

Uniting People  
**BUILDING PROSPERITY**



# **SDLP Manifesto**

**Assembly & Local Government**

**Elections 2011**

# Uniting People

## BUILDING PROSPERITY

### CONTENTS

### PAGE NUMBER

<b>-CREATING JOBS, GROWING THE ECONOMY.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Rebalancing our Economy.....	5
Building on Strong Business Sectors.....	7
Improving North-South Economic Cooperation.....	9
Local Councils Accelerating Economic Recovery.....	11
<b>-DELIVERING BETTER GOVERNMENT.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Building Prosperity Through Educational Excellence.....	12
Housing, Supporting Communities & Welfare Reform.....	18
Uniting Against Terror & Crime.....	22
Improving Healthcare.....	26
Reforming the Public Sector.....	31
Environmental Prosperity.....	33
Prosperity for Farming & Fishing Communities.....	37
Prosperous Rural Areas.....	38
Uniting People Through Arts & Sport.....	39
A Rights-Based Prosperous Society.....	41
<b>-TRANSFORMING SOCIETY.....</b>	<b>45</b>
Achieving a Truly Shared Future	
<b>-LEADING THE NEW POLITICS.....</b>	<b>47</b>
Reform of Government	
<b>-BECOMING ONE PEOPLE, ONE ISLAND.....</b>	<b>49</b>
Achieving Unity	
<b>-AV REFERENDUM.....</b>	<b>51</b>
YES to the Alternative Vote	

*Please note that certain objectives appear under more than one heading.*

# Uniting People

## BUILDING PROSPERITY

### MESSAGE FROM MARGARET RITCHIE



We have now had four years of devolution. After the years of instability, a full term is welcome.

The unity in the face of threat and terror, in recent days and in recent years, is an essential element of politics going forward.

It is now time for parties and devolution to enter a new phase, to achieve more and to go further.

The next Assembly and Executive must start to deliver on the promise of devolution. We must deliver on jobs and the economy, and on uniting people and building prosperity.

The SDLP is proud of its track record of delivery. We appoint competent ministers and we use the power you entrust to us to make a real difference for you, your family and our entire community.

Against a background of economic hardship and a Budget imposing severe cuts on vital public services, your area will benefit from a strong SDLP team in the Assembly and in Council chambers too. We pledge to protect frontline services and fight for every job.

We are brimming with ideas to move society forward, to build a stronger economy and to make government work properly.

The SDLP will lead the new politics and transform the North.

Devolution could do much better. The SDLP will make it work for you.

**Vote SDLP on Thursday 5 May.**

*Margaret Ritchie*



# Uniting People

## BUILDING PROSPERITY



### **The SDLP will unite people and build prosperity.**

*We will create a North which is attractive to business, takes care of the sick, respects older citizens and is a great place to work and raise a family.*

### **We will do this by:**

*Creating 16,000 jobs through support for Green New Deal initiatives, our agri-food and ICT industries, tourism and a lower rate of corporation tax.*

*Investing in our young people, our schools, teachers, apprentices and universities.*

*Delivering better government by driving radical public sector reform and overcoming Executive stalemates.*

*Transforming society by ending segregation in housing and education, protecting frontline health services and supporting vulnerable people.*

*Leading the New Politics through partnership, reducing the number of politicians, cutting government departments and shrinking bureaucracy.*

*Bringing about a new phase of North-South initiatives, joining up services on the island to improve delivery, save costs and increase cooperation.*

*Celebrating our shared Northern, Irish and European identity, and through agreement, uniting people in a new Ireland.*

## SDLP track record

- sought to amend and ultimately **rejected the Budget**, as it unfairly impacts on the most vulnerable in our society and does nothing to create jobs or deliver a sustainable, competitive economy
- the SDLP was the only party to bring forward **genuine alternative proposals** to the Budget
- in Assembly Committees, we oversaw investigations to advance powers for **Credit Unions**, and addressed the problems of **young people not in employment, education or training**
- working to ensure that the banks keep **lending promises** to make credit available to small businesses
- backed **the Fair Fuel campaign**, to help keep fuel prices down for local consumers and businesses
- at the forefront of moves to get government assistance for **PMS savers**.

## FÍS GHEILLEAGRACH AN SDLP

Ba mhian linn go mbeadh an Tuaisceart tarraingteach do chomhlachtaí gnó, Tuaisceart ina mbeadh fás sa rannóg phríobhaideach, a chuirfeadh postanna ar fail, agus ina mbeadh rath agus bláth ar ár ndaoine go léir.

**Oibreoidh Coiste Feidhmiúcháin an SDLP chun an fhís seo a chur i bhfeidhm agus i gcrích.**

## THE SDLP ECONOMIC VISION

We want a North which is **attractive to business, grows the private sector, delivers jobs** and **builds prosperity** for all our people.

**A SDLP-led Executive will work to deliver this vision.**

It will require a rebalancing of the economy accompanied by a targeting of investment and focusing of other programmes on employment creation. There is also the need to improve the general environment for investment and job creation, and create new initiatives bringing the benefits of greater North-South cooperation.

## BUDGET 2011-2015: NOT FIT-FOR-PURPOSE

We voted against the 2011-2015 Budget because it fails to do any of the above.

In drafting the Budget, its authors made little attempt to consult or engage with the other parties, business, trade unions, the community and voluntary sector or wider civic society.

*“SDLP in last ditch effort to amend Budget”*

Belfast Telegraph,  
14 February 2011.



*“The Finance Minister has presented us with a not-an-inch Budget. The Budget will move us forward not an inch when it comes to our economy, our Health Service and our education system.”*

Declan O’Loan MLA,  
SDLP Finance spokesperson.



*“As the economic downturn continues to dominate the political agenda, the SDLP are the first party to hold a conference dedicated to engaging with business and financial leaders and debating solutions to the crisis.”*

www.NIBizTalk.com,  
1 May 2009.



*“This Budget fails the people of Northern Ireland. It is a formula for thousands of job losses and will heap a mountain of misery on vulnerable households. It punishes low-paid workers, students, teachers, schoolchildren, the construction industry and those who depend on our health service.*

*It crudely dismisses the advice of all independent commentators. It is a 1970s Tory cuts Budget from two parties still rooted in 1970s politics.”*

Margaret Ritchie, SDLP Leader.

**The SDLP approach is different.** We will involve representatives from these sectors so agreement between the parties can be reinforced by workers, employers and the voluntary and community sector.

In government we pledge a full **review to radically improve the flawed Budget**, and adoption of **proposals** which can raise £4 billion to boost business, tourism and construction, assign extra cash for school and road building and improve our Health Service.

#### **We will:**

- **reconstruct the Budget** to place a proper focus on job creation
- prioritise investment to create **16,000 new jobs** across a number of sectors
- **reprioritise capital spending** so that more investment goes into school and road building
- increase **construction industry employment** in the social housing newbuild sector and other shovel-ready programmes
- seek devolution of tax-varying powers to **reduce corporation tax**
- invest in a major programme of **home insulation**, creating thousands of new jobs
- establish a single **Department for the Economy**, as recommended by independent experts, to better meet the needs of the people of this region
- establish a **new Department of Energy and Sustainability**
- accelerate **disposal of revenue-generating assets** and reinvest the proceeds in infrastructure
- plan infrastructure on an **all-island basis**
- expand the Executive's **borrowing** capability.

Beidh uailmhian pholaitiúil agus cinní crua le déanamh agus le glacadh ag na páirtithe go léir tríd an phlean ratha seo a chur i bhfeidhm. Oibreoidh muid, áfach, le cur ina luí ar dhaoine eile go bhfuil athrú, ar mhaithe leis an phobal, le baint amach i rith an chéad Thionól eile.

#### **Cuideoidh muid in aontú pobail agus neartú ratha.**

Implementing this plan will require political ambition and tough decisions from all the parties. Nonetheless, we will work to convince others that change for the better can be achieved during the next Assembly.

**We will help unite our people and build prosperity.**

## REBALANCING THE ECONOMY

We need to rebalance the local economy; the **private sector is simply too small**. This is not just the SDLP view, but that of independent economists and commentators alike.

The Budget was a missed opportunity, and without a new Programme for Government in place, the outgoing DUP-Sinn Féin led Executive has let the people of the North down by failing to clearly outline an economic growth and job creation strategy for the next four years and beyond. A continuation of existing policies will not give the North the step change required to grow the private sector economy.

**The SDLP approach is bolder, and will deliver economic prosperity for the people of the North.** In order to free up the Executive to take the necessary action to rebalance the economy and create jobs and economic growth, we are proposing a **25-year economic and financial framework compact with the Treasury**. This compact would map out the future in terms of **tax-varying powers**, the creation of **our own social security system** and the **long-term delivery of the block grant**. This long-term project of rebalancing the local economy would require the compact to be sustained even if the North's constitutional position was to change democratically. This is the only way to truly take control of our own future.

In the more immediate term, and while no single action is capable of immediately boosting the private sector, we believe the next Executive must focus on a number of key measures that will make a difference, including:

### **Help for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)**

SDLP proposals will assist SMEs survive the economic downturn and prepare for recovery when it happens.

We will establish a **Recession Recovery Fund**, a package of 'triage' loans for businesses struggling to secure finance in the current banking environment.

Additionally, a system of **micro-finance loans** of up to £5,000 offered at the current rate of inflation will be made available to small local companies. These loan schemes would be distributed to local companies through Local Enterprise Agencies, whose skills and local knowledge are best utilised in assisting local businesses.

It remains crucial that the **banks are made deliver for the local economy**, and we are working to make all banks operating in the North keep their lending promises.



Finally, we will simplify the business environment, **cutting red tape** in government that currently hampers growth, particularly for small companies.

### **A better performing planning system**

Although it is often the Planning Service that bears the brunt of the public criticism, the problem is with the system itself. It is cumbersome, inconsistent and for investors and developers, the planning system is far too slow.

As part of our programme of public sector reform, we will completely redesign the planning system. The system must respond better to a fast-changing, competitive environment.

One of our reform measures will be the introduction of a fast-track system whereby planning applicants would receive a decision in a fraction of the normal time, in exchange for a significantly higher application fee.

We will also work to ensure the new **PPS 24 'Economic Considerations'** provides a system which processes applications quickly and efficiently.

While the reformed planning system must deliver better and faster for business, it must equally adhere to a policy framework that **sustains, protects and enhances our built and natural environment**. The two are not mutually exclusive.

### **Public sector reform**

Tá go leor comparáidí ann, idir RA (UK) agus idirnáisiúnta, a léiríonn nach bhfuil ardchaighdeán de sheirbhísí poiblí á gcur ar fáil againn faoi láthair. Ba mhian leis an SDLP faille na bpáirtithe eile a aisiompú agus tús úr a chur le **clár oibre chun seirbhísí den chéad scoth a sholáthar** anseo.

We value the excellent work of public servants across the North, who provide essential frontline services which benefit the whole of the community.

*"The detail of the [SDLP] proposals builds on the well-regarded policy document the party published last year..."*

*Even before the recession began to dominate politics, the party had pinpointed the importance of the economy."*

Noel McAdam, Belfast Telegraph,  
22 April 2010.

The SDLP considers public sector reform **a vital strand in facing the budgetary challenge**. We believe that the next four years can see better, not worse, public services.

In *Reforming the Public Sector*, and our chapters on Education and Health, we outline our proposals for reform that can save monies for reinvestment in frontline services and avoid compulsory redundancies, upgrade existing services to best meet the needs of modern Irish society and put us on a path towards a longer-term vision of economic, environmental and social success.

We will seek the support of all other parties in the Assembly and all who work in the public sector on this challenging project.

## **Lower corporation tax**

The SDLP welcomes the recent Treasury paper, as well as the recognition by others that the North should take further devolved powers to lower the rate of corporation tax.

An **all-island rate of 12.5%** would greatly boost our ability to attract investment from multi-national powerhouses, as has been the case in the Republic.

At Westminster and during our regular dialogue with the governing parties in the South, we will continue to engage intensively in the discussion around reducing corporation tax.

We acknowledge the risks regarding the impact of a reduction to corporation tax here, not least the potential cost to the Northern Ireland block grant. However, we believe this major step can **set the local economy on a new trajectory** and issues regarding the block grant can be resolved.

## **Smarter central government borrowing**

While we do not want to depend solely on borrowing power, we do need to ensure we make the best use of existing facilities for **investment in our public services and infrastructure**.

There is a need to look again at the **Reform and Reinvestment Initiative (RRI)**, with a view to renegotiating the borrowing limit with the Treasury. After all, the RRI was established more than ten years ago, so a review is timely.

By doubling the amount of money it can currently borrow, the Executive could access an extra £1 billion of funding over five years.

The increased amount borrowed would be invested in much needed and shovel-ready capital build projects, such as the schools building programme put on hold during the outgoing administration, and a major roads improvement initiative to repair the damage caused by recent severe winter conditions.

This would also go some way in **lifting thousands of jobless construction workers out of unemployment**.

## **Smarter local government borrowing**

Local government in Northern Ireland is free to borrow money in a way that central government is not. We therefore recommend that **local government** begins to develop **strategic partnerships with central government**, and use its borrowing power to deliver core capital projects within the local government area, for which finance would not otherwise be available.

Once again, these projects would help boost the local economic output while getting many of those in the building trade back to work.

We will pursue this proposal as part of the completion of the abandoned **local government reform programme (RPA)**.

## **Shared Future savings bond**

Although the Northern Ireland Executive does not yet have tax raising powers, it does have scope to raise funds directly from the public.

In a time of economic volatility, investors are looking for somewhere safe to lock in their capital, and **a government guaranteed bond** with a guaranteed return would be attractive for savers, large or small.



If the finance raised was to be reinvested in development of the North's infrastructure, the bond would appeal to the local loyalty of people on a cross-community basis and their desire to **build a better future for everyone**.

Building schools and hospitals and other community facilities with this money will help Northern Ireland to continue to prosper while creating much needed jobs in the construction industry.

*"SDLP Budget Proposals - Party offers solutions to Executive cash shortfall"*

*Business editor Gary McDonald examines the proposals, some controversial, contained in a new SDLP discussion paper calling for a revision of the North's budget*  
The Irish News, 7 April 2009.

## BUILDING ON STRONG BUSINESS SECTORS

In *New Priorities in Difficult Times* and *Partnership & Economic Recovery*, as well as in our responses to the flawed Budget, we outline our ideas to generate £4 billion in extra resources for the Executive without the need for frontline job losses, water charges or any hike in student fees.

We demonstrated that with innovative thinking and a hunger for action, there are **real opportunities for job creation** even in the middle of a recession.

Indeed, **SDLP Ministers have shown this to be true:**

- record numbers of **new social homes** have been built in the last four years, employing hundreds of construction workers both directly and indirectly
- by prioritising the **Warm Homes Scheme**, SDLP Ministers have created more jobs and brought immediate stimulus to the local economy

- numerous **town and city regeneration** projects have either been completed or are underway.

