

Social  
Democrats

The Social Democrats are...

**DEDICATED TO  
DUBLIN**

**A policy rethinking our capital city**



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## Key Points

In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Make implementing the key findings of the Dublin City Taskforce's report a priority
- Ringfence initial funding of €200m to begin the implementation process immediately.
- Proceed with creating a Directly Elected Mayor for Dublin.
- Empower Dublin City Council to apply a higher rate of tax to property lying vacant in certain areas of the city.
- Use Compulsory Purchase Orders for buildings in locations where vacancy and dereliction are particularly problematic or unsightly.
- Prioritise making above-the-shop living a reality in Dublin city centre, and reform the schemes we know are not working to deliver this.
- Work with Dublin City Council to establish a Cultural Corridor from Henrietta Street to St James's Gate, taking in O'Connell Street, College Green, Dame Street and Thomas Street along the way.
- Create an Event Policing Strategy to ensure a dedicated Garda Service for events in the capital.
- Work to increase the permanent garda presence in Dublin city.
- Re-municipalise waste collection in Dublin city, beginning with gradually phasing out side-by-side domestic waste competition and withdrawing the derogation on bagged waste.
- Empower Dublin City Council (and all city councils) to apply a 'tourist bed tax' to hotel beds in the city centre.
- Split food and accommodation businesses for the purposes of VAT, and apply a reduced 9 per cent VAT rate on food and beverages, to help struggling small businesses.
- Assist Dublin City Council to identify appropriate venues for playing pitches that would be held as community assets in the city, targeted for use by at-risk youths.

## Introduction

Dublin has not been a priority for the current government. Under their watch, Dublin city is decaying, and it has been in decline for years.

From increased anti-social behaviour and filthy streets to chronic vacancy and dereliction, our capital city has been neglected. A range of urgent measures to tackle creeping dereliction, littered streets, and a policing presence dependent on garda overtime. Dublin needs more than empty political platitudes; it needs a plan backed by significant resources.

The Social Democrats welcomed the report of the Dublin City Taskforce, but ringfenced funding is key, lest the report join the pile of other proposals on the regeneration of the city that have never been followed through on. We will make implementing the key findings of the Dublin City Taskforce's report a priority, and ringfence initial funding of €200m to begin the process.

We want to make 'above-the-shop' living a reality; use a streamlined CPO process to buy vacant and derelict sites and buildings; increase the Garda presence in the capital; and create a Cultural Corridor from Henrietta Street to St. James's Gate.

Other initiatives will include a higher rate of vacancy tax in strategic areas of the city, where dereliction and vacancy are creating eyesores; Dublin City Council taking back control of waste collection; a new tourist bed tax, with revenue ringfenced for amenities and to keep the city clean; and an increase in playing pitches and sporting amenities for children and young people.

For years now, we have heard commentators in government bemoaning the problems Dublin is facing, without doing anything to address those issues. We need politicians, and a government, who can do more than *describe* a problem. We need politicians who will **act** to save our capital city.

## Confronting Dereliction and Vacancy

Some of the most important – and potentially most picturesque – streets and areas of our capital city are blighted with vacancy and dereliction.

Dublin is not just any town or city; as our capital city and home to a majority of our most high-profile historic sites and cultural institutions, it is doubly important that vacancy and dereliction do not take hold.

The Social Democrats believe it is justified to have a higher rate of vacancy tax specific to Dublin city. We believe the City Council should be able to take a ‘Use It or Lose It’ approach to property lying vacant in certain areas of the city.

Under a Social Democrats government, Dublin City Centre will have the power to set a vacant site tax at a rate to encourage owners to renovate, use, or sell.

We will also use Compulsory Purchase Orders for buildings in locations where vacancy and dereliction are particularly problematic or unsightly, and give the City Council the power to compel owners to make, in certain circumstances, vacant sites available to the Council for part-time usage. This should be complemented by a move to convert a vacant and no-longer-necessary retail spaces to cultural use.

In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Empower Dublin City Council to apply a higher rate of tax to property lying vacant in certain areas of the city.
- Use Compulsory Purchase Orders for buildings in locations where vacancy and dereliction are particularly problematic or unsightly.
- Give the City Council the power to compel owners to make vacant sites available to the Council for part-time usage.
- Convert a vacant and no-longer-necessary retail spaces to cultural use.

