

**STRENGTH AGAIN
IN EUROPE** **NEART ARÍS
SAN EORAIP**



**SDLP EUROPEAN AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
MANIFESTO 2014**



CHANGE FOR THE BETTER ATHRAIGH CHUN LEASA

Many important decisions, on issues like support for agriculture, banking reform and equality, are made in the European Parliament. It is essential that the working families of the North, have their needs represented by a strong pro-European voice of influence where these crucial decisions are being taken.

Strength in Europe will mean:

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Strength again in Europe will result from being a member of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D group) which is likely to be the largest group in the Parliament after the elections with influence at the heart of the EU institutions – not the weakness that comes from being in smaller groupings, on the margins, or even sitting alone in the European Parliament.

STRENGTH AGAIN IN EUROPE NEART ARÍS SAN EORAIP

STRENGTH IN EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP

The SDLP is and has always been the most pro-European voice in Northern politics. This strong voice in Europe can be of great benefit to the hard working families of Northern Ireland.

The SDLP is part of the Party of European Socialists (PES), a united group which sits as the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D group) in the European Parliament. One of the largest and most powerful groupings in the Parliament, the S&D group is expected to become the biggest grouping after the election.

This partnership will mean strength and influence across the EU institutions and its corridors of power.

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The SDLP has carried through changes to the system of local councils with the Review of Public Administration and a reduction in the number of local councils from 26 to 11. While we argued for 15 councils, a better model to provide quality local representation, the main Executive parties decided to proceed with an 11 council model.

The SDLP has ensured that this reform will incorporate legal requirements for power-sharing and cross-community protection. We have legislated against potential abuse and majority rule.

The SDLP changes will provide councils with greater economic and planning powers bringing decision making closer to communities. Local people will have power to shape their local communities:

Change for the better in local government:

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CHANGE FOR THE BETTER WITH A STRONG EUROPE

Europe is of deep importance to Northern Ireland. In a way the debate around European involvement is to be welcomed as it provides the opportunity to affirm the great advantages of EU membership. But if there was a referendum today or tomorrow, our strong advice is “vote YES to EU membership”.

While the North’s global trade grows, our biggest and most established export markets (Britain aside) are the Republic of Ireland and the EU. In the current global climate established markets are critical. Our businesses can only gain from access to the vast and growing EU market. It is evident in both the North and South of the island that EU membership has provided significant investment flows. If this was put in jeopardy it would be our people who would lose out, our farmers, businesses, border areas and areas of need.

Northern Ireland can continue to learn from European best practice in innovation, research and cross-border cooperation, to gain from the opportunity for our people to work abroad and for our businesses to attract skilled people to add value and create further growth and jobs. When the EU works best, proposes fair regulation and upgrades standards it is of help not hindrance.

Crucially, the British Government does not grasp the character of Irish farming. Our farmers stand to gain much more within Europe than outside.

Importantly, our young people stand to benefit from guaranteed job placements or training if we implement the European youth employment scheme.

We agree with our partners in the Socialists and Democrats group that the practice of many European decisions being taken behind closed doors by national leaders at EU summits, without full accountability at national or European level must be rectified. However for the Conservative Government in London to allow itself to be pressured by UKIP into a referendum was a strategic error. If there was to be a referendum, and the SDLP is not persuaded that there should be, it should be after an EU Reform negotiation, not as an upfront commitment regardless of the outcome of that negotiation.

Of course, the EU political system is complex and diverse. But it can work if we use it in the way it was intended, as a democratic institutional arrangement respecting national interests and finding common interests where possible for the benefit of all its citizens. Whether in foreign affairs, international trade or climate policy, we can only make an impact and change the world if we work together.

Change will be best achieved from inside the EU. PES membership brings with it real influence at the heart of Europe. With the SDLP, there will be strength again in Europe.

MESSAGE FROM DR ALASDAIR MCDONNELL MP, SDLP LEADER

The forthcoming European and Local Government elections will be fought on the important issues that affect you, your family and our entire community.