Toisc go bhfuil 32,000 cuardaitheoir poist sa bhreis inniu ná i 2008 - 26,000 acu sa rannóg tógála amháin - **caithfear túsáite a thabhairt do chruthú poist sa chéad Clár Oibre don Rialtas eile**, nuair a ghlacfar leis.

Vótáil muid i gcoinne an Bhuiséid siocair go raibh mion-straitéis chruthú poist in easnamh; go contrártha, tá páirtithe eile sásta glacadh le foirmle a mholann cailliúint na mílte post.

With 32,000 more jobseekers today than in 2008 - including 26,000 job losses in the construction sector alone - **job creation must be at the forefront of the next Programme for Government**, when it is finally adopted.

We voted against the Budget because it lacks a detailed job creation strategy; perversely, other parties are content with what is essentially a formula for thousands of job losses.

The SDLP jobs plan highlights opportunities for short-term investment in Northern Ireland's core business sectors to create **16,000 jobs in three years** by:

- properly financing the **Green New Deal** to create 7,000 jobs
- investing in the flourishing **agri-food sector** to create 3,300 direct and supply chain jobs
- beginning an ambitious process of doubling our **tourism revenue** as the global economy improves, creating 2,200 jobs
- ensuring the continued growth of our **ICT sector**, creating 2,000 jobs
- diverting capital spend to the **shovel-ready building projects** which create most jobs - including social housing - to create 1,500 jobs.

### Implementing the Green New Deal

The SDLP is absolutely committed to this sustainability and job creation plan.

Not only will it help manage climate change, the Green New Deal has the ability to help lift vulnerable people out of fuel poverty, and crucially provide significant jobs within the next three years.

*"We must build upon the potential for development of indigenous green industries and we must start now."*

Alasdair McDonnell MP,  
SDLP Economy spokesperson.

The Budget allocates a mere £12 million to the Green New Deal. The SDLP - and many economists and other experts - recommends investment from government should be closer to **£70 million**, which could draw in three times that amount in private investment.

The **record of SDLP Ministers** in tackling fuel poverty is clear. We will ensure the next Housing Minister, alongside the Environment Minister and with the backing of the whole Executive, uses this investment to:

- **insulate 100,000 homes** to reduce energy consumption and help take more households out of fuel poverty
- retro-fit more **energy efficient technology** to those Housing Executive homes currently failing because of inadequate heating, in order to meet the Decent Homes Standard
- convert and retro-fit **public buildings**, including hospitals and schools, to sustainable energy provision, including where necessary more efficient fossil fuel energy such as Combined Heat and Power.

There is no doubt the Green New Deal offers an excellent sustainable investment programme and a unique job creation opportunity at this time of economic difficulty.



A **single Energy and Sustainability Department** would also assist in implementing this green jobs agenda, and make sure government best meets the economic and social needs of the people of the North.

### **Boosting agri-food businesses**

Northern Ireland has an international reputation for high quality in agri-food. We will continue to **support the work of the high-achieving agri-food sector** in order to enhance our largest export sector's job creation potential to the order of **3,300 new direct and supply chain jobs within three years**.

As part of our skills development policy which will underpin the future of the North's agri-food sector growth, we will channel **investment to further develop training opportunities** in food production, research and development. We believe this approach will secure a supply of fresh, healthy, local food and also assist part-time farmers in supplementing their income.

However, in order to achieve any of this we must see a **massive reduction in red tape** to make government more accessible to the rural community and allow them to have a vibrant and prosperous future. A top priority will therefore be to **progress the stalled Better Regulation Review** to eliminate the problem of red tape in the agriculture industry.

### **Developing our tourism potential**

The SDLP believes that there is major potential to develop the tourism industry in Northern Ireland. The NI Tourist Board has developed a sound strategy, but it must be properly resourced if it is to be implemented successfully.

We will work to deliver the sector's aim of **doubling tourism revenues to £1 billion by 2020**, and in three years, have created around **2,200 new jobs**.

#### *Advancing the signature projects*

The signature projects are at the centre of tourism development here. It is essential that the development of signature projects is accelerated so that they represent fully rounded visitor attractions.

An important step in this is to attach a full narrative around each project so that it is not just something to see, but becomes a story that engages the visitor. This requires funding for **further capital works and investment** in interpretative/narrative development, as well as investment in training in **customer service and hospitality**.



### *Gearing up for 2013*

We are proud that **Derry will be City of Culture** in two years time. This is an important opportunity to promote not just the North West, but the whole of the island on an international scale.

We have proposed taking a leaf out of the book of Scottish tourism and organising a '**Year of Homecoming**' aimed at getting members of the Northern Irish diaspora to return home at some point in 2013. The new Executive must move quickly to adopt a strategy that maximises Derry's success.

This strategy would require additional marketing spend, but if Northern Ireland achieved the same performance as Scotland, then the yield of **tens of millions of pounds** in extra visitor spend and the **additional jobs created** would produce a very high return on investment.



## **ICT**

As well as creating the right conditions for ICT companies to thrive (see *Rebalancing the economy*), we will urge the next Education Minister and the next Employment & Learning Minister to **better align education and training provision** with the needs of a technology-rich economy.

One way for the North to address its long-term IT skills needs is by getting students interested in IT at an early age. We will work with industry, educationalists and young people themselves to examine ways of increasing uptake of **STEM** (science, technology, engineering, maths) subjects, courses and degrees.

We also propose the creation of a **single Department of Learning** - bringing together the Education Department and Employment & Learning Department. This would ensure the most effective investment at the earliest stage of our children and young people's development, and optimise the expertise and skills of our future workforce to increase our international competitiveness.

---

## **IMPROVING NORTH-SOUTH ECONOMIC COOPERATION**

Despite over a decade of structured, institutionalised North-South cooperation there is much more to do on an all-island basis that will be of mutual benefit to both jurisdictions. There is a very significant agenda to roll out in physical infrastructure, health, further education, innovation, tourism, energy and many other areas.

Disappointingly, North-South is still hampered by overtly political considerations, as if in some instances it is seen as a concession to nationalism rather than pure common sense.

More and more **senior business figures, community and voluntary** organisations, **economists** and **commentators** all **recognise the mutual economic and social benefits** of enhanced North-South collaboration, particularly in these straitened times.

All parties must now show maturity and capture the full potential of North-South economic cooperation. Instead of trying to constrain the existing North-South bodies, the Executive should allow them to maximise their remit, and give proper consideration to the formation of **further North-South vehicles** as appropriate.

We commit to:

## Implementing existing North-South reports

The Executive and the new Irish government must apply all the findings of the 2006 **British-Irish Comprehensive All-Island Economic Review**, and the **National Development Plan** (NDP) 2008-2013.

As a priority, a short timeframe will be agreed to require the administrations North and South to develop work programmes and implementation schedules to translate the proposals of the NDP into practice during its remaining lifetime.

## Progressing ambition for an 'innovation island'

Ireland has traditionally produced generations of innovative thinkers with a strong sense of entrepreneurship.

The Department for Enterprise, Trade & Investment (DETI) and Invest NI must **integrate their long-term strategies** for economic growth **with the Irish government's plans** to intensify efforts to create the best research, innovation and commercialisation ecosystem in Europe: the 'innovation island.'

The SDLP has proposed creating a virtual '**Open Faculty for Innovation**'. This Open Faculty would serve as a platform to engage and encourage not only those in our universities and our regional colleges, but also within our businesses to work towards achieving a culture that thinks innovation, works innovation and grows innovation.

We will further progress this proposal through the Executive, at NSMC level and by targeting efforts on key proposals such as the creation of a single Economy Department here and implementing the proposals of the **Matrix** and the **NI Task Force** reports.

## Maximising Framework 7

There are numerous benefits to participating in a FP7 project, and not just the financial support for R&D. We want to maximise opportunities for **our researchers, graduates** and **SMEs** to access cutting-edge technology development, benefit from collaboration with key industry players and the ability to access new markets.

We will work within the new Executive to breathe new life into R&D investment and secure **better all-island cooperation** to exploit the potential of Framework 7, ahead of 2013.

We will establish **an expert team** which would quickly identify the R&D opportunities attached to renewable energy, agri-food, bio-technology and life and health sciences, to facilitate researchers and companies in accessing a greater proportion of FP7 funds. We will also work to ensure the clear failures in FP7 are not repeated.

We will argue the case for continued EU programmes in support of R&D post-2013 with our colleagues in the Party of European Socialists (PES), and in the North South Ministerial Council.

## Infrastructure development

Má tá muid lán-dáiríre faoi éifeachtúlacht níos mó a thabhairt do dhaoine i dtéarmaí chaiteachas poiblí, caithfear síorfhiosrú a dhéanamh ar dheiseanna a chothú chun airgead a shábháil trí mhaoiniú uile-Éireann a aimsiú chun gilleagair ar bhonneagar agus ar sheirbhísí a fheistiú.

If we are serious about delivering greater efficiency for people in terms of public spending, we must continuously investigate opportunities to save money through all-Ireland funding to secure economies of scale on infrastructure and services.

We acknowledge the Irish government's assurances in this regard.

As a priority, we will develop an **all-island sustainable transport strategy**, providing greater planning for the growth of the island's ports and manage our island's airport expansion through an all-island aviation strategy (see our ideas under *Access to a better sustainable transport system*).





We will also ensure the revised **Regional Development Strategy** is integrated with the National Spatial Strategy in the South.

### **Continue to develop all-island energy markets**

In the next Assembly, we want to commit the Executive in a substantive way to developing **all-island renewable energy** and **security of supply strategies**.

Ireland, North and South, has a very substantial **wind energy** resource which, if fully developed, could account for a major proportion of Ireland's future electricity generation requirements, and create thousands of new jobs.

We are committed to enabling two things. Firstly, engagement between DETI and the industry regulator to **explore the scope for price regulation** that incentivises the grid to facilitate wind farm connectivity.

Secondly, we will scope the establishment of a fund to which grid companies and/or wind energy developers could bid for **support for research and investment** in significant new wind connections.

We will also use our influence on the Executive and with the governing parties in the South to step up efforts towards a **unified gas transmission network** and a **single gas market** by 2015. It is important that the necessary legislation is put in place to allow this to happen.

Finally, to speed up delivery of a completely integrated and managed energy market for this island and realise significant cost savings for consumers in both jurisdictions, we propose a **single independent regulator**.

### **All-island environmental protection**

Caithfear túsáite a thabhairt do Ghníomhaireacht Timpeallachta neamhspleách, uile-oileán, mar nach n-aithníonn bagairtí truaillithe, dramhaíola nó bagairtí timpeallachta eile teoireanneacha ar bith.

Déanann sé ciall 'timpeallachta' go ndéanfar na costaisí a roinnt agus go ndéanfar cóipeail ar fheidhmiú dlí a dhíbirt, go háirithe sna ceantracha teorainn.

As pollution, waste and other environmental threats know no border, establishing an independent, all-island Environment Agency remains a priority.

It simply makes good environmental sense, would **enable cost-sharing** and eliminate duplication in enforcing legislation, particularly in border areas.

Enforcement is generally poor in Northern Ireland, often leading to infringement proceedings and huge fines which we can ill-afford. The sustainable management and regulation of the environment must therefore be seen as **a major contribution to the economy**.

An independent agency with authority in both jurisdictions would have the ability and the appetite to ensure legislation is fully implemented in the first place, that existing environmental laws are enforced, environmental crimes are thoroughly investigated and proportionate penalties are applied as necessary.



## **LOCAL COUNCILS ACCELERATING ECONOMIC RECOVERY**

Economic Development departments within our local councils can do much more to boost the local economy.

Our Councillors have a unique knowledge of the economic strengths of their local areas. SDLP Councillors will work to ensure better partnership between councils, local enterprise agencies and Invest NI's local offices.

Economic Development committees must work more closely with local business people to gain their expertise in promoting the local economy. Working in isolation is not an option.



## BUILDING PROSPERITY THROUGH EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

### The SDLP record on education

- voiced the worries of young people, students, parents and teachers and **flatly rejected any proposal to lift the cap on student fees**
- SDLP MLA **Dominic Bradley brought an Autism Bill** through the Assembly. This legislation will ensure government plans holistically and realistically for the future needs of people with autism, their families and carers
- defended the statutory rights of **children with special educational needs** to summer school provision
- highlighted and campaigned for **investment in the schools estate**
- fought for investment in **Irish-medium education**.

Disappointingly, almost every debate about education over the past four years has focused on the chaotic situation created by Sinn Féin and the DUP through their **failure to agree a way forward on post-primary transfer**.

We want to move the debate on around the future of education beyond the politics of stalemate, and really begin investing in our children and young people's future. This includes resolving the uncertainty around post-primary transfer.

**Is féidir le infheistiú i sár-oideachas ceartas shóisialta agus fhás gheilleagrach a bhaint amach don tsochaí.**

**Early investment in educational excellence can achieve both social justice and long-term economic growth for society.**

*"Sinn Féin won't discuss schools' transfer chaos"*

Kathryn Torney, Belfast Telegraph,  
2 October 2009.

The SDLP will reform our education system so it no longer fails our young people.

Our top priority is to secure **better investment in and provision for nursery and primary school children**, the stage at which vulnerable children start falling behind.

The SDLP is **committed to addressing the legacy of disadvantage in further education**. In order to boost our economy, students must be better supported and encouraged to secure places at colleges and universities. We will use our numbers on the Executive to **fiercely oppose increases to tuition fees**.

The SDLP recognises the **important contribution that the Youth Service, schools, churches and other community organisations play** in the personal and social development of young people. The contribution the sector makes to the lives of young people is immense.

However, we are aware that the Youth Service is grossly underfunded, particularly the voluntary sector. We will make changes to ensure that the Service is appropriately funded in line with the contribution it makes towards a better society for all our young people.



## REFORMING OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM

Restructuring of the education system can be achieved if a rational and stepped approach is planned out and implemented.

We envisage a system focused not just on exams but on **a rounded education** for our children, and **parental choice** of shared, Irish-medium, state or faith-based education through the provision of appropriate access for all pupils.

As part of the strategy to establish **a more high-achieving system**, we should allow for, where suitable, transfer at 14. This is a more informed age to enable pupil and parental choice regarding the best educational route.

There is much that can be done in education to encourage cohesion, sharing and integration without the loss of diversity. There are **compelling educational, societal, and economic reasons why the sectors should share staff, facilities and buildings**. We would encourage the maximum sharing possible, not only in the delivery of the entitlement framework but right throughout the educational phases from early years to the end of the post-primary phase, and in the planning and provision of the schools estate.

We want to move beyond the current political stagnation and complete the framework that will enable our education system to really deliver for our young people, teachers and parents. We will therefore seek to adopt legislation to establish the **Education and Skills Authority (ESA)**.

