



BUILD A BETTER FUTURE

SDLP MANIFESTO 2016

SDLP Ministers

A Record of Real Achievement in Government

At any one time the SDLP has held only one of the twelve Departments in Government since devolution returned under DUP/SF control. Despite the general failure of DUP and SF in nine years in charge, SDLP Ministers have a strong track record of delivery.

Regeneration

The SDLP in both DSD and DoE was responsible for the **positive transformation** of many of Northern Ireland's most notable town centres and urban spaces. A particular success was the **Newcastle seafront** public realm scheme which has not only transformed the appearance of the town but doubled the footfall and boosted the local economy. SDLP Ministers delivered the **Victoria Square** retail development in Belfast and a major public realm scheme in Belfast city centre.

In addition Margaret Ritchie, Alex Attwood and Mark H Durkan all made the **regeneration of Derry** a top priority. Among many other things delivered, these SDLP Ministers delivered the **Peace Bridge**, the **Guildhall Square** regeneration, city centre public realm, the **Walls lighting scheme** and the rebirth of **Ebrington**. SDLP also delivered the regeneration of town centres in Lurgan, Armagh city, Downpatrick, Newry city, Lisburn city, Portadown, Dungannon and many more.

Community Development

SDLP Ministers in Government provided consistent support for local communities, particularly the most disadvantaged communities, through a range of interventions. It was the SDLP who got the **Neighbourhood Renewal** partnerships up and running and delivering millions of pounds of investment directly into communities.

SDLP investments in childcare, training, IT suites elderly services and adult education have been accompanied by the provision of a multiplicity of community facilities. Local areas have been improved with the provision of brand new high quality children's playgrounds and multi-use games facilities (MUGAs). In many communities the local GAA club has received support to enhance its facilities and its contribution to community wellbeing. In **Lurgan** alone ALL of the local GAA clubs have had generous grant aid for new facilities thanks to a SDLP minister in DSD.

Local Government Reform

After years of political stalemate around the Review of Public Administration (**RPA**) it was the SDLP – Alex Attwood and Mark H Durkan who finally delivered the new councils and provided for a smooth transition without the much feared hike in rates. The new arrangements will ultimately improve service delivery at local level and at the same time save millions of pounds of ratepayers' money which councils can spend on other things.

Despite major cuts to his DOE budget, Mark H Durkan maintained and guaranteed the level of rate **support grant** given by his

Department to the less well off councils so that they could maintain services without increasing the burden on ratepayers.

Planning

SDLP Ministers transformed planning in Northern Ireland by initiating new planning policies to facilitate development of our tourism infrastructure and renewable energy development. They introduced PPS21 to bring a less restrictive approach to development in the countryside while at the same time ensuring proper protection of the environment. It was Mark H Durkan who established a planning policy presumption that all applications for **'fracking'** in Northern Ireland would be refused.

Plastic Bags Levy

The **single-use carrier bag levy** was one of the few tangible legislative achievements of the outgoing Executive and it was delivered by the SDLP.

The levy has been hugely successful in meeting its original aim of changing behaviour so that there are far fewer bags littering the environment. Despite a 70% reduction in the use of these bags the levy has nonetheless generated over £5 million in revenue. This has been allocated to a very wide range of environmental schemes and projects – to organisations such as the Mourne Heritage Trust and the Lough Neagh Partnership – who without the levy would not have been able to do this valuable work.

Innovation – shining a light

The SDLP in Government has always questioned why continuing challenges or problems are just accepted without a radical change of approach to solve them.

For the first time ever it was SDLP Ministers who gripped issues such as beach cleanliness, environmental crime, wildfires, urban dereliction, archaeological integrity in development and heritage crime, and brought new approaches and solutions. Unprecedentedly, Alex Attwood organised a series of 'summits' around many of these issues where all of the relevant players were brought together to hammer out an action plan and then implement it against a meaningful timetable.

This led to such initiatives as Urgent Works Orders – requiring owners of decaying properties to carry out immediate protective works or face significant sanction. Another example was bringing in new sources of external finance, previously untapped, to finance a much higher level of social house building.

Effectiveness in the Executive

The sole SDLP Minister in the Executive over the last nine years, has always punched above their weight around the Executive table. It was SDLP Ministers who called DUP/SF to account on issues like **Red Sky**, their early ideas about the **Social Investment Fund**, any attempts to carve things up or bypass proper process. It was Mark H Durkan who stopped the DUP/SF attempted power-grab over major planning decisions.



SDLP BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

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Northern Ireland needs a new alternative.

At home and abroad we face significant challenges for our society, our economy and for our future. The resilient spirit of the people of the North will ensure that by working together we can face these challenges head-on.

This manifesto offers a tonic to the cynicism which has seeped into our political arena and its discourse. It is a manifesto deliberately filled with optimism. If we follow the right path and if we make the right choices, we can build a better future.

At every election time we are offered a different choice. In this Assembly election the SDLP are that new choice. Ours is a rapidly changing party determined to bring real change to Northern Ireland and to the island.

That means an end to the underfunding of our education system, that means an end to the export of our young workers, that means an end to the chronic problems which plague the health service and it means an end to poverty of all forms and an end to Tory austerity.

This SDLP manifesto roots our politics in policy and ideas. It is a manifesto grounded in the challenges faced by people in their everyday lives. It is a manifesto which sets out how we will build a better future for all who live here.

Any future government we take part in must support children, young people, young workers, families and older people. It must be a government of substance and delivery, not just symbolism.

The SDLP offers the voters certainty in this election. We will only enter a government in May which delivers on pledges. When voters go to cast their ballots they can have certainty that a strong SDLP will deliver the pledges we make in this document.

This election is a chance to reverse a decade of failure. It is a chance to vote for change.

This manifesto embodies that change.

On May 5th a vote for the SDLP is a vote to build a better future.

**Colum Eastwood
SDLP Leader**



It is time for a new type of nationalism. The SDLP's new vision of Progressive Nationalism will move the ground upon which the constitutional debate on this island rests.

For Ireland to be reunited, Northern Ireland has to work.

Our aspiration to share political union with the rest of the island is now inextricably linked with our ability to build a shared and successful social and economic framework here in the North. Unity will be achieved through the success of both jurisdictions, not by their failure.

That means building up the strength and knowledge of our economy, it means giving our young people the dignity and security of a job and it means creating an infrastructure which can support our people.

It is in all our interests to make Northern Ireland work.

Building a new devolution settlement

Making Northern Ireland work will require significant changes to our original devolution settlement.

Centralised power is a concept rooted in the past. The extensive federal and devolution settlements, which have for some time been a feature of other European democracies, are gaining and growing in relevance throughout these islands. From the Smith Commission, to the implementation of City Deals across England and Scotland, more and more centralised power is being pushed downwards and outwards.

The SDLP believes we must make the most of this opportunity.

The Northern Ireland Executive must embrace the responsibility of an enhanced devolution settlement which provides us with the power to shape our own future.

The SDLP believes that devolving corporation tax, while welcome, is simply not enough. We want to see the negotiated devolution of many more fiscal powers and levers but also of those functions like telecoms and broadcasting not currently devolved. We will also seek to begin immediate negotiations with the British Treasury to introduce and implement new City Deals in the North.

The SDLP will also think longer and go further. We will seek the support of other parties to begin negotiations with London on a long-term financial framework which will give **Northern Ireland sufficient financial security to take on long term transitions such as our own tax system and our own welfare system.**

Such a financial compact will be for thirty or more years and would remain in place should Ireland be unified during this time.

It would allow us to build a Northern Ireland which actually works.

Building towards the New Ireland

Although institutional change has most often been focused on Belfast, the SDLP believes that national institutions in Dublin must also evolve.

With the reform of Seanad Éireann remaining on the political agenda in the South, the SDLP will lobby the incoming Irish Government to ensure that Northern representation becomes an official and permanent part of the Oireachtas. This would naturally include both Nationalist and Unionist representation.

The SDLP will also press the incoming Irish Government to finally extend voting rights in presidential elections to Northern citizens as well as to the diaspora.

Key North-South projects which have been long left neglected must now be prioritised immediately by the new Executive. These include finally beginning work on the A5, finally building the Narrow Water Bridge and once more kick-starting the North West Gateway Initiative.

The SDLP will also seek to establish joint teams comprising personnel from the IDA and Invest NI from the autumn of 2016 in anticipation of the North's corporation tax cut in 2018. This sharing of expertise and experience would allow the island to maximise our supply of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

Too often though, North-South co-operation has been limited to the implementation of individual projects, rather than bringing to fruition a more strategic and ongoing integration of the island economy and its infrastructure.

The SDLP will work with the Irish Government to develop all-island plans for infrastructure, energy, planning, tourism, health, higher education, research and development and enterprise. These plans would be jointly commissioned, funded and would draw on expertise from bodies such as the ESRI and the Centre for Cross Border Studies among others.

Years of neglect for the North-South institutions must be remedied. Only by working together across the island can we realise the full potential of our economy and our society.

Building a Framework for Unity

In combination with the practical and impartial policy work as outlined above, it will also be crucial to give a more overtly political roadmap for Irish unity.

Early in the next Assembly term the SDLP will establish a Commission for a New Ireland. It will comprise both SDLP members and non-members from across the island. It will begin a process of answering the many unanswered questions on Irish unity.

It will have two main tasks.

The first task is to conduct a political audit on the current state of North-South affairs, the workings of the North-South institutions, an all Ireland consultation, as well as civic and business co-operation.

The second task will put flesh on the bones of what a reunified Ireland will look like. It will provide an analysis and recommendations on what kind of institutional

structure, what kind of public service and private sector structure and what kind of civic structure a new, united Ireland will comprise.

Scotland's plan for independence contained 670 pages of work. It scoped out and modelled what a new Scotland would look like. Irish nationalism must match that level of practicality. We must do the same.

The Commission for a New Ireland will attempt to escape from merely talking about unity by actually putting in the hard yards of research which will see it delivered.

Irish Unity is not an idea that we in the SDLP simply commemorate, instead it is something that we continue to aspire to. This Commission will form the basis of our plan to deliver it.





The In/Out European referendum on June 23rd is fast approaching. The importance of this once in a generation vote is difficult to underestimate.

Withdrawal from the European Union represents the single greatest threat to Northern Ireland's economic security. In purely financial terms, it is estimated withdrawal would cost the Northern Ireland economy at least £1 billion annually.

This cost is not abstract. It is a real cost which would be paid by businesses, farmers and families right across the North. The SDLP will campaign vigorously to ensure that such a burden is not placed on all of us who live here.