We need Europe and we need a strong voice in the European Parliament, now more than ever. There is great contention as to the benefits of Europe and a dangerous, growing euro-scepticism, but each year European membership is worth £3000 to every household here in the North. The European Parliament is where many key decisions are taken. Europe helps regulate our agriculture, helps manage our banks and leads on equality. We in the SDLP are proud of our record in Europe.

So it is important, at a time of cutbacks, when hard working families are struggling that we are well represented in Europe by Alex Attwood, an individual who is known to work hard for the people of Northern Ireland.

A vote for Alex Attwood in the European elections will ensure you elect an MEP who works hard to defend and promote your interests. His work, and that of his SDLP colleagues, will build a better future for the North.

I also intend that the SDLP will lead in bringing a new, more modern, approach to our politics. That includes in Europe, where, with our partners in the Socialists and Democrats grouping, we will work towards reform and a more accountable system.

The SDLP has a record of delivering accountability. We have delivered local government reform, something others had failed to do since the call for reform was heard 12 years ago.



In bringing forward local government reform the SDLP has ensured greater accountability and openness. Yes, we do not like the 11 council model but change is essential if we are to move on from adversarial politics with its constant bickering and stand-offs to provide stronger services for the community.

The SDLP will continue to offer a better politics which is about partnership and reaching agreement so that things get done. Whether the issue is new jobs, agriculture, health, education, or tourism, we will work hard to build partnerships that will deliver for people on the ground.

If you agree with this approach I hope you will support the SDLP on Thursday 22nd May.

Dr Alasdair McDonnell MP
SDLP Leader

MESSAGE FROM EUROPEAN CANDIDATE ALEX ATTWOOD MLA

These are no ordinary elections.

We have the choice to move forward decisively and vote for hope, ambition and change for the better.

The SDLP is strongly pro-Europe. We would oppose leaving the European Union – it would see our people, businesses and farmers lose out.

Northern Ireland has lost ground in Brussels. We need strength again in Europe, with an SDLP MEP as part of the biggest group in the European Parliament and with the impact and influence that it will bring.

We need hope again here. People feel let down. Government has failed us. This is what I hear everywhere.

As a lead negotiator on Patten and policing, on Haass/O’Sullivan and as a government minister, being decisive, tough and getting things done is how I judged myself. That is what is clearly needed at home and in Europe.

My values are from my Mum and Dad, who taught their five children a responsibility to others. Michael Collins, John Hume, Seamus Mallon, Brid Rodgers and Robert Kennedy shaped my further. Now Orla and I try to instil values in our girls for an equal, shared and just future.

The SDLP believes in a deep accommodation between unionism and nationalism.

We stand with working families and people in need.

We reject the favouritism and elitism evident around government and other parties.

We seek national reconciliation based on telling the truth of the past. We cherish all of our people equally.

These are no ordinary elections. Let there be no ordinary outcomes.

Together we can vote and we can shape a politics that is hopeful, bold and decisive, in the North and in Europe.

Alex Attwood MLA



Alex Attwood, as a councillor, MLA, minister and talks negotiator has a reputation for getting things done at home. Now it's time for Alex to get things done in Europe.

What they said about Alex Attwood as a minister:

“At a time when too many ministries were paralysed by indecisions, back biting, inertia and fear Mr Attwood grabbed the bull by the horns from day one making decisions on a range of tough issues.”

Andersonstown News editorial

“Alex Attwood is a tough act to follow . . .He made a good start on streamlining planning and wasn't afraid to take on vested interests.”

Liam Clarke, Belfast Telegraph Political Editor

“Alex Attwood is one minister over whose eyes no one pulls the wool. Privately, I guarantee you, Peter Robinson would love to see the back of him but I have no doubt he admires his capacity to forensically interrogate any subject...Doing the job is what matters. . .I would want him on my team.”

Eamonn Mallie, Political Journalist

“Alex Attwood is a safe pair of hands, as a minister he has done a very good job and is highly competent.”

Martina Purdy, BBC Political Correspondent

“There is universal acceptance that the West Belfast Assembly Member has emerged as a successful tough and tenacious performer at the Executive table.”