Prior to this, the SDLP will demand a resolution to major issues including staffing, the projected financial savings, the performance assessment process, and how the ESA will link into the new local council groupings, once they are established.

While we value the work carried out by individuals within bodies such as the Education and Training Inspectorate and the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment, we believe it makes good financial sense to undertake **a review of these agencies in order to protect frontline services**. We foresee savings being made through non-delivery aspects of the bodies' work such as administrative and overhead costs reductions.

*"We welcome the SDLP's commitment to securing equality of opportunity for all learners. Action to tackle social and economic disadvantage must remain an urgent priority in ensuring that all young people achieve their full potential."*

NASUWT, 27 April 2010.



## TACKLING UNDERACHIEVEMENT

### Literacy and numeracy

Tá sé de dhualgas orainn torthaí níos fearr sa litearthacht agus san uimhearthacht a bhaint amach do go leor daoine óga a bhfuil an córas oideachais á ligint síos faoi láthair.

We are duty-bound to **invest in better literacy and numeracy outcomes** for the many young people currently let down by the education system.

The SDLP will make sure the forthcoming literacy and numeracy strategy initiates the type of research and cross-departmental approach needed to **tackle 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.

We will also aim to make sure all young people continue with numeracy and maths **post-16**.

### Investing in early years

The SDLP's opposition to the current flawed Budget was based on the **disregard the Budget's authors have shown towards the most vulnerable in society**, including our **children**.

By **fundamentally reconstructing the Budget we will make sure the financial balance is tipped in favour of children's issues**, including the reinstatement of the Children's Fund.

This dedicated funding source enabled communities to access much needed financial assistance to ensure that initiatives such as early intervention, pre-school and disability programmes as well as many others could be made available to all communities, thus providing equality of opportunity for all our children and young people.

We will ensure **full implementation of an integrated, long-term 0-6 years strategy** which recognises that early childhood care and education are the right of all children and the basis of human development. Getting the implementation of this strategy right will be crucial to the social, economic and emotional wellbeing of our society in the future.

That is why Social Development Minister Alex Attwood made sure that **25% of Neighbourhood Renewal monies go towards 0-6 programmes and initiatives**.



The early years strategy must address **early years provision in rural areas**. In the previous mandate there was little coordination between key departments like Education and Agriculture, for example, and affordable rural childcare and other important services for children are still not readily available.

We will highlight the importance of securing cross-departmental responsibility for the implementation of the early years strategy, and put in place a mechanism to assess progress according to agreed milestones, to be reported to the Executive on an annual basis.

The 0-6 strategy must dovetail with other key policies and strategies, including the childcare, play and leisure, and cohesion, sharing and integration strategies. Similarly, early education planning must be integrated into all regional and rural development plans and poverty reduction strategies.

### Learning through play

Leadership and responsibility for the Executive's play and leisure policy must be attributed to a **single department and minister**, in order to deliver the play and leisure implementation plan as a matter of urgency.

We rejected the reduced spend imposed on play policy, and will seek a **commitment to an adequate funding stream over the next Budget period**, as well as guarantees on close involvement of the community, voluntary, private and statutory sectors when implementing the policy.

## Supporting ethnic minority children

It is time to reassess how ethnic minority children are supported in meeting their full developmental potential. These children are **more than simply learners of English**. We will put in place a broader strategy for ethnic minority children taking into account the important pastoral, community and cultural issues involved.

In order to tackle **bullying in our schools**, including **racial and religious bullying**, we will work with schools, parents and experts to assess the possibility of creating an independent complaints system.



## Looking to the future

To best prepare our children and young people for a global employment market, we will improve the current **modern languages programme for primary schools**. By offering in-service training for tutors, we can create long-term, in-school capacity for European and non-European language provision.

We will place a more robust **focus on attainment in STEM** subjects and degrees, in order to provide our young people and, as a consequence, our businesses with the necessary skills base to excel in this era of global competition.

## IRISH-MEDIUM EDUCATION

Fáitíon an SDLP roimh an dul chun cinn iontach atá déanta in earnáil na Gaelscolaíochta. **Traoslaíonn muid leis na múinteoirí, tuismitheoirí agus daltaí as an an éacht ata déanta acu.**

The SDLP believes that the **Irish-medium sector should be given the resources needed to meet the growth in the sector and to eradicate the historic injustices in funding the sector.**

We will continue to support the sector in every way possible to ensure that pupils and teachers have equality with those in other sectors.

---

## SPECIAL NEEDS

Leanfaidh an SDLP tuairimí agus luachanna na bpáistí a bhfuil ráitéisí riachtanais foghlama oideachasúla acu a léiriú, lena dtuistí, lena gcaomhnóirí chomh maith le heagraíochtaí tathanta do dhaoine míchumasaithe ó thaobh déanamh cinní i rialtas lárnach agus áitiúil de.

The SDLP will continue to represent the views and values of children with statements of special educational needs, their parents and carers as well as advocacy groups for the disabled in central and local government decision-making.

We want **as a matter of urgency a policy adopted for children with special educational needs**. Our goal is an education system where children, young people and their parents and carers are partners with schools and education authorities in securing the best educational outcomes for children with a disability and/or special educational needs.

The policy would also ensure **partnership between the Department of Education and the Department of Health** in order to best meet the needs of these children.

Importantly, we will also address the difficulties faced by many young people with special educational needs once they turn 19. We will place a statutory obligation on the two main departments to plan for those over school-leaving age, and assess the options for **post-19 care provision**, including increasing the number of places in day care centres.





We made sure that all parties signed up to the SDLP's **Autism Act**. This groundbreaking piece of legislation will ensure that people with autism, their families and carers now have access to the full range of services they require throughout the course of their lives.

---

## HIGHER EDUCATION IS STILL A RIGHT

It has never been more important for public investment to be geared towards higher and further education across Northern Ireland due to the direct **multiplier effect that it has on job creation and economic regeneration**.

In the next Programme for Government, when it is finally presented, it must remain a priority that access to **higher education is a right**, available to **people from disadvantaged social backgrounds**.

Leanfaidh an SDLP dul i gcoinne méadú ar bith ó thaobh taillí ollscoile de.

Seo cúis amháin a vótáil muid i gcoinne an Bhuiséid; ní thugann sé soiléiriú ar bith ar airgeadas an mhicléinn agus ní éiríonn leis tacaíocht a thabhairt d'ollscoileanna sa dóigh is nach mbeidh gá le méadú táillí na macléinn. Tá muid tiomanta d'oidéachas atá dírithe ar chumas foghlama agus ní ar chumas íocaíochta.

The SDLP will **continue to oppose any increase in university tuition fees**. We will not allow others to attempt to take society back to when only the well-off could go to university.

This is **one reason why we voted against the Budget**; it provides no clarity on student finance and fails to pledge support to universities so that student fee increases become unnecessary.

We are committed to ensuring that education is **fairly based on the ability to learn** and **not the ability to pay**.

Taking a decision not to allow an increase in student fees under any circumstances will require political determination and realism.

**The SDLP will not and cannot support a fees increase, and we will urge the other parties in the Executive to resist and reject it too.**

### Assistance for students and graduates

Additionally, we will put in place an **all-round support package for students**, including assistance with accommodation, advice on loan repayments and careers advice.

The economic downturn is now threatening opportunities for graduates within the labour market here. To support our graduates, we will introduce further funding for **graduate training apprenticeships**.

The Executive must work with indigenous companies to establish a **graduate internship scheme**. Funding must be made available to encourage employers to participate in the scheme and grants must be provided for the students involved.

---

## SUPPORTING OUR FURTHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Further education (FE) students, sixth-form pupils and their families are in urgent need of support, and we will keep campaigning alongside young people to retain the **Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)**. As long as doubt remains over the future of the EMA, it prevents many young people from pursuing apprenticeships and further education courses.

The uncertainty over the EMA has also created concern among **staff in FE colleges** who fear a drastic fall in attendance rates, as well as further job losses. At a time when young people, particularly those from unprivileged backgrounds, ought to be encouraged to stay in education and training to become the skilled workforce of the future, the SDLP will continue to fight any short sighted move that prevents them from doing so.



## 'NEET' YOUNG PEOPLE

As the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) continues to grow, the **economic cost of youth unemployment alone in Northern Ireland is now somewhere in the region of £250 million per year.**

We are determined that the strategy for NEET young people will be preventative and ensure meaningful collaboration between government departments and their agencies, as well as coordination with the community, voluntary and various education sectors.

**Rural young people** face specific challenges that put them at risk of becoming NEET, and we will ensure the strategy adequately addresses this.

---

## AFFORDABLE, QUALITY CHILDCARE

We want to implement an **affordable, comprehensive childcare strategy** which seeks to **expand the availability of childcare places right across the North.**

As a first priority we will assign a lead department and minister for childcare policy. Along with other government departments, parents and childcare agencies in the



community, voluntary, private and statutory sectors, we will develop a robust and well-resourced strategy for affordable, quality childcare for children aged 0-14.

To make it succeed, **flexible working policies for mothers and fathers** must be inseparable from good childcare policies, and we will integrate this into our jobs strategy.

---

## SUPPORTING TEACHERS

We will innovate in favour of **newly-qualified teachers** unable to find employment. By providing necessary training at little cost for those who want it, the Education Department could pursue a policy of redeployment for newly qualified and unemployed primary and post-primary teachers into the early years sector.

Such an approach could lead to a fall in unemployment rates in the range of **approximately 100 jobs per year** over the next four years.

We will also support teachers in the classroom, making sure their training needs are met, and reform school **disciplinary procedures** so that teachers can actually spend their time teaching.

---

## ENHANCING NORTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

We want to exploit the potential for our young people to be part of **increased North-South collaboration in education**, and reverse the DUP attitude of 'hold back on cooperation' and 'hold up progress'.

The SDLP will facilitate more cross-border partnership in education between teachers, students and education administrators at all levels.

It is disappointing that funding for the **North-South Exchange Consortium** was withdrawn, and this decision must be reversed. We also expect swift implementation of the recommendations of the **Joint Study on North-South Cooperation in Education** once it is finally published.

## HOUSING, BUILDING COMMUNITIES & WELFARE REFORM

The SDLP has held the Social Development portfolio for the past four years and both our Ministers, Margaret Ritchie and Alex Attwood, have been highly successful in leading Northern Ireland's largest civil service department.

The Department for Social Development (DSD) covers a very wide range of functions including **housing, urban regeneration, voluntary and community sector and social security**. DSD also has responsibility for social policy areas including **gambling, liquor licensing, Sunday opening and charities regulation**.

Although the Department's central mission is that of tackling disadvantage, it has **an important economic role**, supporting the construction industry with its housing programme and stimulating the wider economy through its regeneration activities.

Under SDLP leadership, DSD has also embraced the concept of social development in its widest sense. As a result, the **SDLP goals of reconciliation and building a Shared Future have been placed at the centre of all DSD work**.

### HOUSING

Bhíodh an SDLP i dtolamh ina 'pháirtí tithíochta', agus ina chara leis na daoine i ngéar-ghá tithíochta.

The SDLP has always been the party of housing, and the friend of those in housing need. SDLP Ministers have worked nothing short of an economic miracle in housing. Their achievements include:

- **building record numbers of new social homes** - the highest for a generation
- **beating the three year target of 5,250 social housing starts** despite a huge shortfall in the housing budget
- delivering on a radical wide-ranging programme of housing initiatives - the **New Housing Agenda**
- major **redevelopment of the worst housing areas in the North**, including the 'Village' in South Belfast and Parkside and the 'Long Streets' in North Belfast



- building homes to a **higher environmental standard** than ever before
- building more houses on land already in public ownership so that **money invested goes into construction workers' wages** rather than into land purchase
- a fundamental **review of the Housing Executive**
- extracting **better performance from Housing Associations**
- bringing **more private capital into social housing**
- tackling segregation in housing with **Shared Future new build schemes** and **Shared Neighbourhood schemes** in existing estates
- new legislation to properly **regulate the private rented sector and protect tenants**
- record spending on **supported housing** so that people can live with dignity in the community rather than in outdated institutional care
- record investment in **co-ownership** to help people onto the housing ladder
- restoring **ex-military housing** and bringing it into use
- substantially **reducing the number of homeless 'rough sleepers'** across the North.

A great deal has been done, but there is still much more to do to ensure that everyone has decent housing and a place they can call home.

**In the next Assembly the SDLP will pursue the following housing priorities:**

- continue the drive to build **more new social housing where it is needed most**

- achieve even **greater leverage of public money** so that the maximum outputs are delivered for every pound spent
- continue to invest in **better quality, environmentally friendly housing**
- secure adequate funding and implement a **Mortgage Rescue Scheme**
- bring all social housing up to the **Decent Homes Standard**
- continue the **housing reform programme** involving the Housing Executive, Housing Associations, procurement and financial innovation
- develop a **new Homelessness Strategy**
- legislate for an **intensified Shared Future-approach to housing** where the desire to live in a mixed area is properly recognised and facilitated.

## FUEL POVERTY

Fuel poverty in Northern Ireland is unacceptably high. However difficult the challenge, we must maintain a **commitment to eradicate fuel poverty in the North**. Although the main contributors to fuel poverty are high energy prices and low incomes, we can help alleviate fuel poverty for many people by **improving the energy efficiency of their home**.

SDLP Ministers have:

- delivered **over 40,000 Warm Homes Scheme packages**, improving the quality of life for all and taking thousands of households out of fuel poverty
- in 2009, a time of huge hikes in gas and electricity prices, the SDLP delivered a one-off **fuel poverty payment of £150 to some 165,000 households**
- established a **Fuel Poverty Task Force** which brought fuel poverty to the top of the public policy agenda
- delivered a comprehensive **Fuel Poverty Strategy**, including innovative energy brokering and a boiler scrappage scheme
- despite huge budgetary pressure, SDLP Ministers **maintained and increased the budget for fuel poverty interventions**.

There is still a huge task ahead in tackling fuel poverty. The SDLP will make sure it is a priority for the incoming Executive and that our overall economic plan is focused on taking more people out of the low income trap.

As a first step, a SDLP Housing Minister will embark on a major **new programme of home insulation** which will not only alleviate fuel poverty but will create thousands of jobs in the construction sector.

## URBAN REGENERATION

Urban regeneration work makes a unique contribution to society in that it not only breathes new life into run-down areas, but also to the economy as it draws in significant private sector investment behind often relatively modest public investment.

