expansion of parks, green spaces and other recreational infrastructure for community enjoyment and biodiversity enhancement.
- Support, through a consultative process, community groups, arts and cultural bodies, sports clubs, voluntary organisations and charities to recover and enhance their impact in the aftermath of COVID-19.
- Support a LEADER Programme and deliver a Rural Development Programme which is led by independent Local Action Groups and supported by Local Community Development Committees.
- Prioritise a state-led Rural Development Programme to bridge the gap between the wind-up of the existing LEADER Programme and implementation of the new Programme.
- Simplify and reduce bureaucracy and promote the role of independent Local Action Groups (LAGs), while ensuring that strong accountability and transparency mechanisms are in place to protect taxpayers' money.
- Prioritise national and local government support to pursue extra EU funding opportunities through Community Led Local Development (CLLD).
- Apply to the EU for exemption from State Aid rules constraining the potential of the LEADER Programme to help communities and small business, particularly in the context of COVID-19.
- Review capital funding restrictions under the LEADER Programme for broadband.
- Increase Rate of Aid available to private enterprise through LEADER from 50% to 75% for capital projects.

High-Speed Broadband and Remote Working

PFG commits to ensuring access to high quality internet connections for people across Ireland is essential to the development of all parts our country, socially and economically. Facilitating remote working and innovation opportunities is essential in addressing climate change, adapting to an evolving economy and competing internationally.

Initiatives will include;

- Seek to accelerate the roll out of the National Broadband Plan.
- Work with local councils to establish designated groups to help facilitate the local rollout of the infrastructure.

- Learn from initiatives like the Ludgate Centre in Skibbereen to enable greater public/private cooperation in developing digital hubs and smart working facilities.
- Continue to support the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce.
- Support the development of Broadband Connection Points across the country, and the development of digital hubs which can support remote working in as many of the Broadband Connection Points as possible.
- Expand the provision of free-to-use wireless internet connectivity in rural areas through the roll-out of Broadband Connection Points, WiFi4EU public Wi-Fi networks and the Digital Innovation Programme.
- Develop a national remote working policy to facilitate employees to work from home or from co-working spaces in rural areas and to support the retention of skilled young people in rural communities.
- Mandate public sector employers, colleges and other public bodies to move to 20% home and remote working in 2021.
- Examine the feasibility and merits of changing tax arrangements to encourage more people to work remotely

Improving connectivity and transport in rural Ireland

Initiatives will include;

- Further integrate Local Link services with other existing public transport services (e.g. the National Transport Authority) and build on exemplar models of integrated rural transport, improve connectivity and access for rural dwellers to work, study, social activities and public services while reducing car dependence.
- Ensure sufficient investment in the local and regional road network to maintain roads to a proper standard, deal with road safety challenges and improve regional accessibility.
- Develop a subsidised Local Area Hackney Scheme informed by the pilot in 15 designated areas of rural Ireland which are too small or remote to support a full-time taxi or hackney service.
- Ensure the Local Improvement Scheme is funded into the future.

Young People and Rural Ireland

Initiatives will include;

- Establish a Rural Youth Assembly as part of a National Youth Assembly to allow young people in rural Ireland identify and influence policy issues that impact on them and their future.
- Seek to increase funding for the national network of Comhairle na nÓg.
- Encourage young people to participate in community development initiatives through special awards for youth-led involvement e.g. Tidy Towns Youth Award.
- Establish a national network of Teen Sheds similar to Mens' Sheds.

- Commission research using the ESRI's Growing up in Ireland on outcomes for children and young people in rural Ireland.
- Support the work of Young Social Innovators to assist young people to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath in Ireland, to address issues facing their communities and the country as a whole, and to harness their energy, skills and talent.
- Expand access to social innovation programmes to all post primary schools.

14. Agriculture and Food

PFG identifies areas of local authority input including;

- Support local authorities to expand the number of farmers' markets, farm shops and food emporiums and support the formation of community-owned markets in all towns, showcasing local food produce from local farmers, growers and food producers.
- Work with local authorities and local communities to develop community gardens, allotments and urban orchards.
- Introduce local food procurement policies for the public sector to encourage the availability of nutritious, locally sourced food in public sector areas such as schools, hospitals, government buildings, prisons, etc.
- Complete a national hedgerow survey
- Task Climate Action Regional Offices to work with public bodies to review land available for planting providing feedback on the potential in this area by the end of 2020
- Engage with local authorities and local communities in a radical expansion of urban tree planting and neighbourhood and community forests
- Prioritise equine welfare based on a robust traceability system, building on existing inspectorate supports across the country and ensuring a consistent approach to dealing with horse welfare issues across local authorities.
- Develop additional urban horse welfare programmes, working with local authorities, charities and community stakeholders to provide stabling facilities and educational programmes.