Eamonn Mallie, Political Journalist

“Since his appointment earlier this year as Minister at the Department for Social Development, we feel that Alex Attwood has got the tricky balance between action and planning just about right.”

Andersonstown News editorial

1. CHANGE FOR THE BETTER FOR GROWTH AND JOBS

At the time of the last European election the effects of the global financial crisis were beginning to bite.

The Eurozone crisis that followed plunged this island into further hardship; few businesses and families were left untouched.

The SDLP's partners, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D group) have fought hard to tackle the impact of the crisis over the intervening difficult years.

Along with our S&D group partners we believe Europe requires an industrial renaissance to cut unemployment and create decent, skilled jobs.

Structural changes will be needed. The most successful economic countries in the world are those which have fostered agriculture, industry and services together. We are proud that Northern Ireland, like much of Europe, has world-leading service industries, but we need a better balance to regain strength in our industrial sector.

The S&D group will work for a new European industrial policy to create sustainable jobs in new and existing companies.

Over the next five years the real influence of the SDLP within the PES will make us stronger again in Europe and help create change for the better to create growth and jobs.

5 STRONG COMMITMENTS TO ENSURE CHANGE FOR THE BETTER FOR GROWTH AND JOBS

The SDLP and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats will fight for a living wage and tackle unemployment by aiming for a 10% increase in the EU and Northern Ireland employment rates by 2020.

The SDLP wants to quadruple Northern Ireland's EU research funds drawdown and the devolution of fiscal powers to Northern Ireland to rebalance our economy and aid business.

The SDLP and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats will add a 0.05% Robin Hood tax to financial sector transactions and ensure fixing the banks won't cost taxpayers.

The SDLP seeks investment in the A5, A6 and Newry relief road to boost the construction industry and stimulate regionally balanced economic growth.

The SDLP and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats plan to update Europe's transport infrastructure improving key cross-border routes like the Derry-Dublin railway.

PUTTING JOBS FIRST

To tackle unemployment we must implement strong policies which promote job creation.

The SDLP is not alone in this aim. Across Europe our colleagues in the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D group) are committed to stronger active labour market policies, which would ensure a living wage for all workers, investment in skills, life-long learning and taking more responsibility for job creation.

Our highly-skilled and innovative workforce consistently proves capable of producing the goods. We must reward this achievement by attracting better, more sustainable, high quality jobs through Foreign Direct Investment.

The S&D group aims to introduce an ambitious European industrial policy, to support the social economy and small and medium sized enterprises. As well as promoting innovative green technologies to improve economic performance. This work in the North must be firmly driven by the Northern Ireland Executive and include a fully-funded sub-regional economic strategy for investment across the North, not just a concentration of investment around Belfast.

The S&D group will also work to ensure the labour market is accessible to all, enabling work places to provide for workers' evolving needs as they age while, benefiting from their knowledge and experience.

In Ireland, the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI) and Invest NI must integrate their long-term strategies for economic growth with the Irish Government's plans to create the best research, innovation and commercialisation ecosystem in Europe, 'The Innovation Island.'

RESTORING FULL EMPLOYMENT

The Socialists and Democrats pledge that the highest priority in the next European Parliament will be restoring full employment.

Through our leadership in the Department of Social Development and latterly the Department of the Environment the SDLP has ensured the decentralisation of public-sector jobs and we remain committed to developing the social, economic and environmental benefits derived from balanced economic development.

The SDLP will:

- Impress upon the Northern Ireland Executive how imperative it is that we join in the European wide fight against unemployment with the aim of reaching the Europe 2020 target of increasing the EU and Northern Ireland employment rates by at least 10% in six years.
- Ensure that work programmes and training provision for individuals currently classed economically inactive provide adequate bespoke support to assist them as they seek to re-enter the job market. A one-size-fits-all approach will not succeed.
- Make certain the needs of those with disabilities and older people are taken fully into account when providing job and training opportunities. This must include adequate financial support under the new welfare reform regime and high quality training to benefit both the employee and employer.
- Remain committed to the regionally balanced development and decentralisation of jobs required to create jobs west of the Bann.
- Promote and exploit the advantages of economic development in border areas, building on the work of groups like the Irish Central Border Network and projects such as the Derry-Donegal cross-border enterprise zone.