The SDLP's commitment to the European Union remains steadfast. Europe as a vision, model and arena of politics has always been of huge importance to our party. It has been at the core of our identity and ethos since our party's foundation in the early 1970s. The

SDLP are proudly part of a broader continental identity.

Our referendum campaign will reflect this continued commitment. The SDLP has already held a number of campaign meetings across the North and our campaign to keep Northern Ireland in Europe will intensify between now and June 23rd.

As a party we have always known that political and economic isolationism is more likely to lead to conflict and economic depression. We have always known that peace is to be found in dialogue and celebration of difference and that prosperity is to be found in co-operation and free movement. At its best, this is still what the European Union represents.

Co-operation between nations is needed, now more than ever, to bring solutions to the immediate and long term crises we all face in terms of tax avoidance, climate change and humanitarian assistance. We must work in Europe to help find these solutions.

Like every human institution, it is not perfect but like democracy itself, it is better than the alternatives.

In Northern Ireland the benefits of our membership of the European Union are clear for our economy and our society.

The EU has helped to erode the border as an economic barrier, allowing freedom of movement, travel and work North and South.

The EU facilitates Foreign Direct Investment - the single market creates new opportunities and helps our small businesses export successfully.

Through the Special EU Programmes Body, Northern Ireland has received extensive funding, better known as the PEACE funds, to build and strengthen our community and infrastructure.

Through the basic payment in agriculture, Northern Ireland's agri-food sector has been able to diversify and grow its export markets.

The SDLP is not prepared to put these benefits at risk. Northern Ireland's interest is best served as part of Europe. Ireland's interest is best served as part of Europe.

As part of our referendum campaign we will also seek to support those foreign nationals who work, contribute and have made their home here in Northern Ireland. The SDLP will campaign to ensure that our neighbours, friends and colleagues from Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia and across the European Union won't face the prospect of their families being divided through a withdrawal from the European Union.

This European campaign is not a question of nationalist against unionist or even of left versus right, but a matter of centrality or peripherality, certainty or confusion, stability or instability. Above all it is a question of inclusion or isolation.

The SDLP will lead the fight in convincing Northern Ireland to stay IN Europe.





The Northern Ireland regional economy lags behind the UK average on many of the key measures of economic performance including productivity. There is an underdeveloped private sector and an over-reliance on the public sector and government subsidy. In particular the Northern Ireland economy lacks the dynamism of the neighbouring economy of the south of Ireland where, after a deep recession, the recovery has gathered pace and GDP growth is running at over 6%.

The planned development of the Northern Ireland economy also needs to focus on ensuring a fair regional balance. This applies in particular to investment in infrastructure and inward investment. It also applies to training and skills and to ensuring opportunity exists in less well-off areas of the North. The SDLP believes that the Northern Ireland economy can only grow more rapidly if it adopts a number of key policy priorities. These priorities comprise the SDLP prosperity process and include:

- A focus on job creation
- Investment in further education and skills

- Prioritising key economic sectors
- Gaining control of more economic levers.

We also need to ensure that Northern Ireland remains inside the European Union.

A focus on job creation

Above all else, the Northern Ireland economy can only grow and develop if it generates more employment and focuses on securing better paid jobs. More jobs enhances society by alleviating poverty and making sure that as many people as possible have the dignity of work. More jobs will also stem the flow of our young people emigrating in pursuit of a better economic future.

This means every area of investment and expenditure must be assessed in terms of its capacity to support existing employment and to generate new jobs.

However the focus must be on the creation of the most productive employment that contributes to economic growth. Therefore there is a need for a rebalancing of employment in favour of the highest value-added sectors.

Investment in further education, apprenticeships and skills

In order to compete for highly mobile, high value-added Foreign Direct Investment Northern Ireland needs to be able to offer an appropriately skilled work-force. Therefore our people, particularly young people, need to be up-skilled to be competitive in the global marketplace.

While all job investment is welcome, FDI call-centre projects, for example, do not develop high productivity sectors in our workforce and ultimately compete internationally on price. We need to raise skill levels to attract the more lucrative FDI investments in the Information and Communications Technology sector and other professional services. Investments in these sectors create well paid employment for software engineers, lawyers, creative design professionals as well as administrative staff.

To achieve our goals we must refocus support for third level education toward the STEM subjects and the areas where graduates can add maximum immediate value to employers and the economy.

The SDLP will provide additional focused support for third-level students and refocus existing skills provision to ensure we better meet the future needs of a modern fast moving economy.

The SDLP recognises that further education is not the only route available in delivering a high skilled, high wage economy. The SDLP believe that the development of skills through quality apprenticeships is essential to improving the economy, stimulating work and delivering new success in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Executive has traditionally underperformed in terms of apprenticeships and skills training. The result is that we currently have a low wage, low skilled economy with fewer apprenticeship places in comparison to the rest of Europe.

The SDLP believes if we are to deliver apprenticeships we must ensure greater co-operation between employers and our education system. Employer led apprenticeship models can directly address gaps in

skills provision and ensure positions in employment are filled. In Northern Ireland delivering STEM related apprenticeships is essential.

The SDLP believes that apprenticeships must be enhanced so they become an attractive alternative to further education and one that delivers sustainable employment.

The SDLP is committed to delivering the expansion of the Magee campus at Ulster University.

Prioritising key economic sectors

Every modern, open economy must prioritise investment in its most competitive assets by channelling resources to those sectors where it is in the best position to compete internationally while generating wealth domestically. The SDLP will continue to support our traditional primary, manufacturing and services sectors while prioritising new sectors where we see potential for growth and export.

In Northern Ireland our priority sectors include agri-food, tourism and ICT. In these sectors we have developed a degree of competitive advantage.

Gaining control of further economic levers

At present the main instrument of Government intervention in the economy is control over how public expenditure is directed. However as health, education and justice account for 75% of the Northern Ireland budget there is limited scope for driving the economy forward from public expenditure alone. The Northern Ireland Executive therefore needs to get control of further economic levers, not only the power to lower corporation tax, but new tax-raising and borrowing powers. The Executive also needs to be more resourceful in drawing down European funds and other new approaches to financing infrastructure investment.

The SDLP will drive for greater control of economic levers through more devolution from the UK Government. An enhanced devolutionary settlement will give us much greater influence over economic policy.



Third Level Education

The SDLP will strive to ensure a proper alignment between the skills development and higher education services currently offered by the training and higher education sector. We must identify the future needs of a growing high value-added economy, which will require an ongoing dialogue with industry and with universities so that this evolution can get underway smoothly.

This will mean directing more of our efforts towards the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) subjects which will be in greatest demand in the new economy and which will form the bedrock of future well paid jobs. It will also mean training more young people in the skills of the future in particular ICT

and specifically, coding. We intend to establish a Digital Technology and Coding Academy during the next Assembly mandate.

We believe we must:

- Focus support for third level education toward the STEAM subjects and the areas graduates can add maximum immediate value to employers and the economy.
- Refocus existing skills provision to ensure we better meet the future needs of a modern fast moving global economy.

Public Sector Reform

The SDLP believes that there is considerable scope to improve the operation of the public sector by raising productivity to improve services. The SDLP believes that the streamlining of the public sector to date could have been achieved by prudent management rather than by borrowing huge amounts of capital to finance a severance scheme. The end of the civil service pay freeze must mean increases for lower paid civil servants. It cannot be used to fund more special advisers or rehire at the highest levels.

Corporation Tax

The SDLP has campaigned for many years for the devolution of corporation tax powers. The setting of a date and a rate provides a significant opportunity for expansion by local companies and for us to attract investment from foreign businesses. Growth in these two areas has been the bedrock of the current economic boom in the Republic and is the only way we can stop the forced emigration of young workers every year.

The Northern Ireland market is too small for local demand to deliver significant growth. That means we need to compete on the world stage to sell products and services and to attract companies to Northern Ireland.

It is also critically important that we retain our place in the European Union to ensure maximum benefit from any devolution in corporation tax powers.



Building for Better

In order to ensure a stronger private sector delivering more jobs which are better paid the SDLP will design and implement 'Building for Better' - a strategy which will boost our local economy. Its key vision is better jobs, better wages and a better economy.

Agri-food

The agri-food industry in Northern Ireland has itself produced an ambitious strategy for growth and this must be facilitated by government. The sector is jobs intensive and can serve the dual purpose of maintaining our existing farming base and supporting rural employment while offering limitless potential for high value food production. There is considerable scope for expanding Northern Ireland's export base in this sector to delivering at least 15,000 jobs by 2021.

Agree and implement a Northern Ireland Manufacturing Strategy

This will support the development of 'factories for the future' and encourage companies to become more consumer-focused and innovative. It will also position Northern Ireland as an attractive place for

foreign manufacturers and support further development of our home grown industry. This will aim to create an additional 7,000 jobs between now and 2021.

Increase our level of exports & FDI

Companies from Northern Ireland primarily export to other parts of the UK or the Republic of Ireland, with limited exports to Europe or the rest of the world. The SDLP will ensure that Invest NI and local economic development agencies strengthen and co-ordinate existing links abroad, and build new links through the Republic's IDA and UK Trade & Investment. We must ensure that the region becomes a hub for exports. Relying solely on domestic demand is not enough. We will also lead a refocus of FDI and export efforts to Europe in addition to North America. Northern Ireland is part of the world's biggest domestic market and we must make the most of this opportunity. The devolution of corporation tax in 2018 will see the creation of 3,000 direct FDI jobs by 2021 and will create an additional 1,500 jobs indirectly.

NI Digital Technology and Coding Academy

The SDLP will establish Northern Ireland’s first Digital Technology and Coding Academy. This will provide real-time and online coding and digital education for people of all ages across Northern Ireland. The Academy will be the home for technology start-up and accelerator programmes and will also ensure that their reach stretches across the North. This will be accompanied by a new Digital Technology Strategy, which will directly link with the Department of Education to ensure that coding and technology feature in all schools. By 2021, Northern Ireland will have ten “Tech Towns” generating 7,000, new jobs in an expanded ICT sector and where awareness and skills in digital technology have increased dramatically.

Increase skills, productivity and job market awareness

Reduced corporation tax is not enough to attract foreign investment. While government has a role to play in improving productivity, the SDLP will introduce a ‘Productivity Partnership’ initiative whereby industry leaders are supported in efforts to share knowledge and best practice with firms who struggle with lower productivity. The ‘Productivity Partnership’ will also assist schools and universities in building awareness of our local job market by assisting with school and university placements.

Building our Tourism Sector

Northern Ireland has managed to protect some of the most unspoilt and beautiful parts of Ireland and offers an attractive destination to both international and domestic tourists. The tourism industry provides a living for thousands of people across Northern Ireland, particularly in coastal towns. Tourism in the North is worth over £750 million to the local economy, and is responsible for 43,000 jobs. It can go much further as a driver of investment and employment.