15. Arts and Culture

Community Arts initiatives will include;

- Develop initiatives enabling the National Cultural Institutions to go on tour to towns across the country.
- **Develop innovative support schemes for small local festivals, amateur dramatics and musicals.**

- Encourage the next generation of young artists by creating new bursary schemes.
- Consider creating a new National Town of Culture competition.
- Work to ensure that local authorities are sufficiently supported to allow the fulfilment of long-term strategic cultural and arts planning at a local level.
- Expand Creative Schools, ensuring every child in Ireland has access to tuition and participation in art, music, drama and coding. Ensure it continues beyond the life of Creative Ireland and to work with the Department of Education to achieve this.
- Foster further collaboration between local authorities and local arts organisations through Creative Communities.

Night-Time Culture

The PFG confirms that social distancing will have a major impact on night-time culture. Commitment given that government will engage with stakeholders from across the night-time culture sector to develop innovative approaches to enable the sector to function and to create a vibrant, diverse and sustainable night-time economy in Ireland including;

- Establish, in the first thirty days of Government a Night-time Economy Taskforce.
- Conduct a full review of the regulations and policy framework governing our night-time culture at national and local level, including the staggering of trading hours for pubs, late bars, clubs and restaurants.
- Modernise our licensing laws and application processes.
- Support the establishment of the Night-Time Culture Mayors proposed for Dublin and Cork and examine the establishment of local committees to advance and improve our night-time entertainment and creative offerings in other urban areas.

Creative, Cultural Infrastructure & Commemoration

Creative, Cultural Infrastructure & Commemoration initiatives will include;

- Examine 'Agent of Change' initiatives whereby existing cultural spaces have to be taken into account when building.
- Support measures to increase the provision of affordable work spaces for artists and creative practitioners.
- Examine 'meanwhile use' legislation for vacant buildings with a view to its potential application in Ireland.
- Ensure the timely delivery of arts and culture capital investment commitments, including our National Institutions, as outlined in Project Ireland 2040.

- Ensure an inclusive model of commemoration planning, informed by the guidance of the Expert Advisory Group.
- Request the Expert Advisory Group to examine the possibility of annual state commemorations for figures with significant positive contributions to Irish culture and heritage.
- Encourage local authorities to maximise engagement and facilitation with communities in developing commemorative events.

Built Heritage

Built heritage initiatives will include;

- Publish and implement the new all-of-government heritage policy and begin its nationwide implementation.
- Explore multi-annual funding models and ensure adequate funding is made available for the implementation of each County Heritage Plan.
- Continue to support the role of the Heritage Officers in the areas of heritage education, health and wellbeing and citizen science.
- Encourage each local authority to appoint a Conservation and Repurposing Officer.
- Build on community led schemes such as the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Structures at Risk Fund, which provide grant aid to protect and maintain important historic buildings in our local communities.
- Encourage traditional building skills in devising an apprenticeship programme with the sustainable construction sector focusing on heritage disciplines and crafts.
- Expand the Heritage in School Scheme so that more students can enjoy our rich natural cultural heritage.
- Continue with the expansion of the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage and include modern and industrial buildings.
- Continue to develop and implement a master plan of our National Parks and National Reserves.
- Establish a scheme for all schools, promoting visits to historic OPW sites in Ireland.

16. Community Development, Social Inclusion and Public Participation

Community Development, Social Inclusion and Public Participation initiatives will include;

- Carry out a comprehensive review of Public Participatory Networks and Local Economic and Community Plans to ensure they are fit for purpose for Climate action and Community Development

- Task every Local Authority/Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) with developing a County Integration Strategy to promote, through a participative process, the inclusion of minorities. Support the Community Sponsorship Ireland programme to support the integration of refugees.
- Publish a strategy to support volunteering, including development of comprehensive supporting infrastructure and measures to disseminate best practice.
- Fully implement Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities, the five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland up to 2024.
- Introduce, on a phased basis, a number of projects similar in approach to Community Development Projects (CDPs).
- Commit to the introduction of an annual small capital grants programme administered through local authorities for the maintenance, improvement and upkeep of community centres.
- Support and enhance the Social Innovation Fund Ireland programme to help secure additional philanthropic funding sources specifically for community-based programmes and projects in the areas of climate justice, rural and community development.
- Update the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Acts 2005-12 to expand the eligibility of projects and programmes under the funding scheme to include biodiversity, environmental awareness and climate change.
- Ensure that Men's and Women's Sheds are properly resourced.
- Refine and build on a range of programmes to support communities including CLÁR, the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP), Community Service Programme (CSP) and Community Enhancement Programme (CEP). Community Call
- Sustain Community Call as we emerge from COVID-19, and examine the merits of maintaining it on a more permanent footing as a means of linking the wide range of services and supports available at local level and into an overarching cross-departmental group at national level.

Libraries

Commitment to support our library network to meet the needs of our ever-changing society and implement the public libraries strategy, Our Public Libraries 2022. Schools in Rural Ireland