CHANGING ATTITUDES TO REBALANCE THE ECONOMY

The Northern Ireland economy is unbalanced, our private sector, crucially our small and medium sized business sectors, need to grow. A continuation of existing policies will not give the North the step-change required to grow the private sector economy.

The SDLP will challenge orthodoxy and stagnation by:

- Continuing to push for the devolution of corporation tax powers to Northern Ireland and reducing the corporation tax rate to 12.5%. We acknowledge the risks that have been pointed out, not least the potential cost to the Northern Ireland block grant, but we believe this step can set the local economy on a positive trajectory.
- Correcting Senior Civil Servants attitude to risk and empower decision makers by providing for a 'portfolio' approach in the assessment of success and failure, acknowledging occasional failures to ensure overall success.
- Creating a leadership unit with a high degree of independence, and headed by a person recruited from outside the public service, to identify radical solutions to reform the culture of the senior civil service and make future decision making easier and faster.
- Fighting for the establishment of a Scottish style commission to assess the extension of devolution and the opportunities to take control of additional fiscal levers. Through this mechanism Scotland has succeeded in winning the argument to allow them to borrow money and issue their own bonds. The same powers should be extended here to enable us to stimulate our private sector through infrastructure projects.
- Encouraging our Executive partners to produce a new budget annually to aid discussion, allow for proper assessment of alternative fiscal ideas and air imaginative proposals that help towards the development of initiatives to grow the economy.

SUPPORTING OUR SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMES)

Most Northern Ireland businesses begin as small enterprises serving local markets. It is the SDLP's vision to ensure that businesses receive the right help to enable more and more indigenous Northern Ireland companies to become major employers with an international reach.

The SDLP will:

- Work with our S&D group partners to reduce bureaucracy that delays business growth.
- Continue to support measures to create an environment within which entrepreneurs can thrive through the use of structural funds and enhanced drawdown of European Investment Bank support for small businesses.
- Represent the needs and interests of SMEs across the many relevant policy areas. Supporting small business growth should not be left solely to the Directorate General for Enterprise in Europe and DETI in Northern Ireland.
- Press for the introduction of a similar approach to that of the Dublin Government regarding the drawdown of EU funding with a large increase in resources and dedicated approach for government departments, further and higher education and businesses (including a single advice portal about access to finance for businesses).

GROWING THE ECONOMY THROUGH INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

The European Investment Bank and the European Investment Fund can provide additional sources of funding for council, central government and third party projects to make Northern Ireland competitive in the global marketplace.

The S&D group in the European Parliament aims to extend the lending capacity of the European Investment Bank by €60 billion over the next five years and develop European “project bonds” which could trigger a flow of private capital into real investment.

It is vital that Northern Ireland properly taps into both existing investment opportunities and those proposed by the S&D group. We must have the necessary infrastructure in place to benefit from the global economic upturn as it develops.

The SDLP will:

- Remain committed to the continued development of key European transport routes on the island.
- Press for further funds in addition to the recent investment in the Belfast to Dublin rail service so as to dramatically develop the EU defined Core Network Corridor between our island’s two major cities.
- Keep pushing North and South for the development of the A5 road. It is a crucial element in enhancing economic development and tackling social deprivation in the North-West of the island.
- Continue to emphasise the need to improve the transport links between the North’s two major cities by upgrading the Belfast to Derry railway line and the A6 road.



- Campaign for the inclusion, in the European Commission strategy TEN-T - Connecting Europe, of the much needed Newry relief road to facilitate further development at Warrenpoint Port and alleviate Newry city centre congestion.
- Facilitate the construction of more high-grade office space to help encourage high level companies to locate jobs in Northern Ireland.
- Press for the development of more enterprise zones, to assist regionally balanced development and stimulate business growth in areas of high unemployment.
- Help tackle security of supply issues by encouraging the creation of an effective long term energy framework across the island and development of “renewables” as Ireland’s biggest economic opportunity. This all-island energy framework would allow SMEs to provide local energy generation systems which would provide viable supply chains for manufacturers and suppliers.