Our tourism and hospitality sectors require urgent reform if we are to capitalise on our potential. As part of Building for Better we will ensure all our tourist destinations are given proper profile. That means enhancing tourism facilities on our coastline, mountains and other areas of outstanding natural beauty; enhancing licensing laws to ensure we remain

competitive; reducing red-tape; ensuring full use of modern digital technology, protecting our environment and supporting food and drink and other niche areas. The SDLP will also ensure that Northern Ireland is included in the island’s ‘Wild Atlantic Way’.

To ensure we gain the most from this opportunity we also need to ensure our tourism and hospitality sectors can offer the best possible service. The SDLP have already delivered reforms in the regulation of taxis allowing the night-time economy to grow while ensuring people can travel home safely. We also believe that it is time to reform the licensing laws in Northern Ireland to allow our restaurants, bars and hotels to continue attracting tourists from across the world. Focused investment in tourism will generate 6,000 new jobs by 2021. We will continue to campaign for the rate of VAT in the tourism and hospitality sectors to be reduced to 5%.

Making government work for jobs

The financial priorities of the next NI Executive must be targeted at those areas which have the biggest benefit for the Northern Ireland economy. That is why we will ensure that funding in future governments is aimed towards sectors which deliver maximum value in terms of employment and infrastructure improvement. We will undertake capital appraisal so that resources are not wasted on vanity projects. Government must ensure we get the full benefit of EU funding to support our economy.

Support for Small & Medium Enterprises

Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are vital for a flourishing economy with healthy job creation. The SDLP will ensure that SMEs operate in an environment which supports their growth by enhancing broadband provision across Northern Ireland, reducing government payment terms to 14 days, helping more SMEs trade online and ensuring that all public sector contracts are advertised on Central Procurement. Over 26,000 SMEs will directly benefit from Corporation Tax and we will also ensure that Invest NI, UK Trade and Investment and local Enterprise Agencies strengthen support provided to small businesses wishing to trade here and abroad.

A NEW DEAL FOR STUDENTS AND APPRENTICES



A properly funded and accessible university and vocational training system is vital if today’s teenagers are to gain meaningful employment in tomorrow’s economy.

Severe financial cuts have been placed on our universities. That means fewer places which are harder to access. Young people either don’t proceed to third level education or are forced away.

Thirty percent of our young people travel to Britain each year to study where fees are higher and were they incur more debt. Two thirds of those who leave never return.

The SDLP will reverse the recent cuts in university places and fund increased student places in Northern Ireland, including at Ulster University, Magee. In addition, we will ensure additional investment in apprenticeships.

We will also reduce the portion of the tuition fee paid by students to minimise the debt burden on young people and ensure comprehensive access to third level education.

A system where all young people can access third level education and training is the norm across Europe. That is the system our young people deserve. That is the system the SDLP will introduce.

We will reduce student fees, reverse cuts to student places and increase investment in apprenticeships.

This will be accompanied by reform of our university sector to deliver an increased focus on STEAM subjects and in other areas which are undersupplied. The SDLP is also committed to increased language teaching at universities, especially as part of mainstream degree courses.

To build a better future we need to make sure our children and young people possess skills which are valuable on a global stage. That means broadening access and ensuring that as many of our young people complete third level education and training as possible.

A prosperous economy requires a modern and resilient physical infrastructure. That means investment in transport networks, telecommunications, water, energy and tourism. The SDLP is committed to a significant step change in Executive investment in infrastructure after years of underinvestment and non-delivery. We believe this can be funded through the block grant, by more effective draw down from European Infrastructure funds, through partnerships with local councils and by agreeing new city and regional devolution deals.

Roads

A vibrant and equitable economy cannot operate without a modern roads network. For decades chronic underinvestment means that today Northern Ireland's road network is no longer fit for purpose.

The SDLP will prioritise the completion of the A5 and A6, delivering access to towns and cities right across the North. Sinn Fein and the DUP's proposed funding model cannot and will not deliver these projects on time or within budget. The SDLP will explore additional funding options to ensure these projects happen.

At present Northern Ireland has no roads strategy - we will agree a roads strategy for the next twenty years, in conjunction with the Dublin government, to ensure we have a modern roads infrastructure for the 21st century.

In addition to the major roads linking Belfast and Dublin with Derry, the SDLP is calling for a road-building programme spanning:

- The planned Ballynahinch bypass.
- A major upgrade of the road between Newry and Downpatrick (to maximise the benefit of the Narrow Water Bridge and to open up the Mournes).
- Major improvement of the Northern Ireland side of the A4/N16 between Enniskillen and Sligo.
- A dedicated link road from the M1 to the A1 at Lisburn to allow Belfast – Dublin traffic to move uninterrupted by the congested Sprucefield junction.

Road Safety

The SDLP believes that in delivering new road investment we must also ensure the maintenance of our current road network while delivering greater safety for all road users. The SDLP has a strong record of promoting road safety and in 2015-16 the SDLP Environment Minister Mark H Durkan allocated £1.5 million to road safety communication and has championed multiple campaigns warning against reckless driving. Investment in road upgrades will help improve road safety and ensure access across the North. Areas such as the A26 in Antrim or the A32 in Fermanagh demonstrate the need for ongoing investment in our current road network to deliver better outcomes.

The SDLP will:

- Ensure sufficient funding for effective road safety communication.
- Argue for a multi-year minimum road maintenance budget to ensure our roads are safe.
- Create Road Investment packages to target and upgrade our current road network.

Uniquely among Northern Ireland's large towns, Lurgan has a series of railway crossings which damage local amenity, limit access and constrain the social and economic development of Lurgan town and its Craigavon hinterland. This is at its worst at Lurgan railway station on the main road linking Lurgan/Craigavon with the M1 motorway - where there is congestion and traffic tailbacks all day long.

The SDLP has succeeded in getting plans for a brand new Lurgan railway station into Northern Ireland's infrastructure development programme (ISNI). We will insist that this project incorporates an appropriate lowering of the track to allow a short traffic flyover which permanently ends the congestion at the William Street/Lough Road level crossing.

A Real Railway Policy

The SDLP believes that a modern Northern Ireland must have modern rail infrastructure and we will ensure the continued development of a modern railway system throughout the North and across the island.

The SDLP support improved connectivity between our airports and rail services. Access to airports through direct railways is a hallmark of most major European and international cities and it is essential to expanding Northern Ireland as a business and tourist destination.

We will:

- Support the redevelopment of the Knockmore line to include a Belfast International Airport connection.
- Enhance connectivity between the Bangor line and Belfast City Airport.
- Build a railway halt at the City of Derry Airport to enhance connectivity to the city.
- Enhance the Belfast Dublin train connection to improve competitiveness.
- Re-establish a railway connection to Armagh City.
- Develop strategic public transport hubs in key towns.
- Establish a mini-flyover crossing system for Lurgan to tackle congestion.

Great Greenways

The SDLP believes that the redevelopment of our greenways and certain disused railway lines represent a unique opportunity for community-based infrastructural development. The Great Western Greenway in Mayo remains a testament to the economic benefits that greenway redevelopment can bring. Greenway development will help build sustainable tourism such as walking, cycling and geotourism. The development of such Greenways will deliver jobs in construction, hospitality and tourism. The SDLP will explore plans for cycling and walking Greenways to include:

- Glens of Antrim Greenway
- Greenway of Thrones (North Antrim)
- Comber to Ballynahinch
- Cookstown to Magherafelt
- Cookstown to Dungannon
- Downpatrick to Newcastle

Better Waterways

Increased interest in water based activities presents Northern Ireland with new prospects in tourism and town investment. The Department for Infrastructure will

now have a unified control of the Rivers Agency, Harbour Gateways, Inland Waterways and Waterways Ireland. This presents new opportunities to support waterway recreational pursuits and generate tourism. The SDLP will direct new investment in the development of waterways, canals and Lake Districts in areas such as Foyle, Erne, Lower Bann and Fermanagh to create new businesses in leisure, retail and hospitality.

Narrow Water Bridge

The SDLP remains committed to the Narrow Water Bridge project and the SDLP will ensure that the development of the project is at the forefront of the next Executive's infrastructural agenda. As a new economic corridor it will transform the local economies of South Down and Louth by developing a stronger North-South economic partnership, increasing tourism and creating new opportunities for investment. The SDLP will ensure that all commitments to the project are met and that the £14m SEUPB funding is once again secured.



Water and Sewerage Infrastructure

In the last election the SDLP committed itself to opposing the imposition of water charges on the people of Northern Ireland and in the Assembly we have continued to uphold that position. The SDLP rejected calls for the implementation of new rates and voted positively on the Water and Sewerage Act which allowed the Executive greater flexibility on subsidies to NI Water. We have worked to ensure the Executive's pledge to not apply household charges to domestic consumers was upheld and we will continue to oppose water charges. The SDLP will direct new funding in water infrastructure aimed at tackling historical under investment.

The Water and Sewerage Act has brought a new alignment between water and sewerage responsibilities with flood related responsibilities. In the next mandate the Executive will now be more able to effectively combat and mitigate flooding throughout Northern Ireland. The SDLP will invest and secure Hard (artificial interventions) and Soft (naturally occurring landscapes) Sustainable Drainage Systems to guarantee the reduction of flood water volumes. We will further invest in water and sewerage provision for rural areas.

Securing Energy

The SDLP recognises that energy security remains a barrier to the expansion of manufacturing businesses and high energy costs continue to negatively affect homes across Northern Ireland. The SDLP believes it is critical we ensure competitiveness and security in our energy infrastructure and that it makes no sense that one island should have separate systems both North and South delivering energy needs.

The SDLP will;

- Remove barriers to effective, modern energy infrastructure.
- Develop a long term energy strategy that seeks to provide new energy investment and deliver competitive prices.
- Develop a new Green Investment Deal to retrofit housing and to invest in energy efficiencies for businesses.
- Support progress made in the creation of an all-island electricity market and replicate this success in an all island gas market.
- Support investment in the North by extending the natural gas network to all major loads and population centres in Northern Ireland.
- Continue to support existing commitments to renewable energy through existing and new technologies.

- Prioritise the insulation of homes and businesses to ensure energy efficiency and reduce energy consumption, thereby reducing bills.



Telecommunications

It is vital that more powers for telecommunications and broadcasting are devolved to Northern Ireland. Our land border with the Republic and the changing nature of broadcasting means that the current model is unsustainable.

The SDLP will:

- Seek further devolution of telecoms & broadcasting powers.
- Initiate the establishment of an NI regulator.
- Expand coverage of RTÉ and other Irish media outlets.