**SDLP Ministers have had many notable successes over the last four years including:**

- delivery and completion of the **Victoria Square Scheme** in Belfast City centre
- completion of **iconic regeneration projects** in Belfast including the Obel tower, the Boat development and Custom House Square
- **further roll-out of major regeneration schemes** in Belfast, including the North East Quarter and Bank Square
- transformation of Belfast city centre pedestrian zones and public realm through the **Streets Ahead** programme
- successful **transformative public realm and town centre work** in Newcastle, Lurgan, Kilkeel, Portadown, Downpatrick, Newtownards, a major scheme in Derry City centre and another in Armagh City centre
- the new **Foot and Cycle Bridge over the Foyle**, which, if the people of Derry agree, should be named after Ireland's greatest bridge-builder John Hume
- support for at least one new pedestrian bridge in Strabane town centre
- more than 12 physical '**Masterplans**' in towns across the North to kickstart the whole process of regeneration
- completion of a **major new regeneration strategy for Derry**, including financial support for the City of Culture.



*"I have made it clear that Neighbourhood Renewal funding will be protected over the next four years, indeed I will try to enhance funding. Protecting areas and people in need going forward must not be compromised."*

Alex Attwood MLA,  
Social Development Minister.



Looking ahead, the SDLP remains committed to investing in environmental improvements, public realm schemes, masterplanning and major regeneration initiatives as part of a strategy to build prosperity across the North.

As with all areas of policy in DSD, the SDLP has placed **progress towards a Shared Future** at the very heart of urban regeneration policy. Shiny new buildings will not succeed unless they are located in urban centres which are also shared spaces.

The SDLP will drive all urban regeneration activity to **unite people and build prosperity**.

## SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

In running the Department for Social Development, the SDLP has focused community funding on **tackling disadvantage and building strong, cohesive communities and neighbourhoods**.

There has been considerable success, including,

- allocating **over £82 million in funding** over the last three years to the priorities identified by communities themselves, across 36 **Neighbourhood Renewal** areas
- Neighbourhood Renewal funding has helped narrow the gap between the Neighbourhood Renewal areas themselves and other better-off areas against a range of economic and social indicators
- **£15 million** allocated competitively to 62 **transformational voluntary and community sector projects**, from the DSD Modernisation fund
- a new Concordat has been developed and agreed as a basis of governing the **relationship between government and the voluntary and community sector**
- a **Community Faiths Forum** has been established to recognise and develop the contribution made by churches and faith communities in relation to poverty and social exclusion
- significant funding has recognised **the unique contribution of the GAA** in terms of community work, and work with young people in particular. Numerous GAA projects have been supported in, for example, Lurgan, Dungannon, Strabane, Downpatrick, Armagh and East Tyrone
- substantial additional funding was found to support the vital work being carried out by numerous **women's groups** throughout the North. This was allied to significant support for **community childcare facilities**

*"Ritchie has proved her mettle as a minister in the power-sharing Executive, especially in her stance in standing up to UDA/loyalist-linked community groups from which she withdrew funding when the terror group re-engaged in street violence."*

Henry McDonald,  
The Guardian, 29 October 2009.

- courageously, a line in the sand was drawn over **future funding for any paramilitary-related groups**



- **community funding** was increasingly **refocused** on delivering services rather than simply funding posts.

The SDLP will continue to support strong interventions which are aimed at tackling disadvantage in all its forms at community level.

However, we take the view that against a background of normalisation, resources should be refocused so that they support greater integration of communities and the SDLP goal of a Shared Future.

Evidence shows that the greatest disadvantage and poverty now exist in single identity communities. Therefore, greater priority will be assigned to projects and programmes that seek to tackle division and counter social segregation. (See also our ideas in *Transforming Society*).

The SDLP has been, and will continue to be, vigilant against unstructured diversions of government funds to the favoured groups of any political party. Our opposition to the now renamed **Social Investment Fund** has forced others to consult openly on and put proper governance around a revised proposal.

This is proof positive of the **SDLP's commitment to openness and transparency in government** and to **leading the New Politics**.

---

## SOCIAL SECURITY & WELFARE REFORM

Although it is directly funded by London and does not impact on the Executive's block grant, social security spend in Northern Ireland is similar to the total spend on Health.

DSD has responsibility for administering social security policy and payments - through the Social Security Agency (SSA) - and also for child support interventions.

The biggest issue in social security is the Coalition Government's policy of **Welfare Reform** which **has the potential to hurt many of those in greatest need in the North**, including low income people, women and children who have experienced domestic violence and older people.

**SDLP Ministers have delivered significantly in this whole area with achievements which include:**

- record amounts of money collected in **Child Support payments** from separated parents
- record numbers of children helped through **child support interventions**
- despite a surge in unemployment and workload for the SSA standards of performance, including **processing times, have improved** throughout the period of devolution
- the SSA, under SDLP stewardship, has **reduced the level of fraud** and error by more than 60%
- thousands of low income people have had their incomes boosted as a result of **benefit uptake initiatives**
- new **customer service and modernisation initiatives** have helped people get their benefits more quickly and conveniently
- 90 more social security **jobs** are being **decentralised to Derry**
- SDLP Ministers have engaged intensively with Ministers from the London Government to **mitigate the impact of the Welfare Reform policies** in Northern Ireland. Notable concessions have already been secured
- Executive agreement to SDLP Minister Alex Attwood's unique proposal to **create a Hardship Fund** which would target additional support to groups of people most adversely affected by London's Welfare Reforms.

The SDLP will continue to improve life wherever possible for those who depend on social security payments. We will support further modernisation of services and continue to find ways of mitigating the impacts of Welfare Reform in the North.

SDLP proposes **an Executive subgroup on Welfare Reform** which will be capable of broadening out our response to the challenges of reform as well as developing more joined-up solutions.

The SDLP will also put additional effort into **intensive benefit uptake campaigns**. This will include campaigns targeted at **older people**, many of whom are still not getting everything to which they may have an entitlement.



## UNITING AGAINST TERROR & CRIME

### SDLP track record

- supported the passage of the **new Justice Bill** through the Assembly and will work to see its provisions properly implemented
- worked with youth organisations, victims of crime and young offenders themselves to develop proposals aimed at **reforming the Youth Justice system**
- fought for **adequate resources for frontline policing in rural areas**
- continue to support the valuable work of the Policing Board in **holding the PSNI to account**.



*"The Prison Service needs a complete overhaul in order to transform the security culture and bring about a new system based on the principles of the reform and rehabilitation of offenders.*

*The SDLP is calling on the Minister to face down any vested interests that are opposed to genuine and sustained reform of the prison regime and management.*

*To date, all he has done is implement the Hillsborough Agreement's commitment to a review but has taken no effective action to try and get at least some interim improvement in the situation within our prisons."*

Alban Maginness MLA,  
SDLP Justice spokesperson.

## UNITING AGAINST TERROR

The SDLP has consistently and continually stood up to violence and terror.

Today, **people on this island stand united against those who seek to threaten the measure of stability** we now have here.

The very good work carried out over the last twelve years and more in changing policing has been one of the pillars of this stability.

Support for the police and the criminal justice system must prevail if our society is to deepen its democracy.

We must take nothing for granted. Dissidents have and will continue to challenge the desire to build prosperity and take society forward.

During the next phase of devolution, the SDLP will work to ensure everyone in leadership - in politics and in our communities - stands firm against terror.

Over one year into devolution, **critical issues** around **the role of MI5** and **the Serious Organised Crime Agency remain with London**. It will build confidence if all those agencies are accountable to the Justice Minister, the Department of Justice, the Assembly Justice Committee and the PSNI.

Defeating the dissident threat must be through modern and accountable intelligence techniques, **ensuring intelligence primacy is taken from MI5 and transferred to the PSNI, and through all-Ireland security cooperation** and action.

---

## PSNI RECRUITMENT

The single biggest objective facing policing in the decade ahead should be to continue to build **a police service that is truly representative of our community as a whole**.

The SDLP believes that the percentage of Catholics in the PSNI should be between 40-44%; it currently stands at about 30%. A figure of around 40% would be broadly representative of the composition of the community here. Without 50:50 recruitment it would take around thirty years to achieve that percentage.

We will continue to **oppose the ending of 50:50 recruitment**, as it goes against the best interests of all the people of this region. We will continue to press the British government to restore 50:50 recruitment to the PSNI. A truly representative police service is of huge value to the police in its work and community acceptance.

---

## MONITORING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POLICING

The SDLP supports the merger of the District Policing Partnerships and Community Safety Partnerships in the Justice Bill. We believe this merger could have an important and beneficial impact on **local policing accountability** and **community safety planning**. Those arrangements are an important part of the entire policing project as envisaged by Patten, and are an aspect of policing in which the public has great faith.

The arrangements have led to stability and accountability, and it would be neither helpful nor healthy to tinker with them in any way that might reduce that element of accountability. We believe that the merging of the two Partnerships will **enhance the level**

**of accountability** by the police to local communities **and increase the input that local communities will have in developing safer communities**.

---

## POLICE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE

In recent years, there have been repeated delays in the completion of important Ombudsman Office enquiries into past police investigations.

There were **quality control issues** surrounding the Ombudsman's report into McGurk's Bar bombing and unacceptable delays over the Loughinisland investigation report.

The SDLP has questioned the extent to which the Office is seen to be entirely independent.

All of this raises issues of confidence. The SDLP will press for **measures to improve the performance** of and **maintain the independence** of this important Office.

---

## MORE NORTH-SOUTH COOPERATION IN POLICING

Cross-border policing must be stepped up as part of the strategy to **confront the dissidents** but equally **to demonstrate the benefits of enhanced North-South integration throughout this island**.

We welcome the **exchange and secondment programmes** between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána and will see that these continue during the next mandate.

With the resources now in place, we will **ensure construction work begins as soon as possible** on the Police, Fire and Rescue and Prison Service training college at **Desertcreat**, Cookstown.

Our work towards an **all-Ireland sex offenders register** will continue.

We will seek **harmonisation of road safety measures** across the island of Ireland.



## STAYING TRUE TO THE AGREEMENT

The SDLP **welcomed the devolution of policing and justice** powers to the Assembly. In fact, we pushed for the date of devolution to be brought forward in order to unite people and bring greater prosperity to this island. This proposal was rejected by other parties.

We regret the manner in which devolution was finally achieved, and remain opposed to **the way in which the Justice Minister was elected** into his position. His election was **contrary to the spirit and the procedures of the Good Friday Agreement**.

We believe that the Minister should have been appointed according to the **D'Hondt** system, as laid down in the Agreement. The present so-called temporary arrangement, due to run out in May 2012, is potentially destabilising.

With any future Minister of Justice, we will **continue to insist that s/he is appointed under the D'Hondt system**.

---

## REFORMING OUR JUSTICE SYSTEM

The SDLP has been clear about the need for justice reform, crucially around the **Prison Service**, the **Public Prosecution Service** (PPS) and **youth justice**.

### Prison Service

We will pursue radical reform of the Prison Service from a **costly, dysfunctional, security-driven** organisation that fails to address the real needs of prisoners, and fails to protect society through the reduction of reoffending by ex-prisoners.

We await the conclusion of the Owers review of Prisons, as a basis for a major reform of the Prison Service in a manner similar to the fundamental reform of policing by Chris Patten.

Also see our section on *Reforming the Public Sector* for more detail on our proposals.

### Youth justice

It is clear that people are frightened due to high incidents of anti-social behaviour and criminal activity of young people.

However, what is equally clear is that children and young people as an entity are readily demonised for what must be acknowledged as the **anti-social or criminal actions of a very small minority of young people**.

The Youth Justice Agency deserves full support in its good work in trying to divert young people from criminality, particularly through youth conferencing. We look forward to the report on Youth Justice presently being carried out for the Department of Justice, and will deliver our opinion thereafter.

In the context of the current review, we will press for greater cross-departmental involvement in a reform project that will help **prevent first time offending, reduce re-offending, ensure young people have access to appropriate services** in a timely manner, **instil a sense of pride and public confidence** in the youth justice system and ensure that young people are **confident about their place in society**, play a positive and constructive role and become active citizens.

We will also reassess **knife crime penalties** and **offences**, although knife crime is clearly not only a youth justice matter.

### Public Prosecution Service

As a key part of our reform agenda, we will engage with the new Director of the Public Prosecution Service (when appointed), the Department of Justice, the Criminal Justice Inspectorate (CJI) and others to **push the need for a new phase of deep and enduring change** within the PPS, with a view to agreeing measures to address four essential needs:

- **how the PPS treats victims**, and the requirement to give the public and families reasons why charges are dropped, or reduced
- changes to governance of the PPS, including consideration of a 'Policing Board model' in terms of **accountability and performance**
- the urgent need to **end delay in the preparation and prosecution of cases** and the introduction of time limits, if deemed necessary
- full **implementation of all outstanding CJI recommendations**.

---

## ALTERNATIVES TO CUSTODY

Following a number of high profile cases, we believe it is timely to **re-examine the criminal law** on the **scale and extent of offences**. In the current financial climate, it is imperative that non-custodial alternatives are considered by District Judges, particularly in cases where there is a low risk of reoffending.

---

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND VICTIMS OF CRIME

Restorative justice has a significant role to play in bringing together victims of crime and offenders, in order to **encourage the offenders to confront the reality of their crimes and make amends**. Youth conferencing in Northern Ireland is now an internationally recognised exemplar of restorative justice.

Restorative justice **must be state-led**. When the concept is abused by political parties or paramilitaries in order to keep control of communities, the potential for the welfare of individuals and communities is seriously compromised.

We will therefore continue to demand that any such schemes are **politically-neutral** and are **under strict supervision and public control**.

Tá an SDLP tiomanta d'fheabhsú ar an dóigh a dhéantar íospartaigh na coireachta a láimhseáil.

The SDLP is committed to **improving the treatment of victims of crime**.

For victims of domestic abuse, particularly children and young people, we will prepare a **properly resourced protection and support strategy** to minimise the risks of abuse victims self-harming and taking their own lives, becoming excluded from the school system and demonstrating anti-social behaviour.

As part of this support strategy, we will include an **outreach programme towards underrepresented groups**, who have a history of not reporting crime, and are therefore underrepresented in both support service provision and current research on victims' needs.

We support a **Charter of Rights for all victims of crime**. We also believe that there should be a **review of the Criminal Injury Compensation Scheme**.

---

## LEGAL AID REVIEW

We are mindful of the need to **guarantee access to justice for those most in need of legal representation in our society**. In addition, changes to the legal aid system must not impact negatively on the Citizens Advice Bureaux, Advice NI and other advisory bodies, themselves facing cuts and, at the same time, growing caseloads.

Clearly, there is a need for a **serious reduction in the cost of the legal aid budget** and we will continue to support the target of £79 million as outlined in the Departmental budget while maintaining access to justice. We will also support the efforts of the legal profession to reach an agreed way forward with the Department to achieve that budgetary target.