HARNESSING OUR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

For the North to successfully compete on the world stage we must harness our knowledge base and invest in our research and development capacity.

To do this we must maximise our use of the vast potential provided by European research and development funds. At present we are not doing so effectively. Evidence confirms that per person the North drew down only 6% of the funding their counterparts in the Republic of Ireland attained from the EU's main fund for research, the Framework 7 programme. In total Dublin has managed to draw down close to €900 million in funding.

We must emulate the decades of intense work the Dublin Government has put into securing EU funds, much of which has paid for large infrastructure projects such as roads but as importantly has ensured Ireland has a global standing in research and development sectors such as life and health sciences, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, information and communications technology and the agri-food industry. We must capture our proper share of the FP7 successor programme, "Horizon 2020" which has a budget line of €80 Billion for 2014-2020.

The SDLP will:

- Strongly advocate the maximisation of North South co-operation on research and innovation and build on the Irish Government's plans for an 'Innovation Island.'
- Push for the enhancement of the expertise within Invest NI, government departments, further and higher education and the business sector in order to sharpen the focus on research and development funding opportunities.
- Encourage development of the work of the Belfast Science Park and call on DETI to promote and support the new Science Park in Fort George, Derry.
- Press for the creation of an 'Open Faculty for Innovation' to serve as a platform to engage with and encourage our further and higher education sector and business to promote innovation across our education system.



FILLING THE BANKING BLACK HOLE

In 2009 the SDLP highlighted the need to tackle the fundamental failures of the economic system and an unregulated global financial market that persisted over recent decades.

The intervening years of recession have pressed home the need to reform the European financial markets.

As the Northern Ireland Executive hold no powers over banking, and with complete disinterest in the specifics of the Northern Ireland banking system being displayed by the Westminster Government, Northern Ireland has become a banking black hole.

To solve this regulatory gap we must tackle it from a European perspective.

The SDLP will:

- Continue to support the S&D group's proposals for the development of an enhanced supervision system for Europe's banks and coordinated recovery and resolution rules that allow banks to capitalise themselves.
- Argue that the recapitalisation of banks must not impose a further burden on taxpayers and will seek legal action against bankers whose wrongful practices contributed to the creation of the crisis.
- Promote the separation of commercial banks from investment banks and their supervision and regulation on a European scale.
- Press for greater transparency of the activities of rating agencies and the creation of a European rating agency to evaluate the creditworthiness of states, and counterbalance private rating agencies.

- Continue our call for the introduction of a 'Robin Hood tax', a financial transaction tax which would be levied at 0.05% on all financial product transactions.

The S&D group has ensured many European countries have been able to introduce this simple mechanism which has the ability to raise up to €200 billion every year, transform public finances and require those who caused the financial crisis and were bailed out to pay for the damage they caused.



PROMOTING GLOBAL HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM



Northern Ireland is demonstrating its potential to the world. Events like the Giro d'Italia, the Irish Open, the Derry City of Culture year and the World Police and Fire Games have lifted the reputation of the North as a major events and tourism destination.

We must continue to be highly ambitious in selling the North's unique brand of world renowned Irish hospitality.

The NI Tourist Board strategy is sound and demonstrates the great potential for growth in our hospitality industry. The SDLP is committed to properly resourcing this strategy to ensure successful implementation and delivery of the sector's aim of doubling tourism revenues to £1 billion by 2020.

There is no doubt that the Titanic Signature project has proved a huge success. Work must accelerate to further develop the other key signature projects, Saint Patrick and Christian Heritage, the Mournes, the Causeway Coast and Glens and the Walled City of Derry and to move towards holistic signature experiences by encouraging the Tourist Board in its development of supporting experiences that provide depth to the signature experiences.