A NEW FORMULA FOR FAIRNESS



The last nine years have seen the emergence of a gross disparity in government support and investment across different regions of the North. West Belfast for example received just 1.19% of available Invest NI assistance. Any government that the SDLP takes part in will end this injustice.

Investment across three areas - job support and promotion from Invest NI, regional infrastructure projects and education and training will be co-ordinated and targeted for areas and projects where it is required most urgently. This will include specific City Deals and sectoral deals.

In any new government this process will be overseen by an Executive sub-committee, consisting of the Minister of Finance, Minister of Education and Minister for the Economy and with strict targets over the next five years for increased investment in areas which have been left behind.

We will also lead the way to redouble efforts by government departments to work with colleagues in local government to support this process.

This will remove the unfair gaps in investment and end the attempt to economically repartition Northern Ireland. Target areas will include: North Belfast, West Belfast, Derry, Fermanagh, Tyrone, Armagh, Newry and others.

The SDLP will end the attempted repartition of Northern Ireland through chronic under investment in some areas.

Bringing People Together

The SDLP's vision of a Shared Future in the North is not just that of improving community relations and encouraging better behaviour but of actually bringing our divided community together so that the old wounds of division heal and all sides work together to build a stronger united community. Other parties may settle for a 'good relations' view of the future - confined to minimising antagonisms - we want to bring people together in a single community which accommodates its differences and celebrates its diversity.

To achieve the ambitious goal of bringing people together we have to address all of the things that keep them apart, including those areas of life where they have become segregated.

The SDLP is committed to defending and campaigning for equality and human rights across all sectors, regardless of: sexual orientation, religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, class, marital status, sex, disability and between persons with dependents and persons without. A genuinely shared future will champion the rights of everyone in our society.

The SDLP will ensure the Commission on Flags, Identity and the Past is truly representative of our society and is empowered to finally tackle issues of flags and contentious symbols. We will continue to strive for a comprehensive and ethical approach to the past, demand stronger parades legislation, seek equality on official flags and call for greater recognition of all of our identities and traditions.

The diverse traditions and cultures in our society need to be celebrated, respected and protected through an updated racial equality law.

We have made progress bringing people together in the workplace, particularly in the public sector, where people from all backgrounds leave any political baggage they have at the door and work together to serve the whole community. It did however take leadership and strong legislation to achieve this. We now need to take a similar approach to housing, shared public spaces and education and to a greater cross-community approach to culture, arts and leisure.

Housing

For the most part our communities physically live apart. It is not only those who live in urban interface areas who pay the price of division but people across towns and villages, in suburbs and rural areas. Our ambition is to end the 'them and us' mentality around areas and housing so that the concept of interface starts to become less relevant.

The SDLP will legislate to impose a statutory duty on social housing providers to promote and develop shared housing. This does not mean that housing will cease to be allocated on the basis of need - that will continue - but it will mean an end to 'Orange' waiting lists and 'Green' waiting lists and the institutionalisation of division in housing management.

A new system will demand that social housing landlords use their best endeavours, including their transfer systems, to deliver shared housing.

The SDLP shared housing plan will also ensure that the development of shared communities is a material factor in the location of all new public services, including local delivery points, from health centres to schools, right down to bus stops.

The SDLP will also establish a shared housing task force to consider means of achieving greater diversity in the location and mix of housing in the private owner-occupied sector.

Developing our Shared Spaces

Outside of the home, workplace and school, communities often follow different cultural and leisure pursuits. This is a simple matter of choice for most people and government cannot dictate how citizens enjoy their free time. Nonetheless, it is desirable that more and more activity should involve all sides of the community and the SDLP will promote this kind of social development by a range of measures. We will support all outreach measures by the main sporting and cultural organisations as they try to engage and enthuse communities not normally associated with their activities.



Across the North we will also strive to ensure that more and more areas become genuinely shared spaces, particularly town centres. We will develop a strategy for reducing the amount of single identity manifestations such as flags, emblems, murals, memorials etc so that less territory is marked out as exclusive to one side or another.

This is a long term project and there is already some good work underway, but it needs a higher prioritisation from Government.

A new approach to Integrated Education – Ending Segregation of Children

The SDLP has long believed that if we are serious about a shared future then we cannot continue to educate children apart. Our current divided education system effectively passes on the old divisions and prejudices of the past to children in their most formative years. This cannot continue. We have achieved a fair measure of integration in higher education so now is the time to face the challenge in the primary and secondary sectors.

The SDLP will actively build and promote the development of integrated education in Northern

Ireland so that it becomes the educational format of choice for an increasing number of parents and children. Our plans to develop integrated education will still operate in a context where parental choice remains paramount. In addition we are not confined to the current model of integration - there is scope to develop integrated education which builds upon the faith element of schools. For example there is no reason why a Catholic school cannot become an integrated school.

The SDLP's view is that the current DUP/Sinn Fein 'Shared' education campuses initiative does not go far enough. Their model, which brings Catholic and Protestant schools closer together to share some facilities, actually maintains and institutionalises segregation. The SDLP model for integration means all children wearing the same uniform being taught by the same teachers in the same classroom. Within this framework it is still possible to have a diversity of religious elements built into the students' weekly schedule.

The present demographic context in education - a very substantial oversupply - presents a tremendous opportunity to rationalise the school estate in favour of integrated education. It is the SDLP view that every

area planning partnership should be aiming to maximise the integration of students within their planning area. The SDLP will set targets for each planning area and performance in meeting those targets will be a key consideration in the allocation of resources and new investment.

Policing and Justice - Putting Victims First

The SDLP is calling for substantial reforms to the criminal justice system to deliver faster, fairer justice with increased accountability. We will do this by introducing clear timeframes for cases, ensuring proper communication between victims, the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service and the increased use of remote evidence technology. We believe that it is essential that the criminal justice system does not re-traumatise the victims and are calling for a review of all stages of the system to ensure the highest standard of justice prevails.

The SDLP will continue the fight for protections against cuts to legal aid and the closure of courthouses to ensure that everyone has affordable and accessible justice.

Police presence

The single most effective way to fight crime and make our communities safer is to have a visible, regular and dependable police presence on our streets. We are calling for the increase in the number of police officers by 4%. This will bring the service up to the 7,000



regular officers that are required to provide an effective and comprehensive service with community policing at its core.

Drugs and Alcohol

Drugs and alcohol are connected to a huge amount of crime in Northern Ireland. Alcohol related harm is estimated to cost Northern Ireland up to £900 million in resources every year, resources that are desperately needed in both our health and justice systems.

The SDLP is calling for the introduction of a levy, modelled on the minimum price per unit system, to tackle binge drinking and alcohol abuse.

It is clear that drugs are an ever growing problem in our communities. The number of drug seizures and arrests for drug related crime have increased year on year over the last decade, with the numbers in 2016 now double what they were in 2006.

The SDLP want to see a dedicated multi-agency Drugs Strategy which will target drug dealers and ring fence seized assets to provide help to those recovering from addiction. We will ensure that clear referral pathways are open for those who need help and that effective partnerships are established between the community and voluntary sector and public agencies to provide integrated and comprehensive support services.

Rehabilitation Reforms

The SDLP are calling for fundamental and structural reforms to the prison service to shift the focus within prisons from security to rehabilitation whilst ensuring the safety and dignity of both prison staff and prisoners. To secure improvements to the standards of justice it is essential that we have a system focused on outcomes which does more than simply process cases. It costs £58,000 to keep a person in prison for a year in Northern Ireland. It is clear that the imprisonment of those who cannot pay fines or debts is not a cost effective way of achieving redress. The SDLP will introduce a progressive approach towards securing compensation by supporting community mediation methods and non-court approaches of dispute resolution.

To prevent reoffending we will establish a 12 month post release supervision programme following international best practice models which have been shown to dramatically reduce the number of those who re-offend. As well as reducing the level of crime and ensuring rehabilitation, this programme has the potential to release significant savings for police services.

Organised Crime and Corruption

The SDLP have been consistent in our calls for a greater degree of co-operation between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána to deal with crime associated with the border. Fuel laundering, smuggling and human trafficking are all areas in which inter-agency co-operation is required to successfully achieve convictions. The cost to the public purse, the damage to our shared natural environment and the devastating impact on individuals must no longer be overlooked or ignored due to bureaucracy.

Over the last number of years in different areas of public, private and political life there has been serious allegations of corruption, cronyism and fraud. While many of the cases have been complex, what is clear is that Northern Ireland does not currently have an effective means of checking, preventing or prosecuting corruption and white collar crime.

Anti-corruption measures are spread across a range of laws and agencies and investigations are often hampered by a lack of a coordinated approach. Corruption has a corrosive effect on the economy, the quality of public services and confidence in institutions.

The SDLP fought hard for local oversight and robust accountability protections for the National Crime Agency. We are now calling for stronger collaboration between all relevant agencies to deliver a specific anti-corruption strategy for Northern Ireland.

Paramilitary Panel

The SDLP have never been in any denial or doubt about the existence and activities of loyalist and republican paramilitary groups. Decisively and

unambiguously, paramilitary activity must be faced down.

There must be a whole hearted political approach to ending paramilitarism and associated criminality. Nearly 20 years since the ceasefires, illegal structures and activities have no place in the life of the island.

This must be accompanied by a comprehensive law enforcement approach to seeking out all involved in paramilitary criminality and all who hold historic assets, be it for personal gain or not.

We will ensure that the Paramilitary Disbandment Strategy Panel is provided with any support and information it may require from organisations including the PSNI, An Garda Síochána and all other stakeholders.

The SDLP have never been in any denial or doubt about the existence and activities of loyalist and republican paramilitary groups.

Accountability and Oversight

The SDLP believes that clearer accountability mechanisms are required to maintain and bolster public confidence in the criminal justice system. We are calling for a review of the oversight mechanisms between the Public Prosecution Service, the Attorney General and the Executive whilst maintaining independence of decision-making.

Domestic abuse

In 2015 there were over 77 domestic abuse incidents a day, with 33 each day involving at least one serious crime being committed. The PSNI responded to a domestic incident every 19 minutes of every day, and these account for approximately 13% of the total crime in Northern Ireland.

The SDLP are calling for a cross departmental gender strategy to tackle the unacceptable level of domestic abuse and gender violence in Northern Ireland.

Victims of Abuse

The SDLP repeats its commitment:

- to compensation for victims.
- proper inquiry into victims of abuse outside the institutions and Mother and Child Homes (under 18s).
- long term funding for victims and survivor groups.
- and an early implementation of the forthcoming recommendations of the Hart Inquiry.