## Making Above-The-Shop Living a Reality

To help breathe life back into Dublin city, we need to get people back living in what are now “vacant above-the-shop units’ (VATSUs) in the city centre.

Existing supports – like the Living City Initiative, planning exemptions, and the Repair and Lease Scheme – which aim to support the conversion of these units into much-needed homes have not worked. This is largely because these types of refurbishments can be complex and fraught with uncertainty.

This is not just a problem in Dublin, but in other cities and towns.

Funding to support a feasibility study at the outset of projects should be provided, to make this process easier. This would give those considering carrying out these refurbishments a better idea of the overall cost and complexity of projects and would remove some of the uncertainty that might dissuade them from proceeding.

When it comes to the Living City Initiative, or the Vacant Homes grant, the requirement to make payments upfront and retrospectively apply for tax rebates or grants is another inhibiting factor which is stalling projects. These schemes should be reformed so that staged payments or rebates can be made or applied for.

Another key reform needed is access to information and advice. Given the importance of this issue, there should be a dedicated point of contact in the Dublin City Council planning office to provide information and demystify the process. A specific booklet, or manual, for renovating above-the-shop units should also be created.

As far back as the 1990s, VATSUs have been identified as an important means of boosting the supply of homes in cities and towns, and breathing life into urban communities. Despite this, there has never been a scheme that has worked to scale up the delivery of these refurbishments. Instead of talking about the importance of above-the-shop living, it is time that something was actually done about it. In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Prioritise making above-the-shop living a reality in Dublin city centre.
- Reform the schemes we know are not working to deliver this.
- Reform the tax rebate and grant processes to encourage action.



## A Directly Elected Mayor for Dublin

The creation of a directly elected mayor (DEM) for Dublin has the potential to be transformative for the city. It would also help balance the power of the unelected Chief Executive with added democracy. The Social Democrats welcomed the advent of the directly elected mayor (DEM) for Limerick and believe the further roll-out of this position for Dublin is the way forward.

We propose retaining the Chief Executive role to manage the operations of the council, alongside a DEM who would take a leading strategic role. The DEM would have budgetary oversight powers and would assist the Chief Executive in drawing up the annual budget with assistance from the Councillors.

We would also give the DEM responsibility for initial drafts of development plans, with input from City Councillors who would approve the final version.

We would like to see the mayor of Dublin eventually take on executive responsibilities in areas like housing, planning, waste management, community and traffic policing. We are particularly keen to see a DEM take a role in transport policy, with a key role in setting Dublin Area Transport Strategies. They would also take the lead on areas such as economic and tourism development, engaging with Gardaí, and creating safer public spaces.

We need accountability for people who are making the important decisions. Local authority chief executives have a lot of power, and yet there is no way for voters to remove them if they do not like the job they are doing.

Personnel and financial resources being transferred as appropriate for the mayoral office to function. As the DEM for Dublin is not intended to be solely a figurehead, they should have responsibility for strategy setting and an appropriate level of power to support the functions of the role.

The mayoral position needs significant power for it to be worthwhile. The entire point of having a directly elected mayor for Dublin is that they have a personal mandate, and their decisions should carry weight. The envisaged strategic policy role for the mayor will be difficult to realise without greater access to finance and devolved powers. The size of the budget is vital. If the Dublin Mayor doesn't have a budget to enact their mandate, no mandate might as well exist. More responsibility for decisions around money already spent in the city should be devolved.

## A Cultural Corridor for Dublin City

In Government, we would work with Dublin City Council to establish a Cultural Corridor from Henrietta Street to St James's Gate, taking in O'Connell Street, College Green, Dame Street and Thomas Street along the way.

There would be an additional focus on maintaining the streets along this route, and emphasising their historical and cultural aspects.

Dublin City Council could then promote this walk, bookended as it would be by two popular attractions; the Tenement Museum and the Guinness Storehouse.

There would also be greater incentives to take over, or transform, vacant units on this strip.

In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Work with Dublin City Council to establish a Cultural Corridor from Henrietta Street to St James's Gate, taking in O'Connell Street, College Green, Dame Street and Thomas Street along the way.
- Conduct a consultation on the types of additional attractions and amenities that people would like to see developed on this route.
- Put an additional focus on maintaining the streets on this Corridor, and emphasising their historical and cultural aspects.