The SDLP is:

- Committed to a reduction of tourism VAT to 5% for the hospitality industry, including restaurants and catering services, tour companies, hotel and holiday accommodation as is the practice in most European nations.
- Focused on continuing our work through the Department of the Environment (DoE) to promote heritage led tourism development which has included investment in key historic sites such as the Walls of Derry, the Saint Patrick's Heritage trail and Carrickfergus Castle.
- Committed to ensuring the necessary funding is provided for further capital works directly linked to tourism and the ancillary transportation and facilities projects.
- Supportive of increasing EU funding of tourism infrastructure projects, such as the Narrow Water bridge project.
- Committed to further investment in interpretative/narrative product development, including through sensitive retelling of our recent history.
- Supportive of increased investment in training in customer service and hospitality to ensure we have people trained to fill the thousands of jobs the industry has the potential to create.
- Keen to ensure the devolution of air passenger duty powers to Northern Ireland to allow our airports to be price competitive and draw more of the island's tourists directly to Northern Ireland.
- Encouraging of the roll-out of the new partnership agreement between Tourism Ireland and VisitBritain which will support tourism growth in each region through joint planning, data sharing and shared sales missions.
- Eager that visa restrictions do not prevent non-EU tourists traveling with ease between the North and South of Ireland.
- Supportive of further investment to grow "Irish roots tourism" which was boosted by the opening of the new Public Record Office building and the campaign of Tourism Ireland.
- Ambitious to demonstrate Irish tourism potential on the largest possible global scale by ensuring all necessary resources are made available to the Rugby World Cup 2023 bid team.

2. CHANGE FOR THE BETTER FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

With over a fifth of young people out of work, many more under-employed and thousands having left these shores looking for work, more must be done to create employment, and educational opportunities for our young people.

As part of the Party of European Socialists the SDLP is proud that we have placed the needs of young people at the top of the European political agenda. It is essential for our young people that the SDLP is at the heart of this strong voice in the European Parliament.

3 STRONG COMMITMENTS TO ENSURE CHANGE FOR THE BETTER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The SDLP is committed to the European Youth Guarantee to provide a tailored job or training opportunity within 4 months of leaving education.

The SDLP seeks better co-ordination between business and education to equip the workforce with future science, technology, engineering and maths skills that will attract more jobs to Northern Ireland and end emigration.

The SDLP seeks an obligation to provide professional careers advice to all year 10 and 13 pupils and a teachers-in-business development programme.

FIGHT FOR YOUTH JOB CREATION

The SDLP is committed to the implementation of a European Youth Guarantee and a European Youth Employment Programme, this strategy to halve youth unemployment by 2020 has already been adopted in Europe as a result of work by our partners in the S&D group.

This fresh approach to empowering young people was adopted by the European Commission in April 2013. It aims to provide all under 25's with an individually tailored, concrete offer of a job, apprenticeship, traineeship, or continued education within four months of leaving education or becoming unemployed.

The SDLP will:

- Campaign to ensure the Northern Ireland Executive properly support and fund the implementation of a European youth employment strategy.
- Continue to advocate that other parties follow the SDLP lead and insert meaningful social clauses to government contracts, so that the successful contractors would make a reasonable contribution to work experience for young people and opportunities for the unemployed.
- Highlight the need to remedy and stop zero-hour contracts.
- Ensure that careers education and work experience provision is of the highest standard and focused towards placing young people on career paths in future growth industries.



IMPROVING EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Ambition and a focus on our future economic needs are required to lift the North out of the recession and empower our working population. This fundamental change must start with our education system.

The SDLP wishes to sustain this island's record of producing generations of innovative thinkers with a strong sense of entrepreneurship.

To make change we must reassess our whole education system with particular focus on early years and further education.

We must devote further resources to research, innovation and training systems. In the new global climate human resources are our greatest asset so empowering our people through innovation led training is key to developing our innovation potential.

Enhancing our training provision, developing a much stronger focus on science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) and further developing graduate apprenticeships is essential to ensure we empower our workforce to make the most of the global economic upswing when it comes.

Our education and training systems are currently failing to provide adequate numbers of skilled workers in key sectors.

There needs to be a co-ordinated approach to the development of STEM throughout our education system and more productive links between schools, further and higher education and the business community.