Compensation

The SDLP believes that compensation, including interim payments if so requested, for victims and survivors should be a commitment in the next Programme for Government. Options for compensation should be scoped out now, without prejudice to final recommendations of the Hart Inquiry and consistent with the Inquiry confirming that scoping is not prejudicial to its work.

The scoping should be undertaken by OFMDFM but involve the churches, institutions and others. Scoping now can mean decisions earlier after the Hart Inquiry Report, not least given the stated views of the Inquiry that, on the basis of evidence to date, compensation will be one of its recommendations.

A full and robust inquiry

Three years ago it was recognised that the Hart Inquiry would not address clerical abuse outside institutions or Mother and Child Homes where the mother was under 18.

In 2015 there were over 77 domestic abuse incidents a day, with 33 each day involving at least one serious crime being committed.

Since then there have been two OFMDFM scoping exercises after which, in early 2016, it was deemed necessary to do a third scoping exercise due to a “lack of data and lack of information”.

This is profoundly unsatisfactory. Victims and survivors see long delays, real doubts and anxiety deepens.

The work of scoping should have been long completed and decisions made long ago. The SDLP proposed at OFMDFM Committee in February 2016, receiving all party support, that the third scoping exercise should be concluded in six months with Executive decisions within two months of that date. This should be the non-negotiable position of the next Executive.

Funding

The SDLP has urged OFMDFM to secure long term funding for groups within Hart and new funding for groups outside Hart. The needs of victims of abuse will not be addressed swiftly and funded support, advocacy and solidarity is needed long term.

Hart Inquiry and delivery

The Inquiry is due to report in January 2017. The SDLP believes that there should be a deadline for a Government Response and Implementation Plan. This should be two months.

The next mandate should recover the lost ground on delivering for victims of abuse. Compensation, a new Inquiry where needed, continuing support and the implementation of Hart are some of the thresholds. They must be the hard outcomes.

PROTECTING PEOPLE FROM CRIME



The SDLP believes that there is a pressing need to review the effectiveness and scope of the law so that older people are better protected from criminal activity.

The SDLP believes that there can be no room for leniency when dealing with those who carry out attacks against older people and pledge to support the introduction of mandatory prison terms for all those convicted of such attacks.

More than a dozen pensioners are the victims of crime every day in Northern Ireland and the conviction rates for these crimes can be as low as 4%. The fear caused by such crimes can imprison people in their own homes and medical evidence shows that victims of such attacks are likely to suffer from premature deaths.

The SDLP believes that we cannot continue to allow a situation where these crimes, and the fear of these crimes, destroy the safety, health and well being of our older population.

It is estimated that 18,000 of us a year are victims of alcohol-related violent crime, that one in five crimes in Northern Ireland have alcohol as a contributing factor and that 61% of street violence involved alcohol. It is clear that more must be done not only to challenge problem premises and suppliers but also those involved in anti-social drinking and those committing acts of violence while under the influence of alcohol.

More than a dozen pensioners are the victims of crime every day in Northern Ireland and the conviction rates for these crimes can be as low as 4%.

Those who cause fear, inflict violence and commit crimes fuelled by alcohol must feel the full force of the law. Any person convicted of an offence where alcohol is an aggravating factor must serve at least a community service order if not a prison sentence. Suspended sentences for alcohol-related crimes are no longer acceptable.



Healthcare Reform

The SDLP wants to create a modern, financially sustainable Health and Social Care system that delivers universal, high quality and safe services that are free at the point of delivery.

The Transforming Your Care reforms were to deliver a strategically planned, sustainable and financially viable model of healthcare for Northern Ireland. While the SDLP supports the intentions behind Transforming Your Care, the implementation of its recommendations have been hindered due to a lack of funding from successive Health Ministers.

Five years on we have a community healthcare infrastructure which is under-resourced and ill-equipped. The Department of Health has taken staff, resources, and beds away from the frontline and placed relatively little focus on community care.

The SDLP has engaged with the expert panel examining our health service. The SDLP will always be responsible when it comes to the issue of health and we want a health service that is fit for the 21st century. We will in no way however, buy into a process that is about cutting first and leaving people, especially those in rural areas, without access to the vital services they require.

The recent crises experienced in our Accident and Emergency Departments and elective care have been a result of this. People cannot see their GP quickly enough, feel like they cannot trust community healthcare initiatives and believe that often their only recourse is Accident and Emergency. The failure to strengthen community care and the reduction of Accident and Emergency services in tandem, has created long waiting lists for patients.

It is for these reasons that the SDLP will campaign for the full implementation of Transforming Your Care.

The SDLP continues to oppose the extension of the 1967 Act, will engage in the cross party working group and support the implementation of the Ministerial guidelines.

Primary Care

The SDLP recognises that health systems which are orientated towards primary care services achieve better health outcomes, with higher rate of patient satisfaction at a lower overall cost. General practice is the backbone of primary care and it is most effective when integrated across the wider primary care team, including nurses, pharmacists and other allied health professionals.

The failure to support primary care has led to difficulties in terms of GP recruitment and retention, a lack of capital investment in primary care facilities while at the same time there are increased workloads for GPs due to ever increasing demand for services.

The role of community pharmacies has been an integral issue in Transforming Your Care, and we believe that this role should be expanded at the earliest opportunity.

The SDLP is committed to:

- The redistribution of services from acute settings into community care as outlined in Transforming Your Care – totalling £83million worth of services.
- Increasing GP training places to 111 with the view of increasing the number of full-time equivalent GPs in Northern Ireland to 400 by 2020.
- Ensuring a cost of service budget is in place for community pharmacies and facilitating a more central role for them in GP practices.

Health Service Staff

The SDLP believes it is vital that proper workforce planning is put in place now to mitigate future demand for services, ensuring better health outcomes for patients and improving working conditions for staff.



The SDLP is committed to:

- A fair and well-deserved consolidated pay rise for our nursing staff and other medical staff.
- Opposing any punitive changes to junior doctors' contracts or nursing students' bursaries in Northern Ireland.
- Ensuring that independent sector care staff receive a proper hourly rate of pay for the services they provide.

Mental Health Provision

Northern Ireland has higher levels of mental ill-health than any other region of these islands. It is estimated that one in four adults here will suffer from a mental health problem at some stage in their life.

A research project undertaken by the Commission for Victims and Survivors and Ulster University found that a staggering 213,000 of the people in Northern Ireland suffer from some sort of mental illness and that almost half of these are directly related to the Troubles.

The SDLP is committed to:

- Ensuring sufficient funds are made available to improve mental health services as set out in the Bamford Review and that funding is ring-fenced from any budget cuts.
- Calling for a regional review of mental health services to examine the extent of which services are fragmented, especially in rural areas.

- Securing sufficient funding for the community and voluntary sector with a view to developing greater partnership working and collaboration with statutory agencies.
- Working in conjunction with the Department of Education, we must ensure that support and education are provided in post-primary schools to protect and promote mental wellbeing among our young people and teenagers.

North-South Healthcare

The SDLP is committed to pursuing, sharing knowledge and resources, solving common problems and working together to provide the best possible care and services.

We have already seen great advances in terms of Paediatric Cardiac Care moving to Dublin and this year we will see the opening of a new Cancer Radiotherapy Unit in Derry.

The SDLP believes this approach can be replicated across other health services to provide better health outcomes for all on this island.

The SDLP will be prioritising the following areas:

- Adult cardiac care services.
- Progressing all island cancer services and organ donation.
- The sharing of Ambulance services, including an Air Ambulance, and acute Emergency Departments across border regions.

We remain committed to the protection and retention of full A&E and stroke services at Daisy Hill hospital in Newry and the full A&E and cardiology services at the Downe Hospital. We want to sustain all other services there and plan for the provision of new services where capacity exists.

Older People's Health and Social Care

Northern Ireland's population is ageing meaning that demand for homecare services will continue to increase. The SDLP believes it is vital that sufficient and sustainable homecare services are in place, to

continue to meet the needs of older and disabled people in their own home. This also requires a well trained workforce and proper funding to ensure that patients' needs are met.

A crisis has emerged in the independent sector with many providers being in dispute over the hourly rate of care provided. Northern Ireland pays the lowest rate in the whole of the UK and this, along with staffing concerns, is impacting on the care that some of our older people receive on a daily basis.

The SDLP is committed to:

- Investing more in community services which will ultimately lead to the reduction of hospital admissions, allowing people to be cared for at home.
- Ending the inappropriate use of 15 minute home care visits.
- The introduction of a price regulator for domiciliary care hourly rate of pay that will review evidence to ensure that providers are paid enough to fulfil their contractual obligations while ensuring the Department of Health gets value for money.
- Introducing a fair rate of pay for independent care providers and provide a career structure to develop their skills and feel a sense of job satisfaction.
- Ensuring that sufficient legislation is passed in this mandate to protect the rights of older people in accessing services, including healthcare services.



Cancer Services

In the past ten years there has been a rise of more than 20% in cancer diagnoses in Northern Ireland. The chance of developing cancer by the age of 75 is now 1 in 3.4 for men and 1 in 3.8 for women.

To sustain the current level of services, the SDLP is supporting calls for the Northern Ireland Executive to introduce an overarching Cancer Strategy with clear measureable targets and timescales with sustained funding at its core.

The SDLP is also committed to:

- The introduction of a Cancer Drugs Fund for Northern Ireland.
- Ensuring Ministerial targets for urgent Breast Cancer referral and treatment are complied with.
- A 'Tobacco-free Northern Ireland' and the enactment of legislation banning smoking in cars with children.
- Calling for the HPV vaccination programme to be extended to include adolescent boys.

Autism Services

Early diagnosis is vital to ensure that people get access to services that will support them. Untreated conditions can significantly increase the impact on the individual, the health system and the community over a long term period.

The recognition of Autism has increased by 67% in school-age children, with 1 in 54 pupils attending school being diagnosed with ASD. However, this has not been accompanied with the necessary funding increase to bolster services.

The SDLP is committed to:

- The establishment of a ring-fenced Prevention and Early Intervention budget.
- A cross-departmental strategy with a shared objective in treating and supporting young children with Autism and other special educational needs.
- The proper funding of the Autism Act 2011 to ensure children with Autism and their families have the necessary support mechanisms in place.
- Reducing the current 20 month waiting list for autism diagnosis assessments.



A high quality education system is the cornerstone of a progressive society and plays a vital role in preparing children and young people for the future. Years of flawed management by successive Sinn Fein Ministers has resulted in a fragmented and disjointed education system which fails too many of our young people. While a minority leave school with better qualifications than counterparts elsewhere on these islands, many leave school illiterate and lacking numeracy skills.