## IMPROVING HEALTHCARE

### The SDLP record on health

- rejected the **Budget** because it will have a **serious impact on frontline health services and jobs**
- SDLP Minister Alex Attwood presented plans to address irresponsible drinks promotions, and **tackle alcohol misuse** and its effects on health, crime and disorder
- fought for **free personal care for the elderly**
- demanded that the **£500 Sure Start Maternity grant be reinstated**
- SDLP Belfast Councillors worked tirelessly with mothers, staff and women's groups in their campaign to **deliver a new regional maternity unit** in the Royal Hospital
- worked to deliver a new £64 million hospital facility in Downpatrick. Our campaign goes on to ensure the **retention of important services and facilities**, and the 24-hour consultant-led Accident and Emergency Unit at the hospital to meet the needs of the population of South Down.



There is real public anxiety about the perceived state of our Health Service. Changes in the Health Service have come to be associated not with improvement but more often with cut-backs, confusion and inconsistency.

### RADIOTHERAPY UNIT AT ALTNAGELVIN

The outgoing Health Minister's decision on the Radiotherapy Unit at Altnagelvin Hospital will directly affect the lives of thousands of cancer sufferers not just in Derry, but across the North West of this island.

**We will not wait until 6 May or until the next Health Minister takes up post to act on this.**

Our Minister, MLAs and Councillors are working to reverse the Health Minister's decision and to make sure funding is provided to match the capital monies required for the Unit which have been already allocated in the Budget.

We are committed to correcting this very wrong decision.

### A PROGRAMME OF CHANGE FOR OUR HEALTH SERVICE

In government, the SDLP will work to achieve:

- **greater action on preventative health** - keeping people out of hospitals for longer. Currently a mere 1.6% of the health budget is spent on health improvement, health protection and the social wellbeing of people in this region. By 2015, we aim to have **increased this to 4% of the total health budget** - a figure closer to EU and OECD averages - with a view to negotiating a further phased increase by 2020
- implementation of **reasonable means of achieving efficiency savings** in Health Service administration, and **reallocation of resources to the frontline**
- future **delivery of health in an all-Ireland context**. Cooperation can assist in addressing challenges like long waiting lists and the need to upgrade or replace existing infrastructure. Joint strategic planning can ensure that the best possible use is made of resources and that overall, a first class Health Service is provided to people throughout the island in urban and rural communities.



Cé gur chóir aitheantas a thabhairt do mhéid na faidhbe, chomh maith leis na háiseanna agus leis an am a bheadh de dhíth chun tabhairt faoi, creideann muid **gur féidir athrú, ar mhaithe leis an phobal, a bhaint amach i rith an chéad shainordú Tionóil eile.**

Although the scale of the problem should be acknowledged, as well as the resources and the time that will be required to address it, we believe **change for the better is achievable during the next Assembly mandate.**

The SDLP offers decisive leadership and will **work in partnership with Health Service staff, managers and the wider public** to rebuild public confidence and ensure a better, more efficient Health Service which **maintains current frontline staff levels** and remains **free based on patient need alone.**

---

## HEALTH PROMOTION & PREVENTATIVE ACTION

Today, more than 60% of adults and 25% of children here are either overweight or obese. By 2020, the number of adults living with high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, strokes and diabetes (Type 1 and Type 2) will have increased by around 30%.

These figures represent **substantial financial, personal and social costs to patients and the health and social care system**, and will clearly cause a significant loss of productivity for our future economy.

In the next mandate, the SDLP will improve our Health Service **by focusing more on primary prevention** and on working to **eliminate inequalities** that mean people living in more deprived areas are more likely to be affected by chronic conditions.

We are committed to:

- **increasing the public health budget** to an initial 4% of the overall health budget, with a view to agreeing a further increase by 2020
- creating an Executive programme fund to kick start a **long-term, cross-departmental preventative health strategy**
- looking at innovative ways of **making people more aware of the impact their lifestyle and environment have on their health.** By encouraging the public to adopt healthier eating and drinking habits, do more exercise and give up smoking we can **keep more people out of hospital for longer**
- **a dementia awareness campaign** as a key part of the dementia strategy's implementation. This will enhance public understanding of dementia and inform people of how they can reduce their risk of developing it, as well as encouraging early diagnosis through symptom recognition



- setting specific targets and a budget aimed at increasing male life expectancy - currently lower than women's - and **improving men's health** within a given timeframe
- involving local sports clubs, leisure centres, local councils, schools and families in promoting a **2-hour weekly minimum allocation for sport and physical education**, in order to reinforce the benefits of a healthier lifestyle for our young people
- working with sporting organisations to **develop a programme** offering every person with a **learning disability** the opportunity, in their local community, to participate in high quality sport and development activities that can lead to **higher fitness levels, increased skills and self-confidence**
- as part of a tobacco-free society strategy, and in the interests of children's health, **banning smoking in cars carrying children**
- rolling out widespread provision of **early screening for cancers** across the North based on risk rather than age, and involving both the statutory and non-statutory sectors in doing so.

## Support for those living with cancer

By making prevention the key driver in healthcare, we hope that more cancers will be detected earlier. For those living with cancer we will ensure the health budget takes due consideration of their needs by:

- ensuring **access to a Clinical Nurse Specialist** for everyone newly diagnosed with cancer
- providing **clearer access to benefits, financial advice, information and support**, as well as **better post-treatment care**.

## Better mental health

Mental health must be taken as seriously as physical health. Mental illness costs about £4 billion per year here, yet **mental health services are currently underfunded by 30%** and we have up to 30% higher levels of psychiatric morbidity than other regions in these islands.

Early detection and intervention will result not only in better treatment for the patient, but will also improve cost-effectiveness. We remain committed to the full implementation of the **Bamford Review** of Mental Health and Learning Disability, and will support the implementation of a **Mental Capacity (Health, Welfare & Finance) Act** during the life of the next Assembly.

We will continue to support the work of both the voluntary and statutory sectors to ensure increased provision of excellent quality **child and adolescent mental health services** to all those who require them, as well as to **pregnant and newly-delivered women suffering from ill mental health**.

## SAVING TO INVEST IN THE FRONTLINE

While other parties hailed the supposed increased Budget allocation for health, we recognise that in real terms this translates as a decrease, given the greater expansionary pressures in health than elsewhere. This was **one of the reasons we voted against the 2011-2015 Budget**.

The SDLP is **the only party to have seriously assessed opportunities for improved care and financial savings within the Health Service**. In December 2010, we launched our ideas on exactly how an extra £30 million over four years can be set aside to ensure that the current level of frontline Health and Social Services jobs are protected.

## Management and administrative savings

Efficiencies have been made in the Health Service, yet there are still changes that can be made to reduce waste thereby providing money which can be **reinvested in frontline service provision**.

For example, there are a number of areas of non-frontline service delivery where administrative savings could be found - the Health and Social Care Board, the Public Health Agency, the Patient Client Council, and others.

While we acknowledge each of these organisations has a valuable role to play, it is imperative that they are required to **keep management, administrative and non-essential programme costs to a minimum**.

## Better chronic disease care

Increased community stroke, cardiac and respiratory care provision has the potential to markedly **improve patient care and make huge savings** for the Health Service over the next mandate and beyond.

While acute services here must be adequately funded to provide appropriate medicines, enough designated beds and appropriately trained staff, this cannot be at the expense of **community rehabilitation services for suitable patients who want to avail of it**.

The quality of life experienced by people often depends upon whether they are offered cardiac rehabilitation following a heart attack or other cardiac event, and services like physiotherapy and speech therapy for stroke patients.

We will commission a study into current levels of community service provision leading to a strategy and action plan aimed at **greater involvement** by the **voluntary and community** sector in health and social care provision here, more patient-managed care and ultimately, a **reduction in unnecessary hospital readmissions**.

### Waiting lists

Waiting lists for **treatment** have soared, and this must be brought back under control. It is simply unacceptable that people with some of the most serious forms of arthritis here must wait nine months for access to powerful drugs which are available immediately in Britain.

The public will not be distracted by statistics that only show one half of the picture and **focus solely on initial assessment waiting times**. The next Health Minister must take control of waiting times by pump priming frontline health services which will help cut waiting lists. The SDLP will seek an end to the costly practice of outsourcing work to the private sector, a luxury that the Health Trusts can no longer afford.

### Health provision

Free prescriptions have been a welcome relief to a number of people including those with chronic conditions and people just over the benefit threshold. For many others, however, once something becomes free, people place little value on it and impose little discipline upon its consumption, resulting in rapidly rising costs.

The Department of Health should consider implementing a modest administrative charge for those able to afford it, just enough so that wasteful behaviour is discouraged. Such a charge would not regain the revenue foregone in the earlier decision to make prescriptions free, but it would reimpose sufficient discipline to **stop prescription costs soaring beyond control**.

The Department should consider the introduction of a modest charge for people who fail to show up for medical appointments. Likewise, a substantial **fine could be introduced for hospitals** when patients endure disproportionately long waiting times for treatment, or for hospitals that **cancel appointments** altogether with little or no notice.

While we believe the problem goes much deeper than this, and the introduction of fines will not specifically address the anomaly whereby there are wards lying empty because staff are not being recruited to work in them, these are still unnecessary costs to the Health Service, examples of poor practice and need to be discouraged.

### Medication spending

The cost of prescribing drugs in Northern Ireland is the second highest in Europe per head of population, averaging £224 per person annually.

We support more prescribing of **generic drugs where appropriate**, with patient consent and in cooperation with GPs, pharmacists and patients to ensure further progress. In addition, it is essential that informing and educating patients continues.

We will also ensure that Health Trusts support people with Parkinson's in consistently getting their prescribed medication on time in hospital, allowing for self-medication where suitable.

---

## ALL-ISLAND HEALTHCARE

We will ensure the Health Department publishes and implements key recommendations of the long-awaited joint **North South Feasibility Study on health issues**, in order to establish what investments can be made together in these challenging times for the public purses both North and South, **particularly in rural areas**.

It is neither good value nor sustainable that 35% and more of all public monies on the island are spent on health.

This is a call to action to **recreate health on an all-island basis**, and to set about this work on 6 May.

Consideration must be given to further collaboration in the following areas, which we believe would provide better services and cost savings:

- cooperation on **public health** and **health promotion**
- **procurement**, including medicines and equipment
- **specialised services** where greater population mass is required

- access to services in rural and/or border areas, including **reduction in duplication of emergency response provision.**
- **common standards** to promote quality and safety of healthcare
- long-term planning on the **location of hospitals** and **other major health infrastructure**
- extending all-island work to ensure provision for **an eating disorder unit.**

## CARING FOR OUR MOST VULNERABLE: ADULT SERVICES

Long-term planning is essential if we are to enable older people to continue contributing to society and retain their independence, dignity and quality of life.

We will work with the **voluntary, independent and statutory sectors providing domiciliary care**, as well as those in receipt of care, to develop an Executive-led approach which centres on the care-user, ensures all care providers are fully registered and receive the training they need, while providing best value for money.

Often, the amount of time home helps and other carers spend travelling from house to house is longer than the actual time spent carrying out one-to-one care. We will ensure this and other key issues are tackled by the next Executive.

In recognition of the many thousands of **people here who care for a relative** living with dementia, Parkinson's, cancer,

arthritis or other debilitating illnesses, we will urge the Health Trusts to encourage carers to look after their own health and wellbeing by identifying respite needs, and having access to emergency respite provision. This is only right, given the huge savings family carers provide the Treasury on an annual basis in return for often limited benefits allowances.

## CARING FOR OUR MOST VULNERABLE: CHILDREN'S SERVICES

We will support the new **developments in safeguarding children** and encourage Trusts to continue developing family support services for children in need.

In particular, we will emphasise the continuing necessity for **respite care for children with learning needs and children with autism.**

We will highlight the urgency of introducing the **delayed adoption legislation** because of the developing needs for post-adoption support and post-adoption contact.

We will continue to support the **excellent work of community, voluntary and statutory organisations in the health and social care professions** whose work supports children, new mothers and fathers, carers and wider family life in its broadest interpretation.





## REFORMING THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Northern Ireland needs a new phase of radical reform. This business is unfinished and encompasses a wide spectrum of the public sector.

First-class public services will require significant investment as well as reform. The SDLP will **provide political leadership** to undertake a review, but **consensus will be vital** for the success of such a project.

Many issues will need examination, including whether the public sector should deliver or commission services. This will not be easy but it is a necessary project.

**In government the SDLP will deliver first-class services by:**

- implementing **major public sector reform** across all areas of service delivery
- **delivering on the local government reform**, now abandoned by DUP and Sinn Féin, and transferring more functions to councils while **streamlining** the local government sector
- supporting education by **improving school maintenance, building more new schools and supporting teachers in the classroom** by improving disciplinary procedures
- **prioritising** capital expenditure in **health, education, transport, roads** and other services based on optimising returns
- implementing **reasonable means of achieving efficiency savings in Health Service** administration and management, and reallocation of resources to the frontline
- introducing more private finance and new delivery models in the provision of **social housing**
- implementing **planning reforms** to achieve greater certainty and **faster turnaround**
- reforming the **Prison Service**
- restoring the Bain **decentralisation initiative** also abandoned by DUP and Sinn Féin
- delivering a genuinely **independent, all-island Environmental Protection Agency**
- **transforming Northern Ireland Water** into a 'peoples' company' that will operate commercially in the public interest
- pressing on with **positive reform** of the **Housing Executive** and **Housing Associations**.

**As a first priority, we will:**

### RESTORE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE BY REFORMING NI WATER

We believe that Northern Ireland needs a water undertaking that **delivers water and sewerage services efficiently** and **at the least possible cost**. Such an ambition totally precludes any room for private sector shareholders.

Accordingly, we propose that **NI Water be mutualised** for the following reasons:

- mutualisation - ownership by customers - is the opposite of privatisation and **guarantees public control**
- mutualisation is **the way to avoid separate water charges**
- mutualisation will **ensure water and sewerage investment without decimating public finances**.

Mutualisation requires a certain and steady income stream, but that does not have to come from water charges. First of all, there **already is a certain income stream from the rates**.

Secondly, we could continue to subsidise NI Water out of the block grant. However, we would find it **unacceptable to have to sacrifice vitally needed expenditure** on health, social services, education or economic development in order to accommodate a reformed NI Water.

We would **therefore take the case for mutualised water to the Treasury** with a fully costed and detailed scheme that would allow us to raise revenue and guarantee an income stream for a mutualised water service.

NI Water will only get better if we make rapid and significant investment.

The SDLP believes taking forward water mutualisation would reverse the wasted years during which our water and sewerage system has steadily deteriorated, culminating in the nightmare scenario experienced by so many people across our region last Christmas.

We therefore intend to present **as a priority in the next Assembly a clear set of principles for the governance of NI Water as a 'people's company'**.

## CHANGE THE CULTURE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE

One of the features of our civil service that needs to change is **an attitude of extreme caution**, coupled with the **long and laborious processes** that are in place on the route to getting anything done. It appears that the system of checks and balances has become disproportionate.