The SDLP will:

- Support and fund the further development of our universities and press the Executive to raise the Maximum Student Numbers (MaSN) cap to guarantee the University of Ulster Magee campus grows in line with the One Plan commitment to at least 9400 students by 2020.
- Seek to learn lessons from our European partners regarding workforce development and encourage our further education sector to learn how FÁS and IDA Ireland successfully equipped their workforce to serve the needs of the IT and research science sectors.
- Continue to ensure standards are raised in early years development so as to give children the best start in life and provide a strong foundation for their active involvement in society.
- Extend the provision of free nursery places to all 3 and 4 year olds and extend the Bright Start programme to private day care providers.
- Promote effective intervention in our schools to address the current problems with literacy and numeracy, through particular focus on our primary schools and measured intervention in post-primary where necessary.
- Seek a statutory obligation that all year 10 and year 13 students have an interview with an external careers advisor who can provide professional and impartial advice based on up-to-date knowledge of the economy.
- Continue to highlight the need for careers education to be an integral part of post-primary education. Call for careers teachers to hold a formal careers qualification, for the introduction of a teachers-in-industry programme and work placement experience for DEL career advisers in order to strengthen schools links with business.
- Press for career education that better relates to future employment trends, to help our young people follow the most appropriate pathway and ensure our workforce meets the needs of our changing economy.
- Seek constant monitoring and evaluation of our curriculum provision to ensure our young people develop the appropriate skill set to meet the demands of a changing society.

3. CHANGE FOR THE BETTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Northern Ireland needs a strong rural economy to thrive and grow. Despite the global recession the island's agri-food industry has been a great success story in recent years.

The SDLP has demonstrated our commitment to rural farming communities both in the Assembly and on the Environment and Rural Affairs Committee in Westminster, where the one member from Northern Ireland is the SDLP South Down MP, Margaret Ritchie.

In Europe we will work closely with the Dublin Government to fight for the needs of the island's farmers. It is imperative that we make our voice heard in conjunction with our Dublin counterparts as they better understand and care about the needs of our farmers than the British Government.



3 STRONG COMMITMENTS TO ENSURE CHANGE FOR THE BETTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

The SDLP seeks the development of family farm based rural communities and favour a single zone region for CAP Pillar 1 with a 4 year transition.

The SDLP and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats have secured EU climate change targets and we will bring forward an ambitious Northern Ireland climate change strategy.

The SDLP will oppose planning applications for fracking as proof it can be done safely and responsibly does not exist.

FARMING AND AGRICULTURE

The SDLP supports productive farming conducted in a sustainable and environmentally sensitive way. We strive to underpin family based farming and economically viable rural communities.

European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) support for farming must be tailored to help sustain and grow quality farm production across the region that is financially viable for the primary producers in dairying, beef and sheep production, industrialised chicken and pig production, as well as tillage and fruit and vegetable growers.

It is imperative that we adequately support our farmers and put in place a stronger agri-food strategy that supports all farmers in order to ensure food security in the face of growing global demand. The British Government threaten to pull out of Europe, a stance the North's other main parties support, with no thought of the impact on the rural farming economy. We are committedly pro-European as it has been good for our farming rural community.

The SDLP will:

- Prioritise an all-island approach during the CAP reform implementation to get the best deal for the Irish farmer.
- Fight to ensure the new CAP deal must strike the right balance between support for area-based provision and farm production related activities, as well as having some enhanced grant support for those farmers that work on the less productive, higher land.
- Continue to implement pro rural community, pro farming family planning policies.
- Commit to ensuring our growing agri-food sector is protected and nurtured for future growth and that Going for Growth ensures investment across all sectors, sheep, cattle and poultry production.
- Support the continuation of sustainable farming which helps maintain the countryside and contributes to rural development.
- Work for fair and reduced regulation, not further bureaucracy.
- Strongly advocate for the maximisation of North South co-operation in the whole field of agriculture and food processing, including the funding and acceleration of the work of the North's Going for Growth plan and its alignment with the comprehensive Harvest 2020 strategy of the Dublin Government.
- Press Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) to develop a more robust approach to eradicating Bovine TB.
- Pursue protections for smaller farmers on an all-island basis for environmental as well as economic reasons. It's in all our interests to remain able to buy local produce.
- Strive to ensure the rural environment remains a place in which people wish to live and work.
- Work to see that farm production activities are not impeded by cumbersome administration and needless bureaucracy for farmers.
- Support the increase in funding for countryside management, agri-environment schemes and planning policies that support farm families and rural communities.