An investment in educating children is an investment in our economy and in our ability to compete globally. Equipping our pupils with cutting edge skills will create a sustainable, vibrant economy able to generate modern jobs in the future. Put simply, it means young people can enjoy prosperity and employment throughout their lives.

Curriculum & qualifications

A key aspect of any vibrant and successful education system is a modern curriculum. The SDLP will introduce a comprehensive review of primary and post-primary curricula to ensure that what is being taught in our classrooms is relevant to modern life. This review will include input from education professionals and those from the world of work.

In addition, we will reinstate the requirement to study a modern language to at least GCSE.

Coding and computer skills will be provided through the new Digital Technology and Coding Academy.

The SDLP will ensure young people continue to study numeracy and mathematics until they are aged 18, within or in addition to the current qualifications regime. The SDLP will lead a wider review of all current school-based qualifications and curriculum to ensure that students are being given the best education possible.

Numeracy & Literacy

We are duty-bound to invest in better literacy and numeracy outcomes for the many young people who leave schools with huge skills gaps in these areas. The SDLP will make sure that an updated literacy and numeracy strategy is published, aimed at tackling the root causes of educational underachievement which lie in social deprivation.

We will ensure that the future strategy works at family, community and school levels. Involving teachers, parents, siblings, wider family and volunteers is a key way to improve standards in these areas.

From STEM to STEAM: (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics).

To succeed in this, we need to move from a focus purely on STEM subjects to a wider focus on STEAM subjects. That means a recognition and understanding that Arts subjects provide many vital skills for children and young people.

As well as ensuring that STEM subjects are on the curriculum from primary school, the SDLP will ensure that arts subjects play a vital role in curriculum design and that STEAM subjects run through all parts of our education system. We will also ensure more productive links between schools, further education, higher education and the business world.

Youth Council

The decision to scrap the Youth Council was wrong and against the best interests of young people in Northern Ireland.

The SDLP will undertake a significant overhaul of the Youth Sector funding mechanisms to ensure they are correctly funded to complete the important work that they do on a regular basis.

Supporting teachers and discipline in schools

Teachers are at the heart of a good education. It is vitally important that we support and invest in our teachers.

If we are to introduce a new curriculum to better prepare students for the world of work, then teachers must be empowered to deliver it. To do this we need to foster relationships between teachers and business leaders within the community in order to create dynamic relationships that can provide future leaders. We must re-evaluate and reaffirm the 'Every School is a Good School' policy consideration on supporting professional development within the teaching profession.

Put simply, we will support teachers in the classroom, ensuring that their training needs are met. We will reform school disciplinary procedures to empower teachers to spend more of their time teaching.

Cross Party Commission on academic selection

Since the abolition of the 11 plus in 2008 children are now forced to sit up to five exams instead of the previous two. The SDLP does not support academic selection at 11 but the current situation cannot be allowed to continue. We will invite all parties to join in a commission to explore options for future transfer, to report within one year.



Early Years

The SDLP believes that the first years of a child's life are where the foundations are laid and lifelong paths are established. These formative years go on to have multiple impacts on health, educational achievements and opportunities and it is vital that every child has the highest level of support.

The SDLP will introduce an Early Years Bill for Northern Ireland that would provide a clear legislative framework for the co-ordination, funding, development and delivery of early years education, care and support services by public bodies in conjunction with community and voluntary sector.

A BETTER DEAL FOR WORKING PARENTS

OUR PLEDGE - MORE CHILDCARE FOR MOTHERS AND FATHERS

We will provide more free childcare to parents who are working or in training or education

The SDLP believes that increasing free childcare provision is of the utmost importance to families in Northern Ireland.

That is why we will increase pre-school childcare provision from 12.5 hours per week to 20 hours per week in our first year, with a view to further increasing it to 30 hours once the new budget is agreed.

We will also safeguard existing funding for childcare through the childcare strategy and ensure that this fund is fully utilised.

As well as reducing the direct cost of childcare to families, this removes a key barrier for those seeking work or training and benefits the entire economy.

The SDLP believes that increasing childcare provision is of the utmost importance to many families in Northern Ireland.



Social Responsibility and welfare

By handing back welfare powers to London, Sinn Féin and the DUP agreed, through the Westminster backdoor, a benefits freeze for four years up to 2020 for every claimant in Northern Ireland.

The SDLP opposed this transfer of welfare powers to Westminster and recognise the devastating impact it will have on vulnerable individuals and deprived communities.

Other parties have been left wanting on the issue of social security. The SDLP has remained consistent in our approach to dealing with the issue of social security, recognising that those who will be affected most by the reform of welfare are those who are the most vulnerable. The record shows that the SDLP have consistently attempted to negate the devastating impact of Welfare Reform changes by amending legislation, presenting alternative proposals and calling for protections for the elderly, disabled and deprived.

The process for dealing with Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland needs to be remodelled. We are reiterating our calls for a bespoke Welfare Reform committee, to run in tandem with any proposed changes to Welfare Reform from Westminster. This committee will ensure that we do not face the recurrence of our current situation, with the Westminster Government having the power to implement welfare changes without taking the situation in Northern Ireland into account.

Evason Report

The SDLP has welcomed the attempts of the Evason recommendations to soften the blow of welfare reform but we recognise that SF/DUP handover of welfare powers threatens to remove hundreds of millions of pounds from those most at risk in the community.

The SDLP will continue to defend the most vulnerable and do all we can to ensure that deprived communities do not end up paying the price for the economic crash.

Social and Affordable Homes

The fair provision of social housing was one of the founding principles of the SDLP. We have been and remain at the forefront of housing reform. We will prioritise reducing the longest waiting lists on record.

In terms of social housing need – there are 40,000 households on the social housing waiting list. 22,000 of these are in housing stress. This is an issue of utmost urgency.

Although the Regional Development Strategy suggests that 11,200 homes should be built each year to meet the basic housing need, since 2011 less than 6,000 houses have been completed each year. With only 1,500 of these being social housing this merely perpetuates the crisis.

The SDLP believes that the provision of social housing should be doubled which would both meet the needs to our communities. This will also provide a significant boost to our construction industry.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Housing Associations

The SDLP believes that the system of housing allocation must continue to operate on the basis of objective housing need. The most vulnerable must be protected and prioritised, and housing allocations must continue to be made under the principle of fairness and equality.

Housing Associations are the only providers of new social and shared ownership homes in NI. They have told us that they are ready to build new homes and that finance is available. The problem is lack of availability of land.

The SDLP believes that a cross departmental strategy should be developed to identify available land in areas of high housing need. The acquisition of land in target areas will help to reduce the amount of people on housing waiting lists and in housing stress in areas of high need.

Affordable Homes

The SDLP will also support other forms of housing tenure including owner occupation. In particular we wish to help more young people and families take that first step onto the housing ladder. Traditionally, the Executive's mechanism for assisting uptake of affordable housing has been co-ownership and while this has been moderately successful, we believe it is time to add to the range of support mechanisms available.

The SDLP will promote uptake of the recently developed 'Help to Buy' ISA, funded by the Treasury.

The SDLP will also press existing housing finance providers in the North to offer terms to prospective buyers that are as favourable as those available to first time buyers in other parts of the UK and we will encourage new entrants into the market.

Shared communities

The SDLP has been a strong advocate of sharing our communities. We believe that both shared housing and mixed tenure housing developments are required to ensure an inclusive, socially cohesive society.

The SDLP will work to tackle segregation with shared future and new build housing schemes as well as shared neighbourhood strategies in existing developments. We will ensure that the desire to live in a mixed area is properly recognised and facilitated.

New Homes

Housing waiting lists indicate that there are not enough new houses being built to meet housing need.

There is an appetite for more affordable houses to be built, to help people make their way onto the housing ladder.

The SDLP will prioritise the building of both new social and affordable houses to meet requirements. We believe that areas of greatest housing need

must receive priority consideration when new projects are being planned and funded.

Targets

The SDLP believes that the target for new build houses should be increased, based on the Regional Development Strategy and waiting lists.

There is a combined target for the building of new social and affordable homes in Northern Ireland.

The SDLP view these as different sectors of housing and therefore believe that they should have separate targets for development.

Homelessness

The SDLP will introduce a new homelessness strategy, aimed at helping those who are homeless and protecting those at risk of homelessness. It is incumbent on statutory agencies to work together with those in the charity sector to formulate a new homelessness strategy.

Recently there has been a huge increase in rough sleepers dying on our streets. The SDLP will ensure that adequate services are provided to look after rough sleepers. We will streamline funding for organisations on the ground, to ensure that they continue to support their wide ranging needs, including emotional and mental health support.

Poverty

Poverty is a huge issue in Northern Ireland. Levels of poverty are increasing. In 2013/14, 21% of individuals were in poverty, around 376,000 people including:

- 23% of children, approximately 101,000 children.
- 20% of working-age adults, approximately 213,000 working-age adults.
- 21% of pensioners, approximately 63,000 pensioners.

The SDLP will combat these worrying trends by

tackling child poverty, fuel poverty and ensuring an adequate living wage for working age adults.

Fuel Poverty

The Northern Ireland Executive must commit to eradicating fuel poverty in the North. The SDLP will ensure that this is a priority for the incoming Executive. In 2015, 33% of houses were deemed to be in fuel poverty. The SDLP wants to see this reduced dramatically in the next mandate. We believe that any fuel poverty strategy should aim to substantially reduce fuel poverty and should have a target that includes specific measurables.

We need a system which both proactively contacts those at risk of fuel poverty, but also ensures that those who need advice and information are able to receive it through a single point of access.

The SDLP will update the current fuel poverty programme to include a signposting and information service. The SDLP will establish a Fuel Poverty Taskforce bringing together experts, independents and the department to update the current fuel poverty programme, to ensure that it is fit for purpose and is proactive.

Living Wage and Zero Hour Contracts

The SDLP supports the widespread provision of a living wage that will allow people within our society to make ends meet. The SDLP believes the new upper age band of the minimum wage that the Conservative government are calling 'National Living Wage' cannot be allowed to act as a substitute for the lower income focused tax credits and benefits.

The SDLP has always demonstrated a strong commitment to making work pay for everyone and because of this we have called for the provision of a True Living Wage which would reflect the rising costs of living.

The SDLP acknowledges that zero hour contracts can play an important role in flexibility for employers who

experience fluctuations in their work-flow. However, zero-hour contracts should not be a substitute for good work force planning and the lack of legislation surrounding them leaves scope for exploitation of workers.

The rise of in-work poverty is a cause for deep concern for the party and we believe that the proper regulation of zero-hour contracts is an important measure to begin to combat this.

In 2015, nearly 1% of employees were not paid minimum wage. The SDLP believes that this is simply unacceptable, and we will create a 'Fair Employment Enforcement Unit' in the Department of Finance, to ensure that all employees are paid a fair wage, and to ensure that workers are not exploited.