Within the next year, we will set out a broad agenda for change in the civil service, similar to the Strategic Management Initiative undertaken in the South. We will examine recruitment rules and processes, simplifying regulations and other measures that would make the civil service more accountable, open, coordinated and integrated across departments.

‘Sé an fhís atá againn ná **státseirbhís a dhéanann a uas-dheonachán d’fhorbairt shóisialta agus eacnamaíochta, chomh maith le cumas iomaíochta an réigiúin seo.**

Our vision is **a civil service that makes the maximum contribution to the social and economic development**, as well as **the competitiveness, of this region.**

Such an approach would also **alleviate the regulatory burden** often felt by business and other sectors when dealing with government officials.

---

## CREATE MORE PUBLIC SECTOR JOBS OUTSIDE OF BELFAST

The SDLP remains committed to the main principle of the Bain Review, the decentralisation of public sector jobs.

That is why Minister Alex Attwood transferred 85 pensions jobs to Derry, relocated the Charity Commission headquarters to Lurgan and established a Departmental Regeneration Office in the city of Newry.

We will work to **rebalance economic development and wellbeing** across the North by relocating a further **2,000 public sector jobs across the North** over the next three years, focusing on areas of high deprivation and addressing the historical imbalances which exist in the Northern Ireland



economy. Strategic government planning of this kind would begin to **tackle problems of high unemployment and low-wage employment**, and the resultant additional consumer spending in these areas would help encourage private sector investment.

Serious investment to **upgrade the public transport network** is needed to accompany relocation, and we will undertake both reform programmes in tandem.

---

## CARRY OUT ROOT-AND-BRANCH REFORM OF THE PRISON SERVICE

The SDLP has continually called for a fundamental review of the Prison Service and the Owers report offers a base to move from.

Anything less will simply not address the chronic problems of appallingly **poor industrial relations, bad management** and a **security-focused culture** among the Prison Service staff.

In government, we will offer the political courage and conviction to see a radical reform process through during the first half of the next mandate.

We will carry out a complete overhaul in order to transform this security culture in prisons and bring about **a new system based on the principles of the reform and rehabilitation of offenders.**

We want to adopt a raft of legislative and policy changes that will lead to:

- root and branch **reform** of the Prison Service, **in the style of the Patten reforms** for policing
- a radically **more cost-effective prison system**. Currently, the annual average cost for each prisoner in Northern Ireland is nearly double the average in England and Wales. This is unsustainable
- overall **reduction in the prison population**. Imposing custodial sentences on fine defaulters is a disproportionate response
- **reduced re-offending** rates
- due **consideration of a privatisation model** for NI prisons
- a **new female prison**, and **adequate provisions for young offenders**
- proper treatment of all prisoners with **mental illnesses**
- increased sense of prisoners' responsibility and citizenship through the implementation of the European Court of Human Rights ruling on **prisoners' right to vote** in general elections.

See also the *Uniting Against Terror & Crime* chapter.



## ENVIRONMENTAL PROSPERITY

### SDLP successes:

- oversaw the Assembly's Environment Committee **inquiry into climate change**, to understand the implications of climate change for the North and to make recommendations on government policies
- backed campaigners' call for a **public inquiry into the proposed runway extension** at Belfast City Airport
- demonstrated vision and commitment to the Irish agricultural industry by developing the **all-Ireland animal health strategy**
- **rejected DUP plans for an incinerator** on the shore of Lough Neagh because of its location, and gave our support to local calls for a public enquiry into the proposals
- using our influence locally and at Westminster to ensure the retention of the **Coastguard Station** at Bangor, which services the whole of Northern Ireland.

The SDLP continues to campaign for the highest environmental standards to manage the many pressing demands on our environment today: climate change, land use change, habitat destruction, pollution and waste disposal.

As a matter of urgency, we want to move beyond the lip service that has been paid to date to the **Green New Deal**. We will secure realistic investment to ensure it becomes the key platform on which we build jobs for future generations (see our commitments in the *Job creation, economic growth* section).

Serious consideration should be given to bringing together the government departments currently responsible for matters relating to our environment into **a single Energy and Sustainability Department**. This would achieve greater value-for-money and better cohesiveness in policy decisions on environment- and sustainability-related issues.

It is simply unacceptable that for almost four years, **DUP Environment Ministers presided over backlogs and delays** to legislation that were finally brought before the Assembly in its final few months. This is not efficient government, and it certainly fails to inspire public confidence in how government tackles issues like landfill, planning regulations, and pollution control among others.

## PROTECTING AND PRESERVING OUR ENVIRONMENT

As a top priority, we will work with all stakeholders, including those in the fishing industry, to bring forward the **long-overdue Marine Act**.

We have worked with the Marine Taskforce and its members in favour of strong protections for the marine environment, and will continue to promote marine management as a priority theme within the British Irish Council.

The SDLP has made this case already at the British Irish Parliamentary Association and elsewhere.

Environmental education should be a key component in school curricula. If we are to transform our society to think greener, this has to be achieved through the **education of our young people**. We will reverse the decision to stop grant aid for environmental education, and seek a commitment from both the Environment and the Education Departments to continued support in **addressing the 'nature deficit'**.

## ENFORCING EXISTING LEGISLATION

Enforcement of existing legislation is also a priority, not only to raise environmental standards and avoid costly infringement procedures, but to reinforce the message that **protection and promotion of our natural environment can in fact play a key role in controlling the pressures facing us today, particularly climate change**.

Creideann muid go mbeadh ról lárnach ag an Ghníomhaireacht um Chosaint Timpeallachta uile-Éireann, neamhspleách sa chur i bhfeidhm, agus oibreoidh muid i gcomhpháirt na bpáirtithe eile anseo agus i mBaile Átha Cliath chun seo a bhaint amach.

We believe an **independent, all-Ireland Environmental Protection Agency** would have a crucial role to play in enforcement, and we will work with the other parties here and counterparts in Dublin to progress this.

Equally, we will enforce legislation aimed at **wildlife and biodiversity protection** and **against wildlife crime** through full implementation of the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act.

## MANAGING CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE NORTH

**“DUP stands by climate change sceptic environment minister Sammy Wilson keeps job despite petitions calling for his sacking and fellow unionists accusing him of turning Northern Ireland into laughing stock”**

Juliette Jowit, [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk),  
10 February 2009.

In the next Assembly, the SDLP will press for **a renewed commitment to a low carbon society from all government departments and ministers**. We will strive for ambitious, legally binding greenhouse gas emission reduction targets of 40% by 2020 and 80% by 2050, to be met through a **Northern Ireland Climate Change Act**. The financial, environmental and social cost of not doing so is simply too huge.

**We want the Executive to commit to a raft of long-term measures and accompanying action plans to include at the very least:**

- a **'green jobs' strategy** at the heart of our economic policy, offering employment growth in areas like waste recycling, renewable energy, agriculture and public transport (see separate section under *Creating jobs, growing the economy*)
- mitigation against the huge economic and social costs of **extreme weather conditions** caused by climate change
- an end to our **over-reliance on exorbitant fossil fuels**, reiterating the dangers inherent in nuclear power and a serious commitment to developing the island's wind, biomass and tidal energy resources
- **protection of our biodiversity** increasingly at risk of destruction and even extinction due to climate change
- more collaboration on all of the above with relevant government departments and ministers in the South, given that **climate change knows no border**.



## WASTE MANAGEMENT

There is great potential for more cross-border cooperation in waste management. We will continue to push for **an all-Ireland waste strategy** that has at its core strong prevention measures, provides the economy of scale to reduce costs and preserves the attractiveness of our countryside, towns and cities.

The strategy will look at ways to **further improve recycling rates**, including reviewing best practice from elsewhere in Europe and examining how financial incentives to reduce waste can contribute to raising current recycling levels.

To **stop incineration becoming a barrier to increased recycling**, and with due consideration of the proximity principle, we will review the implications of and possibilities arising from incineration overcapacity in the South.

---

## ACCESS TO A BETTER SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT SYSTEM

Transportation is the only sector where greenhouse gas emissions are rising rather than falling. With real commitment to promoting sustainable transport, the SDLP aims to have made substantial progress in **reducing our carbon footprint**,

**improving public health** and **lessening congestion** on our already overused roads by the end of the coming mandate.

Government must commit to radically altering travel patterns in order to do this. At a time when we need to plan for low-carbon alternatives to the car, we must also think about **sustainable transport plans which benefit the entire island**.

We recognise that many major and minor roads here are in need of upgrade and investment, and we have encouraged the cooperation and financial commitment to date between the administrations here and in the South for projects such as **the A5** and **the A8**. Indeed, the completion of key capital projects is an essential part of our strategy for better economic balance through the relocation of public sector jobs across the North.

However, going forward there must be **a fundamental shift in the spending balance** in order to address the inadequate provision of alternatives to car use and make sustainable, accessible, value-for-money transport the first choice for the people of this region.

The Budget provides around £200 million capital investment for public transport versus almost £1.2 billion for roads. The SDLP will seek to **amend the current policy direction to better reflect the needs of the public and our environment** by working towards a more balanced distribution of spending on our roads and our public transport systems.



Moreover, the **cost of using public transport** must be reviewed if we are to increase passenger numbers. Prices have to be at a level that makes public transport a more attractive option than car travel, which is not the case at the moment. We will engage with the Consumer Council, Translink, Northern Ireland Railways and passengers to progress this.

The SDLP will take the following steps to improve public transport across this island.

## **Our public transport strategy**

Firstly, both jurisdictions should make the relatively modest investment to retrofit three Iarnród Éireann diesel trains, at a cost of around of £7.5 million, with a breakeven point anticipated after 10 years. We believe this would allow for **hourly Enterprise services between Belfast and Dublin**.

The Belfast-Dublin line is on **our most important economic corridor** on this island. There is a huge appetite among business communities, shoppers and tourists alike to improve the frequency of services from Belfast to Dublin using refurbished spare train capacity.

Likewise we will work for a better service for students, older people, families and other passengers using the **Derry-Belfast line**. We will engage with Translink and others to resolve key issues like overcrowding, frequency of services and the investment needed in the network to enhance journey times.

## **Push for more renewable energy**

Secondly, we will look at ways of increasing the use of renewable energy in transport, through **increased investment in R&D for the transport sector**. Poor political decisions and planning have meant the renewables industry in general here has stumbled and lost momentum.

To reverse this, Invest NI, our local universities and colleges and local SMEs - along with Southern counterparts - will be encouraged to develop an action plan to increase the use of renewables in our transport network, including the cross-border network.

## **A strategy for our ports and airports**

Thirdly, we need to plan air and sea access to this island much better. This will require common all-Ireland strategies for our airports and ports, and we will use the review of the Regional Development Strategy to deliver on this.

We want to secure **full devolution of aviation matters** to the Assembly, including transferring decision-making power for issues including air traffic control and air safety. We will seek the adoption of **an aviation strategy** that clearly maps out the role of the regional airports in an **all-island context**.

We will explore legislative means of securing financial investment in the Northern Ireland economy from our ports, as part of an all-island port strategy.

## **Encouraging active transport**

Fourthly, it is widely accepted that reducing the speed from 30 mph to 20 mph on urban residential streets through creative urban planning has been proven to increase the number of cyclists on the roads. The SDLP therefore brought draft legislation to the Assembly which would **reduce speed limits in urban areas**. By making our streets a safer place for all, we will increase uptake of active transport, namely cycling and walking.

We initiated the draft legislation and also demanded a reversal on cuts to the active transport budget following the **startling 98% cut in the Budget**. In the next mandate, we will build on our work to date by expanding and promoting the 'bike to work' scheme to encourage employees to cycle to work if and where possible, incentivising the scheme by enabling employees to purchase bikes tax-free.

In addition, we will establish a bike scheme in Belfast, whereby bikes are available for short-term public hire across the city, given the success of a similar scheme in Dublin, as well as evidenced in many cities across Europe. Looking beyond our main cities, we support the expansion of the cycle network across the North and an increase in the number of dedicated cycle routes.

## PROSPERITY FOR FARMING & FISHING COMMUNITIES

Local farmers are often the **custodians of the natural environment** and many have integrated environmentally-sensitive farming practices into their work.

In government, we will assist farmers and farm businesses to continue to grow in a sustainable fashion.

We will assist the agri-food sector maximise its potential and create 3,300 new direct and supply chain jobs within three years.

Integral to this will be cutting the bureaucracy that currently limits what the sector can achieve.

### CAP reform

Farmers face huge challenges post-2013 with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) review. CAP accounted for £339 million of income here in 2009, and a strong SDLP Assembly team will work alongside PES colleagues in Brussels and **fight for a fair deal for farmers** during the next stage of discussions.

We will ensure the money spent on the CAP reaches the farmer, and is not absorbed by administrative costs and bureaucracy.

### A comprehensive Rural White Paper

We will closely review the long-awaited Rural White Paper, which had been expected at the end of 2008. We assure the farming community that we will work to make sure that any future measures arising from the White Paper **understand and maximise the potential role that farming continues to play in rural communities as an economic, social and environmental driver.**

### Supporting our fishing industry

Quayside prices, increasing overheads, especially fuel costs, as well as the high number of fishing regulations all make for challenging times for the fishing sector. We will offer our **continued support to the fish processing industry here**, given its significant **contribution to the local economy.**

At Westminster our MPs are campaigning for a meaningful degree of **regionalisation** for Northern Ireland, to give our fishing industry more control over its future, particularly during negotiations on the Commons Fisheries Policy.

For the purposes of economic recovery and the sustenance of fishing in our ports, the SDLP will work to obtain realistic and **meaningful quotas** for fish species in the Irish Sea, and seek **investment for better infrastructure** in our fishing ports.

As with agriculture, Northern needs are often better represented by the Irish government during European negotiations on fish quotas. We intend to use our strong links with the relevant ministers in Dublin - as well as with PES colleagues throughout Europe - to negotiate the **best possible deal for our fishermen.**



## PROSPEROUS RURAL AREAS

### SDLP record for rural dwellers

- in 2010, Alex Attwood ensured 50,000 applicants received the £250 **Winter Fuel Payment in rural areas**
- our MLAs made sure the whole Assembly backed our proposal to **develop ways of maintaining the viability of our smaller rural schools**
- rural SDLP Councillors across the North successfully secured **rural townland signage**, purpose built **rural recycling facilities** and additional **rural recreational facilities**
- our Ministers increased the provision of **social housing in rural areas**
- SDLP representatives across the North campaigned against closure and privatisation of the **local post office**.

## SUPPORTING RURAL LIFE

The SDLP **vision for our rural areas is based on equality**, whereby those living in rural areas enjoy the same access to amenities and excellent services as those living in urban settings.

Our Councillors and MLAs have a clear understanding of the issues facing rural areas and a commitment to their resolution at local and central government level.