## Transport

One of the starkest differences between Dublin and other European capitals is its poor public transport system.

Under successive Irish Governments, one abandoned or delayed public transport plan has followed another. Transport policy has been too focused on moving cars, not moving people.

The failure of successive Governments to properly plan, fund and deliver public transport programmes for Dublin means that the citizens of our capital city live daily with the consequences.

Traffic congestion is a regular occurrence. We don't do enough to disincentivise the most environmentally damaging forms of transport. Despite improvements, cycling is not as safe as it could be.

In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Proceed with building the MetroLink between Dublin city centre and Swords.
- Re-examine current plans for MetroLink, including commissioning an independent study on continuing the line to southwest Dublin.
- Continue with planned expansions of the DART and Luas, including the proposed Luas line to Finglas.
- Proceed with the rollout of Bus Connects.
- Prioritise the completion of the Greater Dublin Area Cycling Network Plan.

## An Event Policing Strategy for Dublin City

As the capital city and Ireland's largest city by far, Dublin hosts a disproportionately high number of large or national events; everything from national and international sporting events to concerts and festivals, as well as marches and protests.

Each of these puts a policing burden on the members of An Garda Síochána stationed in the city, and takes them away from their normal policing duties. It's not right that the city, and its citizens and visitors, should be deprived of normal levels of policing because of this.

We know we need more gardaí on the streets of the city anyway. We also need a separate Event Policing Strategy for Dublin, so the city isn't losing gardaí from important city centre stations and locations at key times.

In Government, we will create an Event Policing Strategy to ensure a dedicated Garda Service for this. Police at important events should be in addition to – rather than taking from – garda resources already deployed to the city.

In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Create an Event Policing Strategy to ensure a dedicated Garda Service for events in the capital.
- Work to increase the permanent garda presence in Dublin city.

## A Cleaner City Centre

Having a multitude of different waste collectors in the same area (and often the same street) of the city is inefficient.

The Social Democrats will work towards the re-municipalisation of waste collection in Dublin city, beginning with gradually phasing out side-by-side domestic waste competition within municipal areas. We will also withdraw the derogation on bagged waste immediately.

We believe these measures will lead to a far cleaner city centre.

## Supporting Small Businesses

Small businesses, particularly in hospitality, are the backbone of so many of our cities, towns and villages. Regrettably, many of those businesses in Dublin city are now facing closure, with hugely negative impacts not just on staff and suppliers, but on the wider community and city scape.

Many much-loved cafes and restaurants in Dublin city have closed in the last two years, citing difficult trading conditions and a struggle to make viable profit margins on food and drink.

So much of what the government has provided in support has either been ineffective or overly complicated, to the point that businesses can't access supports.

The Social Democrats believe it is necessary to give a break to these businesses. We would split food and drink businesses from the accommodation sector for the purposes of VAT, and apply a reduced 9 per cent VAT rate on food and beverages.

VAT is a blunt instrument, but this is an emergency measure, designed to get support to businesses quickly, and is necessary to stop the further closure of otherwise viable businesses.

In Government, the Social Democrats would:

- Split food and accommodation businesses for the purposes of VAT.
- Apply a reduced 9 per cent VAT rate on food and beverages.
- Conduct, as a matter of urgency, a review of supports to the sector.

## Funding for the City Council

A small 'tourist bed tax' is standard in most large European cities.

In Government, we would empower Dublin City Council (and all city councils in Ireland) to apply such a tax to hotel beds in the city centre, with the money to be ringfenced for use by Dublin City Council to improve amenities, and keep the city centre clean and maintained.

In Government, the Social Democrats would:

- Empower Dublin City Council (and all city councils) to apply a 'tourist bed tax' to hotel beds in the city centre.

## City Centre Amenities

Dublin 1 and Dublin 8 in particular suffer from a severe dearth of sports playing areas, particularly a lack of football pitches.

Aside from depriving the city's youth of opportunities to be active, the lack of such facilities means there is less to distract young people from engaging in anti-social behaviour.

In Government, the Social Democrats would:

- Assist Dublin City Council to identify appropriate venues for playing pitches that would be held as community assets in the city, targeted for use by at-risk youths.

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