



Pre-Budget Submission 2026

Prevention, Participation, Progress:

Strategic Investment in Ireland's Social
Infrastructure Will Deliver Long-Term
Savings and Stronger Communities

Submitted by

extern

Forward

Extern's Call to Government: Prioritising Ireland's Most Vulnerable in Budget 2026

Extern services are designed to intervene early, locally, and with compassion, ensuring no one is left behind. With the support of the Government, we can extend the reach and impact of these proven interventions to more individuals and families who need them most. However, the growing demand for support, combined with increasing pressure on service delivery budgets, cannot be met without greater and sustained investment.

Budget 2026 presents a vital opportunity to act decisively. By investing in what works, Government can help prevent crisis, reduce long-term costs, and ensure that those already facing the greatest disadvantage are not pushed further into poverty and exclusion.

Recommendations for Budget 2026

1

Invest an additional **€2 million annually to support Tusla to expand family-based short-term respite services** delivered by Extern Youth Villages, a proven service that prevents placement breakdowns, reduces reliance on costly emergency care, and delivers better outcomes for children and families.

This aligns with Budget 2026's focus on preventative, cost-effective care and supports the Programme for Government's commitment to reducing poverty and strengthening family wellbeing.

2

Government to urgently expand the Bail Supervision Scheme (BSS) into a national programme through an additional **€3 million annual investment**, enabling access for approximately **240 young people** at risk of remand across Ireland.

This supports justice reform, reduces reliance on costly detention, and aligns with the Children Act 2001 and Budget 2026's emphasis on value for money and community-based alternatives.

3

·**Invest €3 million annually** in multiannual funding to expand respite and day services for neurodiverse individuals to support their integration into their communities. This investment will increase service capacity, reduce waiting lists, and extend access to underserved regions, supporting approximately **20 individuals** currently excluded from appropriate community-based supports.

This supports inclusive communities, reduces long-term care costs, and aligns with the National Development Plan's investment in disability services and Budget 2026's focus on social infrastructure.

4

Prioritise early, community-based interventions delivered by the **Community and Voluntary sector in Budget 2026**, recognising their proven economic and social value. The sector services are aligned with the Programme for Government's goals to reduce poverty, strengthen inclusion, and build safer, more resilient communities.

Strategic investment in this sector supports the Government's commitment to value for money, preventative care, and local service delivery, key themes in the Summer Economic Statement and the revised National Development Plan.



Prevention, Participation, Progress: Strategic Investment in Ireland's Social Infrastructure Will Deliver Long-Term Savings and Stronger Communities

Extern delivers frontline, community-based services that empower individuals and families facing complex personal and societal challenges across Ireland.

This submission outlines three priority areas for strategic investment in Budget 2026, each offering proven, cost-effective, and preventative support:

- 1. Family-based short-term crisis and planned respite in Extern youth and family centres**
- 2. Youth Bail Supervision**
- 3. Short-term planned respite and day supports for neurodiverse individuals, particularly in the Southwest**

These services deliver measurable outcomes for our commissioner-funders, Tusla, the Department of Justice, and the HSE, while reducing long-term costs and strengthening communities.

Strategic Alignment with the Programme for Government

Budget 2026 marks the first under the new Programme for Government, which commits to building safer, more inclusive communities, supporting a caring society, and tackling poverty and social exclusion.

Extern's trauma-informed, community-based interventions directly support these goals by reducing reliance on institutional care, custodial sentences, and emergency placements. Our services are designed to empower individuals, sustain families, and promote long-term wellbeing.

Extern have set out three service priorities in this pre-budget submission.

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Priority 1: Expand Respite Services for Children and Families

Why It Matters

Tusla's Spending Review (2020) highlights the high cost of residential care, averaging €309,500 per child annually. In contrast, Extern's respite services cost between €11,000–€14,000 per child per year, representing a 95% cost saving while maintaining family unity and delivering better outcomes.

This presents a compelling economic and social case for increased investment in community-based alternatives.

The Challenge

Families across Ireland are facing growing pressures that threaten child wellbeing and placement stability. Key indicators include:

- **Rising demand for child protection services:** Tusla reports consistent increases in referrals, reflecting escalating family stress.
- **Placement instability:** Foster placements often break down due to caregiver burnout and lack of support, leading to costly residential care.
- **Mental health and behavioural challenges:** Children in care frequently present with trauma-related behaviours requiring intensive support.
- **Economic pressures:** The cost-of-living crisis has intensified stress in vulnerable households, increasing the risk of neglect and separation.

These trends underscore the urgent need for proactive, community-based supports that intervene before crises escalate.

Priority 1: Expand Respite Services for Children and Families

Extern's Proven Model

Extern's short term respite services, commissioned by Tusla, offer a preventative, child-centred alternative to institutional care. Key strengths include:

- **Short-term relief for families and carers:** Respite reduces stress, prevents burnout, and sustains placements.
- **Tailored support:** Services are designed around each child and family's needs, promoting stability and emotional wellbeing.
- **Community-based delivery:** Children remain in familiar environments, avoiding the disruption of residential care.
- **Demonstrated impact:** Evidence shows reduced placement breakdowns, improved family functioning, and better long-term outcomes.

Extern's model is more human in scale, more effective, and significantly more affordable than traditional approaches.

Our Ask

Extern is calling for:

- Increased investment in community-based respite services for children and families, scaling Extern's proven model nationally
- A dedicated funding stream within Tusla's budget to expand access to respite for families under pressure
- Support for workforce development to ensure high-quality, trauma-informed care
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An additional €2 million annual investment would allow Tusla to commission the expansion of the Extern respite model into new areas currently without access and scale up in high-need regions, supporting approximately 160 more children and families across Ireland.