The challenges facing rural dwellers are compounded by the fact that **the Budget was not rural-proofed**, and that cuts will impact disproportionately on rural dwellers, farming families and community groups.

We intend to **restructure the flawed Budget to better take into account the needs of the rural community**.

In parallel, we will make sure that **the long-awaited Rural White Paper** satisfactorily addresses the key challenges and earmarks resources for a measurable and enforceable rural development action plan.

## MORE RURAL JOBS

Ní mór dúinn cur ar chumas an geilleagar tuaithe dul san iomaíocht faoi bhláth i rith amanna geilleagair éiginnte agus, chun féinchothú a dhéanamh in ullmhú don chor chun feabhais nuair a tharlaíonn sé.

We must enable the rural economy to compete and thrive during uncertain economic times and, crucially, to sustain itself in preparation for the upturn when it happens.

SDLP plans outlined at the beginning of this manifesto will ensure realistic investment in **'green collar' jobs** that can contribute to sustaining our rural economy. We will make it possible for farmers and other rural dwellers to use portions of their land for the development of small- and large-scale **renewable energy projects**, such as exploiting key sites suitable for wind turbines.

Local SDLP representatives will make sure the reformed **planning legislation** eliminates unnecessary delays in approving applications which can stifle entrepreneurship and inward investment in rural areas, a particular concern for people looking to diversify their farms and develop the local economy.

Our commitment to the decentralisation of public sector jobs to rural areas will see **2,000 public sector posts** spread more equally across the North over the next three years.

We remain supportive of efforts to fully **expand the high-speed broadband network** throughout rural areas in order to eliminate the digital divide and provide equal opportunities to rural businesses and community groups.



Finally, to give those parents living in rural areas and who want to work the freedom to do so, our **comprehensive childcare strategy** will ensure affordable, quality childcare is available in more isolated areas, just as it will be elsewhere.

## PROTECTING OUR RURAL SCHOOLS AND SERVICES

SDLP representatives got Assembly backing for the Education Minister to halt rural school closures, other than those where agreement has been reached locally, until the Sustainable School policy was agreed and implemented. While we will give our support to positive education reforms, **we will continue to oppose arbitrary rural school closures**, the very lifeblood of rural communities.

In the last Assembly we fought to **save hundreds of rural post offices** under threat of closure. Our Councillors and MLAs will continue to campaign for other vital services in rural areas, including **community pharmacies** and **libraries**, to retain the basic entitlement to access to facilities that others in urban areas take as a right.

## RURAL TRANSPORT

We will prioritise resolving the transport issues of huge concern to rural dwellers, including **road safety, fuel costs, road gritting, poor quality roads** and **lack of public transport**.

We will divert more resources to ensure that public transport better meets the needs of people in the countryside, particularly school children, young families, older people and people with disabilities. Our public transport strategy will rebalance investment in our roads and investment in public transport, leading to greater frequency of services and examine ways to lower costs for passengers, in order to **maximise choice** for rural dwellers.

SDLP MPs have urged the British Government to include Northern Ireland in a pilot scheme to **reduce the cost of fuel in rural areas**. We will fight to ensure that Northern Ireland is given equal treatment to other regions and that people and businesses in remote rural areas are given some relief on their rising fuel costs.

## UNITING PEOPLE THROUGH ARTS & SPORT

### SDLP track record:

- Ba mhaith leis an SDLP sochaí dhátheangach a bheith i réim in Éirinn. Chuirge sin tá muid **ag obair leis na móreagraíochtaí Gaeilge sa tír leis an chuspóir sin a bhaint amach**
- worked closely with practitioners and community representatives to take forward legislation to allow **provision and support for the development and use of the Irish Language**
- SDLP Ministers provided **substantial funding for a range of major GAA projects** in Lurgan, Downpatrick, Strabane, Dungannon, Armagh and elsewhere
- funded a cross-border programme run by Voluntary Arts Ireland, the Church of Ireland, the GAA and City Church Belfast, aimed at highlighting the excellent work of **volunteers** in the four organisations
- the SDLP was the only party on the Belfast Education and Library Board to **oppose library closures**.

## THE ARTS: AN ECONOMIC DRIVER

The SDLP is a proud supporter of the arts, and values the contribution that people in the arts and creative industries make to our society, often in the face of limited funding - which will continue to be the case during the 2011-2015 budget period.

Cé go ndéanann ealaíontóirí cumasacha agus tiomanta a ndícheall chun dul i dtaithe ar na coinníollacha airgeadais níos deacra gan dabht, ba mhian linn go dtabharfar níos mó tacaíochta dóibh.

While talented and committed artists will undoubtedly do their best to adapt to tougher financial conditions, we want to see more done to help them along the way.

On top of its positive social impact, evidence shows that a well-supported and thriving arts and culture sector greatly **contributes to our economy**. Every £1 invested by the Arts Council generates a return of over £3 to the local economy, and with Derry winning the City of Culture title for 2013, there is clear scope for further economic growth for the sector across the North.

We will create construction jobs, boost our tourism offering and demonstrate our commitment to promoting the talent of local artists by **building a first-class art gallery**.

There is real potential for growing the **creative industries** here. Significant benefits are already being derived from the continued investment in attracting top level film and television production to Northern Ireland. We believe that investment must be about helping to nurture talent from within these shores which will further help it grow. We will assess the possibility of attaching conditions to financial assistance in ways that will **encourage local young acting, writing and production talent**.

As with all government departments, we will set in motion a **process of pay restraint and reassessment of senior salaries** within the arts and sports bodies managed by the Department for Culture, Arts & Leisure. Savings made must be reinvested in frontline service provision.

### **Irish Language Act**

Leanfaidh an SDLP ag cur brú ar chur i bhfeidhm iomlán na ngealltanais a bhaineann le hAcht na Gaeilge.

Leanfaidh muid leis an obair atá á dhéanamh againn ar Acht na Gaeilge, a chomlánfaidh cearta na nGaeilgeoirí go dtiocfadh leo an teanga a úsáid in achan ghné dá saol, ar a bhfuil sé de chumas ag an Tionól a reachtú.

Má theipeann ar an Tionól cearta Gaeilgeoirí a chur i bhfeidhm go sásúil, déanfaidh muid fiosrú ar fhéidirtheacht reachtaíocht na Gaeilge a thabhairt isteach trí Westminster.

The SDLP will keep pressing for full implementation of commitments relating to the **Irish language**. We will continue our work on an Irish Language Act, which will fulfil the rights of Irish speakers and enable them to use the language in every aspect of life on which the Assembly has the power to legislate.

If the Assembly fails to provide adequately for the rights of Irish speakers, we will explore the possibility of Irish language legislation being introduced through Westminster.

### **Arts in our schools**

We recognise the significant social and community benefits of the **Extended Schools** programme, particularly in urban and

rural disadvantaged areas. We will make it possible for schools to provide more arts and sports services by ensuring additional funding above the existing budgetary provision.

### **Libraries: a social hub**

Finally, we will gather further support to challenge the department's proposals aimed at destroying the local library, in both our towns and countryside.

SDLP Councillors and MLAs have worked alongside local communities and trade unions to **retain these valuable assets**, which are particularly crucial to sustaining a vibrant society.

We will work to secure a commitment from the next minister and the Executive to keep our local libraries and keep much needed jobs.



## **SPORT CONTRIBUTES TO SOCIETY**

SDLP representatives have seen at first hand just how cultural and sporting activities can be used to tackle social exclusion, crime and under-achievement in deprived communities, particularly among children and young people.

We were therefore disappointed at the missed opportunity surrounding the pre-Olympic Games training camps here, and believe this reinforces the case for **sustained investment in grassroots sports infrastructure**, including Gaelic games, soccer, rugby and other popular sports.



### Investment in sport facilities

Likewise, delay over developing the **Elite Facilities Capital Programme** is extremely disappointing, not only because our children, young people and athletes are being denied access to world-class sporting facilities and the health and social benefits this brings, but also because of the thousands of jobs in construction and related industries that could have been created had the Programme gone ahead.

In government, we will increase the **rate relief for Community Amateur Sports Clubs** - and equally for all regional level sports stadia and facilities - to 100%, in line with other parts of these islands.

### Sport in cross-border areas

To assist and support cultural and sporting activities in border areas, we will work with our Southern counterparts, particularly at local council level, and give practical consideration to a more joined-up approach.

## A RIGHTS-BASED PROSPEROUS SOCIETY

### SDLP successes:

- stood up to the DUP and the Orange Order by rejecting the **disastrous proposed parades legislation**
- challenged the DUP and Sinn Féin on their **fatally flawed plans for a shared society**
- forced the DUP to **resolve the Civil Service equal pay claim settlement**
- kept pressure on the British government and other parties for a **comprehensive Bill of Rights**, in line with the wish of over 81% of people across both communities here
- as Social Development Minister, Margaret Ritchie funded the development of a new **housing scheme for Irish Travellers in Derry**
- championed the need for **internationalism** to be on the agenda in the Assembly
- internally the party is reviewing how we **encourage women within the political arena**, and in **other public and community** roles.

Ní sluáin iad amháin comhionannas, ceartas sóisialta, athmhuintearas agus cearta daonna; is cuid dár bhfealsúnacht bhunaidh iad agus atá chomh tábhachtach céanna dúinn inniu is a bhíodh don pháirtí sa bhliain 1970.

Equality, social justice, reconciliation, and human rights are a central **part of our founding philosophy** and remain as important for the party today as they were in 1970.

We steadfastly **oppose any dilution of equality and human rights**. It is regrettable that during the last four years, little progress has been made by OFMDFM in policy terms on a number of critical issues:

- 40,000 children are still in severe poverty here
- Bill of Rights process has come to a standstill
- unjustifiable delay on the Single Equality Bill.

For this reason, and others, we believe that many of the functions in OFMDFM should be reallocated to other departments and effective political responsibility given to advancing key equality and human rights processes.

## LIFTING 100,000 CHILDREN OUT OF POVERTY

The last-minute OFMDFM child poverty strategy is bereft of targets and lacks a collaborative approach across government departments. This was a missed opportunity by Sinn Féin and the DUP to create a more prosperous and fairer society for the 100,000 children living in poverty in communities across this region.

SDLP Ministers have led on tackling child poverty through a number of schemes including **Warm Homes, Cold Weather Payments and Neighbourhood Renewal**.

In the next mandate, SDLP representatives will place a firm emphasis on a **childcare strategy**, tackling the huge financial burden of childcare costs and delivering our economic strategy that directs **more good quality jobs** and **training** to the most deprived areas.

**Councillors** can make a unique contribution to the task of eradicating child poverty, by identifying the key groups who suffer most from child poverty, supporting Sure Start and other valued programmes and working with families.

## PROMOTING EQUALITY

We will deliver the **Single Equality Bill**, to strengthen and harmonise protection against discrimination and guarantee equality for all groups. All government departments must ensure that men's issues and needs are reflected in departmental **Gender Action Plans**, just as women's should be.

We can **eliminate the gender pay gap** through mandatory pay audits. To minimise the burden on business, we would time these with fair employment reviews.

Inflexible, anti-family working hours and the lack of good childcare facilities in the workplace or the community are **massive barriers to equal treatment**, and we will look at legislative and non-legislative means to address these issues.

SDLP Youth will continue the campaign to **extend the full minimum wage to younger workers**.

We will revise the **Racial Equality Strategy** and action plan to reflect the new political, social and economic climate here.





We will put out for consultation, before the end of 2011, a draft **sexual orientation strategy and action plan**. This will seek to promote the rights and awareness of LGB&T issues within and throughout Northern Ireland.

We recognise that good relations extends beyond the traditional areas of political opinion, religious belief and race, and will therefore seek the extension of the remit of **good relations legislation** (Section 75(2)) to include people who are LGB&T, as well as people living with a disability.

---

## EQUALITY FOR OLDER PEOPLE

To help address the inequalities felt by older people, the Commissioner for Older People must receive the necessary resources to be established and function effectively.

We will publish legislation to **end age discrimination** on the basis of goods, facilities and services, and develop a renewed older person's strategy, containing clear targets and an implementation plan and with the participation of older people themselves.

---

## TRAVELLERS' RIGHTS

Continuing the good work of SDLP Ministers, we will urge the next Housing Minister to provide more appropriate accommodation to meet Travellers' needs including the provision of transit sites.

---

## EQUALITY IN LOCAL COUNCILS

In 2009, the SDLP was supported by the Equality Commission when we **challenged unionist gerrymandering** in Lisburn City Council.

When the reform of local government finally takes place, the SDLP will be there to ensure the changes to council powers provide **equality of representation**.

To this end we have demanded a legislative basis to council power-sharing that can guarantee:

- **cross-community representation** in the top posts of all councils
- **proportional representation** in council nominations to all committee posts and outside bodies
- **sufficient cross-community consensus** on important decisions, and
- **safeguards** against partisan or sectarian decision-making.

Moreover, we will seek to establish an **independent commissioner to investigate** any issue which indicates **abuse or the danger of abuse of power in councils**. The SDLP will ensure that the letter and spirit of power-sharing and fairness legislation are adhered to.

---

## STANDING FIRM ON A BILL OF RIGHTS

The SDLP will seek agreement on a **comprehensive Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland**. The outgoing First and Deputy First Ministers failed to secure a clear strategy to develop a Bill of Rights, and the process has now stalled.

We reject the notion that a 'British Bill of Rights' is adequate for the people of the North and we will continue to argue for a Bill of Rights which is **reflective of local needs and the circumstances of people in our region**.

Ina theannta sin, cuirfidh muid brú ar rialtas na hÉireann agus rialtas na Breataine fóram a thionóil i gcomhar Cairt de Chearta d'oileán na hÉireann.

In addition, we will press the Irish and British governments to convene a forum for a **Charter of Rights for the island of Ireland**.

---

## GUARANTEEING HUMAN RIGHTS

We will **strengthen the role of the Human Rights Commission** in protecting the rights of people in the North. We will not tolerate downgrading of the Commission, an integral part of the Good Friday Agreement settlement, or any merger with the Equality Commission. We will ensure the British and Irish governments are fully aware of their responsibilities in this regard.

## JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHILD ABUSE

The SDLP will accept nothing short of **a full inquiry into historical institutional child abuse**. In accordance with victims and survivors' needs, the terms of reference of the inquiry must meet the needs of all those who suffered at the hands of state-funded institutions.

We will put services in place as soon as possible to address the particular needs of the victims and survivors of institutional child abuse, including **access to counselling, assistance with benefits, further education and training**.

Victims and survivors' needs are best met by the appointment of **an advocate for victims and survivors** providing a 'one-stop-shop' office in which those who wish to avail of services can do so in an environment sensitive to their experiences, as many have found that their needs fall beyond statutory provision.

---

## TRAFFICKING

We will review the recommendations of the Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group report, and examine ways of ensuring that this region meets its obligations under the European Convention Against Trafficking.