Child Poverty

The previous Programme for Government promised to reduce child poverty levels. However, in 2013/14, the number of children living in absolute poverty was more than twice the target figure, and currently, 23% of children live in poverty.

The people of Northern Ireland were promised a child poverty. This will be achieved through a dedicated Early Years Bill, a joint Executive Office & DfC Child Poverty Unit, the Strong Start Fund and increased preschool childcare provision.

Every child deserves to grow up free from the threat of poverty and with better life chances and opportunities than the generation before them. All parties should commit to putting this issue above politics and to dealing with it as a matter of urgency.

The SDLP will commit to tangibly reducing the amount of children born into and growing up in Child Poverty. We believe that the initial starting point will be areas of deprivation, but this is by no means exclusive. If we only target these areas, we run the risk of completely missing small pockets of poverty in other areas.

To make our community better, child poverty needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

OUR PLEDGE – A STRONG START FUND FOR ALL CHILDREN.

We will provide every child born in Northern Ireland with an investment in their future

There are children across Northern Ireland who live in homes with no savings or assets. For many, from the day they are born, the system is rigged against equality.

The SDLP's 'Strong Start Fund' will see £250 provided to every child born in Northern Ireland as a starting contribution to a junior tax free savings account. This will be topped up at aged 10 with a further £250 and we will explore an option for a third top-up at age 16.

At age 16 children take direct responsibility for their own account and can access funds at age 18. The 'Strong Start Fund' will allow parents, grandparents and other family and friends to contribute.

The 'Strong Start Fund' means an end to the situation where children live in households with no savings. It also means financial stability for every child as they face the move to adulthood.

The 'Strong Start Fund' will be accompanied by an increased focus in the school curriculum on savings and finance.



The SDLP has a consistent record on our support for greater environmental awareness in Northern Ireland and reducing wastage within organisations and public bodies. Northern Ireland is home to some of the most scenic views in Europe and has seen its tourism industry increasingly expand. The SDLP believes that the needs of our environment and the demands of our economy can be balanced to deliver a vibrant landscape that delivers new economic opportunities. We believe proper conservation and environmental awareness remain crucial to maintaining a Northern Ireland we can all be proud of.

Waste Management and Recycling

Under the direction of SDLP Environment Ministers, Northern Ireland has continued to manage waste better. An increasing percentage of all waste is being recycled, over 40% of all municipal waste, and an ever reducing percentage is being diverted to landfill. The SDLP remains committed to the continuation of this improved performance and we will commit to a long term recycling strategy on an all-island basis.

The DOE single-use carrier bag levy introduced by the SDLP has been a huge success for the environment in terms of waste reduction with usage contracting by more than 70%, preventing streets and hedgerows from being littered with non-biodegradable plastic bags.

Tackling Litter

Tackling litter is not simply a matter of cleaning up our environment but is a real method of saving public money with cleaning our streets costing ratepayers £40 million annually.

In Government the SDLP will pursue policies and campaigns that seek to develop civic pride in Northern Ireland. If the North is to work we must foster a duty within everyone to keep our streets clean and local towns neat. The SDLP will support initiatives such as the "Live here, Love here" campaign which help communities take proactive steps in developing local responsibility.

Green Flag program

The SDLP supports the expansion of the Green Flag Eco-Schools programme which has brought environmental awareness to younger generations in Northern Ireland. The award has promoted sustainable living in Northern Ireland and in government the SDLP will further seek to expand the Green Flag programme to encompass other institutions such as our local hospitals and public buildings.

Climate Change Bill

The SDLP has consistently championed the introduction of climate change legislation in Northern Ireland as we believe a Bill would provide new recognition to the reality of climate change and further create the clarity businesses and industries in Northern Ireland need. A new Bill will help drive environmental innovation and create new jobs. As the only region across Ireland and Britain not to have climate change legislation the SDLP's Environment Minister Mark H Durkan consistently pushed the Executive to reach agreement on the delivery of a Climate Change Bill. The SDLP believes that the next Programme for Government must commit to the introduction of a new Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill.

Independent Environment Agency

The SDLP believes that the restructuring of the Department of the Environment into the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs represents a new opportunity to ensure better co-operation between rural and environmental stakeholders. It is important however that the environment is given full consideration in developing policies. The SDLP recognises that there is sufficient scope for an independent environment agency to act within the environments interests and co-operate positively with other sectors on the operation of environmental regulations and policy.

Coastline Strategy

Northern Ireland's coastline represent some of the greatest areas of natural beauty on this island and as such play an important role in local tourism. Unfortunately however coastal erosion now threatens these areas of natural beauty and the businesses, homes and people that reside there. Areas such as the Causeway Coast, face an increasing threat to their local economies if proactive and practical action is not taken.

- The SDLP will:
- Introduce a new Northern Ireland Coastline Strategy.
 - Map Coastal Erosion across the North.
 - Support and expand the role of the Coastal Erosion taskforce.

Fracking

The SDLP fundamentally opposes the introduction of fracking into Northern Ireland. There is no evidence to prove that fracking can be carried out safely and responsibly and that the process raises serious concerns about the protection of our rural landscapes and the security of our water supply. We support the development of new, safe and renewable sources of energy.

The SDLP has consistently opposed fracking at local government, in the Assembly and at the Executive table. The SDLP Foyle MLA Mark H Durkan as Environment Minister has announced a fracking moratorium for all parts of Northern Ireland.



Agriculture is one of the North's key economic sectors and the SDLP believes that both our farming and agri-food sectors must be appropriately supported and new ideas must be implemented to allow them to flourish in a challenging market.

If Northern Ireland is to work we must have a viable and sustainable industry that brings net profits. Agri-food and farming remain fundamental to Northern Ireland's economy and as such they are fundamental to building a prosperous Northern Ireland.

As the world's population grows Northern Ireland must be able to meet new demands and engage in new emerging markets.

Agri-Food Sector

The agri-food sector is Northern Ireland's primary indigenous industry employing 100,000 people, generating £2 billion in wages and an estimated £5 billion in sales value this year alone. The SDLP believes the success of our agri-food sector is crucial

for job creation and the development of rural economies. In the next mandate the Executive must take proactive actions to reduce barriers to expansion. As our largest manufacturing employer, the SDLP will support the industry through policies that seek to reduce energy costs, encourage skills development and competitively promote the North's food and drink sector.

A competitive agri food industry remains crucial to the North's growing export market and as such we must cultivate a flexible industry able to match the demands of the international market.

Food & Drink Global

The SDLP will create a Northern Ireland food strategy and marketing board similar to Bord Bia in the Republic of Ireland and Scotland Food and Drink. Food & Drink Global would be in charge of expanding Northern Ireland's agri-food market and ensuring the unique qualities of Northern Ireland produce are communicated domestically and internationally. A

dedicated food and export marketing board can deliver better outcomes for both small and large producers, while further certifying the quality of our produce internationally.

Labelling

In recent years food products in the North have faced difficulty in labelling regulations that do not recognise them as Northern Irish or Irish. The SDLP believes that Northern Ireland produce is best served when it can reflect its unique nature. It is only natural that food grown in Cavan be treated the same as food grown in Tyrone. The SDLP will seek to develop a One Island Label that recognises Ireland as a unique region within Europe and unique produce of quality.

Going for Growth

The SDLP remains firmly committed to the goals of “Going for Growth” agri-food strategy and we will ensure that the new Executive firmly recommits itself to the aims of the strategy in developing 15,000 sustainable jobs by 2020. The SDLP recognises that we are now in a different place than the strategy envisioned but that the goals originally set out by going for growth can be met if our agri-food and farming industries are properly supported through investment



plans and employment strategies. The SDLP believes removing barriers to our agri-food sector and delivering a Fair Deal for Farming will ensure that targets are met.

Farming

The farming industry is vital to the development of our agri-food sector and represents the backbone of Northern Ireland’s economy with nearly 50,000 people working within farming and associated food processing industries. The SDLP will ensure that farming in Northern Ireland is economically viable and that farmers are getting a fair deal for what they produce.

Northern Ireland farming incomes have reached crisis levels and in 2015 farm incomes fell by 41%. The majority of our farmers now face massively reduced incomes, unsustainable losses and living in increasing poverty. The SDLP wants to see an economically viable farming industry that pays both our major farms and our local family farms. In 2016 it is unacceptable that young farmers, the future of the industry, find themselves forced into emigration in order to seek sustainable employment.

In the next mandate the SDLP will call for the establishment of a Fairer Farming Deal between

farming communities and the Executive. We will deliver policies that support farmers, challenge power imbalances and deliver fairness.

The SDLP believes that greater recognition of Northern Ireland’s food produce will help bolster both our farming and agri-food export sectors. The SDLP will target initiatives that certify food quality such as the European Unions Protected Geographical Indication (PGI). Lough Neagh Eels, Armagh Bramley Apples and Comber Early potatoes have all received protected PGI status which not only recognises their unique regional features but places them in an elite brand of quality food produce internationally. The SDLP will seek to expand PGI status to other Irish food products from this part of the island.

New Approaches to Banking

Cash flow management remains an issue for farmers and the SDLP will call for a more flexible approach to financial arrangements between farmers and banks. Due to the unique nature of farming the SDLP believes loan agreements must take into account the volatility of the international market and the seasonal nature of profitability. The SDLP believes a fair deal for farmers will ensure that loan repayments to banks are met and that only flexible loan agreements will allow for farmers to pay when they can.

Land Reform

In delivering a Fair Deal for Farmers the SDLP will further seek to modernise how Northern Ireland farming makes use of its land. The SDLP supports the “Conacre” letting system but we believe that by delivering economical viable fairer farming land must be put to better use.

The SDLP will:

- Develop initiatives that seek to enrich land for new use.
- Develop more flexible approaches to succession and tenure and create new levels of innovations and productivity.

Rural Development

The SDLP believes that proper support for farming and rural industries must be matched with the proactive development of rural communities. The SDLP will tackle rural isolation through promoting equal and fair access to public services, transportation and high speed broadband and we will continue to defend rural communities by ensuring rural protection policies are enforced across the nine new departments.

Fisheries

The SDLP recognises fishing as a major industry on our island and for many communities such as Ardglass, Portavogie and Kilkeel, fishing ports are vital for the local economy. The SDLP believes the use of meaningful species quotas, the development of harbour infrastructures and new investment in businesses will ensure our fishing sector remains strong and viable.