Priority 2: National Expansion of the Bail Supervision Scheme (BSS) in support of the Youth Justice Strategy 2021 – 2027

Why It Matters

Youth detention is extremely costly, while the Bail Supervision Scheme (BSS) offers a more economical and rehabilitative alternative.

- Detention in Oberstown costs approximately **€232,500 per young person annually** (Oberstown Annual Plan 2023).
- **BSS operates at approximately €20,000 per young person annually**, less than one-tenth of the cost.
-

Despite its success, young people outside the current pilot areas (Dublin, Cork, and Limerick) lack access to BSS, limiting courts' ability to offer community-based alternatives.

The Children Act 2001 mandates detention as a last resort, yet in practice, courts often have no viable alternative for high-risk youth. Expanding access to BSS would deliver significantly greater value for money and reduce pressure on the custodial system and support the Youth Justice Strategy by the Dept of Justice

The Issue

Ireland is facing a troubling rise in youth crime, driven by deep-rooted social challenges such as poverty, lack of local services, and limited opportunities for young people. These factors contribute to persistent offending and an over-reliance on custodial remand, which is both costly and ineffective.

Violent offences make up over **60% of crimes committed by BSS participants**, highlighting the need for targeted, therapeutic responses. Without access to BSS, courts are left with few options other than detention, even when it may not be the most appropriate intervention.

Priority 2: National Expansion of the Bail Supervision Scheme (BSS) in support of the Youth Justice Strategy 2021 – 2027

A Proven Model

Extern delivers the Bail Supervision Scheme in **Dublin, Cork, and Limerick**, commissioned by the Department of Justice. BSS provides intensive, community-based support to young people involved with the Children's Court and at risk of being remanded into custody.

The scheme integrates therapeutic supports into the homes of young people, tackling the root causes of offending and promoting long-term behavioural change. It supports families, reduces reoffending, and offers courts a credible alternative to remand.

Our Ask

Extern recommends the Department of Justice is supported to roll out the national implementation of the Bail Supervision Scheme, ensuring equitable access to therapeutic alternatives to youth detention across Ireland.

We are recommending an additional €3 million annual investment to roll out BSS nationally, enabling support for approximately 240 young people facing into the criminal justice system.

National expansion will:

1. Address geographic inequity – ensuring young people outside pilot areas are not denied access due to postcode.
2. Respond to rising youth offending – Over 60% of offences among BSS participants are violent, highlighting the urgent need for structured, rehabilitative interventions across all regions.
3. Reduce cost pressures – by offering a significantly more affordable alternative to detention.
4. Uphold legal obligations – by enabling courts to comply with the Children Act 2001.

Extern's model is evidence-led, scalable, and aligned with Ireland's youth justice goals. A national BSS would ensure no young person is denied access to therapeutic support due to their location.

Priority 3: Increase Access to Respite and Day Services for families and individuals with neurodiverse needs

Why It Matters

Investing in individualised, community-based respite and day services for neurodiverse individuals fosters greater independence, inclusion, and long-term wellbeing.

Countries like Norway have demonstrated the impact of prioritising community supports, investing four times more in these services than in residential care. In contrast, **Ireland ranks 18th in OECD disability spending**, highlighting the need for strategic investment.

By expanding access to tailored supports, Ireland can:

- **Reduce long-term costs** associated with institutional care
- (Residential placements are fix figures depending on need per person annually, **compared to circa €23,000 for Extern's neurodiverse support model**)
- **Improve quality of life** for neurodiverse individuals and their families
- Build more inclusive, resilient communities
- Align with international **best practice and human rights principles**

The Issue

Many neurodiverse individuals and families are being denied meaningful choice and support due to limited access to community-based services.

- **Waiting lists for overnight respite exceed 3 years** in some areas—for both children and adults
- Traditional group-based services often fail to meet the specific needs of neurodivergent individuals
- Families are under increasing pressure, risking breakdown and institutionalisation
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Extern's individualised services are designed to meet these needs in a new way – providing tailored, flexible support that adapts to the individual, not just the diagnosis.

Priority 3: Increase Access to Respite and Day Services for families and individuals with neurodiverse needs

A Proven Model

Extern currently **supports 65 individuals and families** in the Mid-West region, offering bespoke respite and day services that:

- Reduce stress and prevent family breakdown
- Enable individuals to remain in familiar, supportive environments
- Deliver services in the community, with 95% attendance rates
- Avoid centralised models that can be inaccessible or unsuitable
-

Extern's approach is holistic, preventative, and rooted in the lived experience of families with complex needs.

Our Ask

We are calling for an additional €3 million annual investment to expand individualised respite and day services as delivered by the Extern service model, reaching approximately 20 neurodiverse individuals currently disadvantaged by the lack of appropriate local supports.

This investment will:

- Reduce reliance on costly residential placements
- Ensure families remain together and supported
- Deliver long-term savings across health, education, and social care systems
- Accelerate positive outcomes for individuals and their communities

Conclusion

Extern's Pre-Budget Submission 2026 demonstrates the clear economic and social value of investing in early family and community-based interventions.

These services not only reduce long-term costs across multiple sectors, but also empower individuals, strengthen families, and build more resilient communities.

In a time of global uncertainty and rising demand, the need for sustainable, trauma-informed, and person-centred support has never been greater. With the right investment, Government can ensure that no one is left behind—and that every individual can live a safer, healthier, and more connected life.

We urge decision-makers to act with compassion and foresight in Budget 2026, and to recognise the proven impact of services that place dignity, inclusion, and prevention at their core.