---

## INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Since its foundation, **the SDLP has committed to internationalism and global cooperation** as the only viable way to tackle the many issues that cross state boundaries including poverty, international trade and environmental protection.

The SDLP will:

- continue to ensure Irish and British governments fulfil their **Millennium Development Goal commitments**. We will support the efforts of local and international NGOs campaigning on the goals
- build on the excellent work of our Councillors and develop **procurement criteria** to ensure goods procured for local use are ethically sourced where possible
- campaign for **fair treatment of asylum seekers and migrant workers**



- work towards an integrated policy for all government departments and local councils leading to the provision of an **appropriate support service** for migrants and their families to ensure they are fully aware of social welfare, education, health and housing entitlements.

---

## EU AFFAIRS

The SDLP is the **only major and consistent advocate of EU membership** amongst all the parties in Northern Ireland.

Membership of the EU has brought significant material benefits to this island, such as improved infrastructure, assistance for agriculture as well as improvements for industry through access to wider and open markets.

The SDLP will:

- maximise the opportunities of enlargement to **support business development and job creation** on this island
- continue to develop strategies designed to **enable our businesses to make the most of the opportunities** provided by the new single market of over 450 million people
- support the development of **export opportunities for Northern Ireland farmers** in the wider EU
- build on the achievements of the agri-food industry and **remove red-tape restrictions** on the sector to enable it to fully develop into a top-class, 21<sup>st</sup> century agri-food sector.

*“... that small flower on her coat made a very large statement.*

*As the first nationalist leader to wear the flower on Remembrance Sunday it is, in the words of the South Down MP, the signal of a new “progressive nationalism”.*

Victoria O'Hara, Belfast Telegraph, Monday, 15 November 2010.

Our rejection of the **flawed OFMDFM strategy for cohesion, sharing and integration** was largely on the grounds that it envisaged a future where we still have two separate communities. The height of its ambition was to have two ‘tribes’, still unreconciled, but generally at peace.

We do not accept this. **The SDLP vision is a North where a united people live, learn and work together in safe communities.**

Seasóidh muid suas don phobal leochaileach sa sochaí agus tá muid tiomanta dá gcuid saoirsí sibhialta a chosaint chomh maith le cearta na mionlach.

We will stand up for the most vulnerable in society and are determined to protect civil liberties and the rights of minorities.

We will achieve our vision, not by carve-up politics but by **delivering a strategy that will address the corrosive relations in our community** and ensure a real debate about our Shared Future.

*“There can be no equality without good relations, and no good relations without equality.*

*Sectarianism and the failure of the DUP and Sinn Féin to present a workable strategy for a Shared Future is feeding into the blinkered agenda of dissidents.”*

Conall McDevitt MLA.



## ENDING SEGREGATION, ACHIEVING A TRULY SHARED FUTURE

As Social Development Minister, Margaret Ritchie held a series of 14 public meetings around the North, to discuss how her Department could advance a Shared Future.

This contrasts sharply with the absence of OFMDFM Ministers at consultations and public meetings about the discredited cohesion, sharing and integration strategy.

The SDLP approach is a measure of how all government departments should use research and action around the implementation of pro-sharing policies. **We cannot be serious about building a Shared Future if we do not address the deep segregation in housing.**

We will **build on this work and engage all sections of the community in a discussion about what a Shared Future means to them.**

We believe a robust strategy for a Shared Future must include firm public policy proposals outlining how good relations will be delivered through all government services, especially **youth services, schools, workplaces, transport and social disadvantage.**

---

## NEW CITIZENS OF THE NORTH

People from across the EU and the wider world who have come to live, work and raise their families here contribute hugely to our local economy and society. They too must be part of our Shared Future.



We are honoured to field five candidates from Poland and Portugal in this local government election, and a Polish candidate in the Assembly election. Together, the SDLP at all levels will continue to work to ensure that government here comes together to stand up for our new citizens.

## REALISING SAVINGS THROUGH SHARING

Slashing schools' community relations budgets and denying investment to much needed shared housing projects will only end up costing more in the long-term. Cross-community work pays multiple dividends in hard cash saved, as we gradually reduce the impact of division and sectarian violence and establish a society that is prosperous and attractive to global investors.

SDLP Ministers in the new Executive, supported by our MLAs and local Councillors, will set about **exploring the potential savings that could be realised through better sharing and eradicating the duplication and waste resulting from segregation and segregated services**. Such savings could go back into our Health Service and schools from which they are currently being diverted due to our persistent division.

Distribution of economic investment and benefit must be equally felt across all parts of the North, on an east-west and urban-rural basis.

## DEALING WITH THE PAST

The SDLP has been to the forefront in arguing for a comprehensive, inclusive, rigorous approach to dealing with the past.

We will seek a **commitment from the new Executive to resolve**, with sensitivity and inclusivity, a series of **issues crucial to victims and survivors** including, among others:

- the establishment and proper functioning of the Victims Forum
- the financial circumstances of the seriously injured, and
- the growing difficulties facing carers.

The SDLP will progress these and other key issues through the Shared Future strategy, working with victims and survivors themselves and **acknowledging the contribution that victims will play in the transformation of our society**.



## CENTRAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

The cost-saving arguments for rationalising government are well made. We have consistently argued that the debate is about more than **reducing the number of departments** - although we are ready to enter serious all-party negotiations on this.

If we are serious about dealing with the cost of government, we should tackle it at all levels and on all fronts.

We need to consider **shared services and shared support across government**, or between groups of departments, in order to rationalise the system and reduce costs. The various departments - whether at the present number or a reduced number - should not have separate establishments for policy, financial management and personnel matters.

Furthermore, we must examine the savings that the **transfer of powers from central to local government** is supposed to achieve.

## AMBITION FOR REFORM

OFMDFM has the competence to propose a redistribution of the functions of departments, including a reduction in their number, and yet has failed thus far to do anything about it.

Níl faitíos ar an SDLP roimh chinní deacra a ghlacadh agus leasú a thabhairt chun cinn.

The SDLP is not afraid to take difficult decisions and drive forward reform. This is **not about surrendering hard won gains for nationalists, but proceeding with representative and fair government in the future, retaining the protections for minorities** that the SDLP ensured are framed **in the Good Friday Agreement**.

To take this forward, following the election we intend to open a serious **debate on government reform with all political parties**, which we hope will result in **a number of options being presented to the next Assembly for a full discussion in 2015**.



SDLP proposals will include:

- **cutting the number of MLAs from 108 to 96** by the time of the next election, with a **further reduction negotiable after 2015**. This figure has been calculated on the basis of what we expect will be the consequence of legislative changes in Westminster to have fewer MPs elected from fewer constituencies
- **reducing the number of Stormont departments and ministers, to better meet the major social and economic challenges facing people here**. Today, there are 11 departments plus OFMDFM, something of a departure from the Agreement's provision of up to 10 departments plus OFMDFM
- **reforming OFMDFM**, the largest department within the Executive, has four Ministers and eight special advisors. This is excessive. There should also be a conscious attempt to **reduce the staff complement** in OFMDFM so that it becomes lean and efficient, capable of focusing on the overall work and performance of the Executive. This would also produce a modest financial saving
- creating a **single Economy Department**, as recommended by the Independent Review of Economic Policy group
- Similarly, a **new Department of Energy and Sustainability**, a **new Department for Learning**, and a **new Communities, Housing and Local Government Department** - taking on board various elements of existing departments - all deserve further consideration
- **Assembly Committees** would subsequently be reduced to the same number
- immediately **abolishing the Junior Minister positions**
- **reallocating many of the functions of OFMDFM** - community relations, urban regeneration, former security sites, etc. - **to other departments**

- reinforcing the joint nature of OFMDFM by **changing titles to 'Joint First Ministers'**. While we do not believe this will in any way improve the lives of the people of the North, if removing the 'Deputy' element helps reinforce the equal status of the Office the SDLP would support such a change
- ensure all **parties agree to the use of the D'Hondt system for the appointment of all Ministries** post-election and for the full four-year term. Likewise, D'Hondt must continue to be used to appoint chairs, vice-chairs and other key positions within committees.

---

## REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

We are disappointed that other parties abandoned the RPA. **Instead of providing certainty for councils** and allowing them to formalise existing informal, collaborative relationships with their neighbouring councils, there has been **failure to deliver**.

This has **cost over £100 million** to date, despite the outgoing Environment Minister's assurance that it would be "cost neutral".

We will ensure the eventual transfer of powers to councils achieves **prosperity through effective local representation, value for money, equality of opportunity, quality services for ratepayers and certainty for council officers and other staff**.

We will **continue to block attempts to transfer the cost of local government reform on to ratepayers**. Any transfer of powers from central to local government must be **accompanied by adequate income streams**.

Is í an aidhm atá ag an SDLP, mar pháirtí náisiúnta, ní amháin chun **Éireann Comhaontaithe a dhaingniú** ach **Éireann Aontaithe a bhaint amach** chomh maith.

Chuir muid Éireann Comhaontaithe i crích le hAontú Aoine an Chéasta a bhaint amach, agus cuirfidh muid Éireann Aontaithe i gcrích tríd an straitéis s'againn ar Aontú Pobail.

As a nationalist party, the SDLP's goal has been not only to **secure an Agreed Ireland** but to **achieve a United Ireland**.

We delivered on the former with the Good Friday Agreement, and we will deliver on the latter with our strategy for Uniting People.

**Our strategy is based on equality.** We are clear that unity must not be about the entrapment of a new minority.

All the rights, protections, and inclusion that nationalists have sought within Northern Ireland while it is in the United Kingdom must equally be guaranteed to unionists within a United Ireland. We will also consult widely on our unity proposals with people from the various communities across Europe and beyond who now live and work here.

During the next mandate, we will seek **a referendum on a United Ireland**, for which the SDLP will campaign vigorously in favour of a 'yes' vote.

## ACHIEVING UNITY

Uniquely among parties in the North, we are clear on the structures of a United Ireland and the strategy for achieving it.

### In the United Ireland that the SDLP seeks:

- the **Assembly** would continue, as **a regional parliament of a United Ireland** with all its cross-community protections
- the **Executive would be kept**, bringing together all political parties
- all the **Agreement's equality and human rights protections**, including the Bill of Rights, would still be **guaranteed**
- the **right to identify** oneself as British or Irish, or both, and hold British or Irish passports would endure
- **East-West cooperation** would continue. In particular, just as the Irish Government has a say in the North now, the British Government would have a say in the North in a United Ireland



- those in the North who want it, should have **representation in the House of Lords in a United Ireland.**

---

## ANNIVERSARIES AND SHARED NARRATIVES

As we approach **a decade of anniversaries and commemorations**, we call on all parties to return to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation - or a smaller strategic commission - to build a consensus and develop understandings that were previously frustrated.

We can ensure, well in advance of the centenaries of the Easter Rising, the Somme and other battles, that we minimise the contention which they might bring.

There is great opportunity to **develop the shared narratives** of the people of the North instead of focusing on division.

We will make sure that the next decade is a time to come together looking to the future, and not a time to divide again by harking back to historical grievances.

### **We propose to achieve this by:**

- building on positive achievements like **Derry's City of Culture**
- developing the **social and cultural opportunities** of our shared history

- ensuring resources are set aside to develop the tourist potential of our **shared history**, such as Saint Patrick and the story of the Titanic
- **encouraging all political parties on the island** to take a unified approach to commemorations during this decade of anniversaries.

---

## CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

The government in the South has committed to a constitutional convention. We will use this opportunity to ensure that **the people of the North are able to participate** in the process and that their needs are accounted for.

### **Specifically, we will seek the following guarantees:**

- **voting rights for the people of the North in Presidential Elections.** In addition, we will propose that the Presidential nomination process is simplified to allow more candidates to stand, including those outside of party politics
- **Northern representation in** the body which replaces **the Seanad**, or in a reformed Seanad. We will press for an agreed number of directly elected Senators from Northern Ireland who would be entitled to vote on matters including foreign affairs and the budgetary process. Importantly, this would give a Northern voice on crucial matters like NAMA
- an all-island **Charter of Rights.**



## The SDLP supports the YES to AV campaign because:

- AV will end the need for tactical voting with your only vote
- every voter will have a fuller say in their choice of MP
- AV will help to complete the transition to the New Politics here that the Good Friday Agreement envisaged.

*"This is a once-in-a-generation chance to change our electoral system and we will be doing everything we can to get the people to ditch our regressive and unfair First-Past-The-Post voting system."*  
Eddie Izzard, 21 December 2010

Since the 1970s, the SDLP has campaigned in favour of electoral reform. We therefore welcomed the decision to hold a referendum on whether to introduce the Alternative Vote (AV) **for elections to the House of Commons.**

We urge people to vote **YES on 5 May** because **it will give people the opportunity to choose a fairer system for electing their MPs.**

Tá sé ceart agus cóir deis a sholáthar do dhaoine córas níos cothroime a chur i bhfeidhm chun BP (MP) a thoghadh. Tá an córas atá ann faoi láthair go huile agus go hiomlán míchothrom, mar go bhfuil sé i bhfabhar na páirtithe níos mó agus go bhfuil sé in aghaidh na páirtithe níos lú, atá in ann na céadta míle vótaí a fháil agus nach feidir leo síocháin Parlaiminte a fháil.

## Vótáil 'SEA' ar 5 Bealtaine.

### WHAT WOULD CHANGE?

Today, MPs are elected to Westminster by voters using an 'X' to indicate their preferred candidate (**'First-Past-The-Post'**).

This system is completely unfair as **it favours larger parties, discriminates against smaller parties** - who might get thousands of votes but no seats in Parliament - and encourages sectarian pacts.

In the North, we already use a variation of the Alternative Vote - **the 'Single Transferable Vote'** (STV) - to elect local Councillors, MLAs and MEPs.

STV works by voters **ranking candidates** using '1, 2, 3...' and so on.

Our **preference would be to extend the STV system** to Westminster. It is much fairer and would make every vote count, rebalancing politics away from the extremes.

Nonetheless, the Alternative Vote is **a big improvement** on 'First-Past-The-Post'.

We hope you vote **YES to progressive electoral reform** on 5 May.





Uniting People  
**BUILDING PROSPERITY**





Published by:

**SDLP Headquarters**  
**121 Ormeau Road**  
**Belfast**  
**BT1 7SH**

Printed by:

**GPS Colour Graphics Ltd**  
**Alexander Road**  
**Belfast**  
**BT6 9HP**

For further information:

**Tel: 028 90 247700**

**Fax: 028 90 236699**

**Email: [info@sdlp.ie](mailto:info@sdlp.ie)**

**Web: [www.sdlp.ie](http://www.sdlp.ie)**



**FOR THIS DOCUMENT IN ALTERNATIVE FORMATS PLEASE CONTACT SDLP HEADQUARTERS**