The SDLP will;

- Support the use of reasonable new quotas on both White Fish and Nephrops prawn.
- Commit the Programme for Government to new fisheries bill to update deep sea and inland fishing regulations.
- Promote Aquaculture businesses and ensure high standard water quality.
- Support the Kilkeel Harbour Development Initiative which identifies essential infrastructural improvements to the harbour which will facilitate access for larger vessels.
- Invest in our angling industry as a recreational area of local tourism.





Human rights provide important protections for everyone in Northern Ireland. Political criticisms which have sought to undermine respect for the rule of law have created a perception where rights are seen as optional or occasional rather than a fundamental foundation of our democracy.

The SDLP believes it is the responsibility of all of us to respect the rights of others and we will continue to campaign for the adoption of a Northern Ireland specific Bill of Rights to protect, strengthen and uphold the social, cultural and economic rights we currently enjoy.

We will also resist any attempts to diminish the protections currently afforded to us through the Human Rights Act 1998 and the European Convention of Human Rights. We will bring forward legislation to extend the right to marry with full family status to same sex couples.

An Irish Language Act

Tá an SDLP gníomhach ar son na Gaeilge agus ar son Acht speisialta a bhunú leis an teanga a chaomhnú agus a chothú. Tá sé thar a bheith riachtanach go mbeidh an tAcht bunaithe ar chearta Gaeilgeoirí a dteanga a úsáid sa saol poiblí gan bhac gan deacracht.

The SDLP continues to promote the Irish language and proposes the establishment of an Irish Language Act to preserve and encourage the language. It is imperative that a rights-based Act supports speakers in the freedom to use the language in public life, without constraints.

Disability Rights and Accessibility

The SDLP believes that if Northern Ireland is to work it must deliver for everyone. In recent years those living with disabilities have faced discrimination in access to businesses, public services, transportation and recreational areas. The SDLP believes that it is

unacceptable and that enabling full accessibility should be part of the planning process

For many people living with disabilities and those living in rural areas in particular, access to safe, reliable public transport is central to their independence and as such impediments to this can seriously compromise an individual's wellbeing and leave them feeling isolated. The SDLP believes that public transport must be available and safe for everyone.

The SDLP further recognises that tourism is a rapidly developing sector in Northern Ireland's Economy and we believe that access to Northern Ireland as a destination should be available to all. In the next mandate the SDLP will seek to develop access in transport and services until Northern Ireland is not simply disability accessible but disability friendly.

The SDLP believes that a renewed focus is needed on removing barriers to those living with disabilities so that everyone in Northern Ireland can live full independent lives.

The SDLP will;

- Call for a comprehensive review of all public buildings, city centres and tourist destinations to ensure they are Disability Friendly.
- Review current discrimination legislation to determine if it is delivering effective outcomes in access for those with disabilities.
- Expand the availability and accessibility of our public transport systems.
- Ensure a proactive approach to meeting access needs through new planning guidelines.
- Support campaigns that promote new awareness of disability issues such as the Every Customer Counts" initiative.

Digital Rights

The SDLP will ensure that individual rights of people online are protected while also ensuring that the state has proportionate powers to prevent crime. We were proud to vote against the recent draft Investigatory Powers Bill and support amendments in the Assembly's Justice Bill, which strengthened the privacy and protection of individuals online.





The SDLP recognises the hugely important role of the Culture, Arts and Leisure sector in Northern Ireland. Year on year, culture and arts are hit with budget cuts and in the last mandate, the Culture Minister failed to pass any legislation to help the sector.

Ireland has a rich creative, linguistic and artistic heritage and many Northern Irish poets, authors, musicians and artists are world renowned. The SDLP is committed to continued support for community arts and for the development of our artistic talents into economic drivers.

The Department of Communities will have responsibility for Culture and Arts in Northern Ireland.

To ensure that this important aspect of our society is kept on the agenda, the SDLP will:

- Form a Cultural Advisory Group to the Minister.
- Create and introduce a new Culture and Arts Strategy.

Creative industries

As proud supporters of the arts the SDLP wishes to build on the economic success of our creative industries. The talent of our artists has led many large international companies to base projects in Northern Ireland.

We must build on this potential. As every £1 invested by the Arts generates a return of over £3.60 to the local economy we must better nurture business entrepreneurship within our arts community so to develop a sustainable indigenous creative industry in Northern Ireland, which is boosted by and not dependent on, international investment.

Libraries

Northern Ireland's public libraries play an important role in our local communities by enhancing learning and ensuring access to information to everyone; improving literacy skills; acting as a social space;

creating employment and helping to develop partnerships with statutory and community organisations.

The SDLP will continue to work with libraries to ensure that services are not destroyed in local communities, especially in rural areas.

Sports and Health

Tackling social isolation is a key priority for the SDLP and we recognise the potential of the arts to bring people of all ages together.

The SDLP recognises the unique role that sport in general plays within communities in the context of health promotion, tackling social exclusion, crime and under-achievement. The SDLP will continue to work with sports clubs and venues to tackle obesity levels through sport. We will continue to support sustained investment in grassroots sports including football, GAA and rugby.

Museums

The SDLP believes that the National Museums and Galleries of Northern Ireland and the NI Museum Council should work in a much closer capacity. We

believe that their co-operation would mean that they have more power to compete on a global scale.

Broadcasting

The SDLP calls for Northern Ireland to have further powers over broadcasting devolved to the Assembly to ensure that our unique cultural, social and creative landscape is given the best possible platform and exposure.

To do this, the SDLP proposes the establishment of an Independent Advisory Panel to explore the potential for devolution as well as addressing and dealing with broadcasting policy issues.

Philanthropy Alliance for the Arts

The SDLP wants to create a collective Alliance in Philanthropy in Northern Ireland. We recognise the generosity of people in Northern Ireland, and we want to create a strategic giving culture through a joined up approach with local donors.

To do this we propose developing a co-ordinated strategy to enhance philanthropy in Northern Ireland including peer and professional support networks for philanthropists and advisory services.





There is an urgent need to address comprehensively and ethically the legacy of the past and the needs of victims and survivors. We believe that this would certainly be one of the single greatest contributions to reconciliation and healing.

The SDLP believes that when it comes to dealing with the past, disclosure, truth and accountability are non-negotiable. We will continue to push for a comprehensive human rights compliant process to deal with all aspects of the conflict.

We warn against fixes that serve the interests of those threatened by truth and accountability, the vested interests of people in state and illegal groups. This risk is real.

Eames/Bradley has been degraded in the various negotiations over the last three years. The scale of truth and accountability envisaged has been greatly diminished. There will be more negotiations on the Past with outcomes that on paper are potentially greater than before but with substance being less than needed by victims and survivors.

The SDLP believes a number of requirements are needed. First, a new process that involves in a substantial way victims and survivors, who have been outside not inside the negotiations. Second, the latest version of the London draft Legacy Bill, not shared with all parties last November, should be published so that victims and survivors have full knowledge of the good and bad in the Bill.

Third, an acknowledgement that the defects in the Bill are more than the resistance to truth by London represented by its stance on national security and that the deficits stretch across the proposals. Fourth, a renewed effort to recreate the range and scale of critical elements of Eames/Bradley, so that outcomes are greater than the minimum expectations of victims and survivors. Fifth, a fundamental review of the legacy funding negotiated in Stormont House, which is clearly inadequate generally, not least with the new financial demands on Inquests and the Stakeknife Inquiry.

Flags commission

The SDLP support the establishment of a Flags Commission consistent with the guarantees within the Good Friday Agreement for “just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos and aspirations of both communities.”

We need a consistent and comprehensive approach to tackling the annual crop of flags on lampposts across Northern Ireland and an updated Flags Protocol from the Executive, as well as a coherent strategy on tackling sectarianism. We believe that left to OFMDFM a future Commission Report could gather dust. That is why the SDLP argue that a future IRG could inform decisions and actions.

Bonfires

The SDLP has proposed the introduction of a bonfire licensing scheme to prevent some of the dangerous scenes we have seen in recent years. The current approach to bonfires is slow and burdensome and often fails to address residents concerns. A single streamlined system would have the benefits of reducing bureaucracy, preventing the repetition of anti-social or sectarian behaviour and averting harmful social, economic or environmental impact.





The true test of any government is whether it improves people's quality of life. After nine years of political stagnation in Northern Ireland, we believe that it's time to move things on and build a better future.

The SDLP has delivered real political reform at local government level, working to ensure that ratepayers receive nothing less than excellence in public services while minimising the annual rates burden. We believe that same ambition for real reform is required in the Assembly and at Executive level.

The SDLP will work with any and all principled partners to ensure that the Assembly delivers real progress. We have always stood for an inclusive, lawful and peaceful society.

Opposition

The SDLP are running for government. After the stagnation, government must now succeed. That is our ambition. We are also clear however that this will be the last Assembly mandate in which there will be no provision for an Opposition.

That is why we have supported the efforts of others and proposed our own mechanisms to create a credible and robust role for an Opposition in the Assembly's structures. For any government to be appropriately held to account it must be transparent in its dealings, open to examination and respect the democratic will of the people. Our reforms ensure that the power-sharing protections and structures will remain while allowing for effective government with the Executive held to account.

Tackling Division

Over the last nine years we have seen a stop-start, piecemeal and partial approach to tackling community divisions. The level of recorded hate crime has increased and on average a place of worship or faith is attacked every day. Legislative protections have become outdated and basic provisions such as a legal definition of sectarianism remain unachieved. While we all have a role in tackling division, the Executive and the Assembly have a duty not only to lead by example but to provide adequate legislation, strategies and resources.

The SDLP will renew its efforts to introduce the long overdue Racial Equality Strategy, press for the introduction of the Sexual Orientation Strategy, establish a comprehensive gender strategy and work to strengthen the flawed shared future strategy.

Petition of Concern

The SDLP believes that the Petition of Concern has in recent years been abused. This mechanism should be restored to its original purpose and restricted to areas where there are clear and identifiable human rights or equality impacts. The Petition of Concern cannot and should not be used by any one party to veto proposals or legislation that would benefit us all.

It is also time to upgrade the Ministerial Code of Conduct, the Code for MLAs and Councillors and those who serve on public bodies. The SDLP tabled amendments to the Fresh Start legislation at Westminster on these matters, all rejected by London.

We plan to go back to them and go back to higher standards for all in public office.

Transparency Bill

The SDLP is committed to introducing a Transparency Bill during the life of the next NI Assembly which will:

- Enshrine in legislation the Nolan Principles of Public Life - Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership. Any breach following investigation by the Assembly Commissioner for Standards or Police could result in a MLA being recalled.
- Introduce cumulative fines for delays in Freedom of Information Act response times for all government departments and local government. No response should take longer than 20 days.
- Require all public representatives who are directors of companies to directly exclude themselves and their agents from any process to secure funding for their own companies.



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