FISHERIES

The SDLP is strongly committed to the protection of fisheries and the fishing industry.

DARD must develop a comprehensive fishing development plan for the fishing industry that supports an onshore fish processing industry and is within agreed EU Common Fisheries Policy objectives.

To do so the Executive must support DARD to fight for the devolution of fisheries policy to the Assembly as, like agriculture, the Northern Ireland fishing industry has very different needs to that of its English counterparts.

It is important that the introduction of regionalisation, which we understand will follow from the review of the Common Fisheries Policy, delivers a sustainable and profitable fishing industry for the Northern Ireland fleet and onshore industry.

Opportunities for other marine and coastal development need to be grasped. These include the fishing fleet involvement in offshore industry, the DoE fund for coastal communities and action plans for coastal areas that can see growth around our marine and natural heritage, coastal life and tourism and hospitality.

RADICAL REFORM OF DARD

DARD is a massive resource for the rural community but one that must be deployed and utilised more effectively.

Over the past decade DARD has become removed from the farming community, it is less farmer friendly, and fails to fully respond to the needs of our agri-food sector.

In order to build on our strong agri-food sector DARD must move away from its current bureaucratic enforcement model towards an enabling support for farmers. The DoE, SDLP proposal for a Better Regulation Bill, pursuing those most in non-compliance and an integrated permitting enforcement regime, is an example of how this could be undertaken.

Northern Ireland agriculture and the food-processing industry will only develop further and maximise its potential if DARD is reformed with a focus on farming advisory activities.

The inabilities of DARD and DETI to deliver for our farming economy are evidenced by the hold-up in publishing an agri-food implementation plan despite the publication of an Agri-Food Strategy report in May 2013.

An example of DARD's failure is that Northern Ireland is one of the only regions that will not be able to avail of upfront advance part payment of the Single Farm Payment scheme, an example of DARD's administrative systems failing the interests of our farming community once again.

The SDLP will:

- Press for the restructuring of DARD to meet farmer advisory needs and provide better support services to the farming community.
- Work for the reform and streamlining of DARD to deliver more effective computer and administrative systems for processing Single Farm Application CAP payments.
- Press DARD and DETI to fully implement the Agri-Food strategy along with an agri-food implementation plan that sets targets and timelines and has dedicated, allocated funding.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural development must strike a balance between the farmer and agriculture, alongside the need to provide essential and tailored services and facilities to support rural based living while underpinning a strong community spirit.

Rural development EU funding should be co-matched with Executive money to tailor a range of agri-business initiatives to include capital grants for farm buildings, fencing and drainage schemes as well as agriculture related rural business development.

The SDLP believes:

- The DARD Rural White Paper should be acted on and placed on a statutory basis. Thus rural voluntary and community based support services, notably community care and local transport needs, would be given sustainable long term funding. This should be carried out alongside other government funding for sport and cultural facilities.
- DARD should rollout a similar project for rural communities to the neighbourhood renewal programme through which the SDLP achieved success for communities while responsible for Social Development.
- A small schools policy should be introduced to protect rural schools; the heart of local rural communities.

RENEWABLE ENERGY

Renewable energy is the single biggest economic opportunity for this island. It is essential that we support growth and innovation in renewable energy so to be at the cutting edge of research and development.

Renewables will make a significant contribution to the jobs market, energy security and to our environmental efforts and the transition to a low carbon economy can be developed in a way that respects and benefits local communities.

The SDLP is one of the strongest voices advocating this approach. We believe the North can become self-sufficient in electricity, develop service clusters and service jobs around the industry, be at the cutting edge of research and development and see our engineering industry grow and prosper through renewables construction. This potential is evidenced by the fact that the tidal plant in Strangford Lough already makes us a world leader in tidal power research. As climate change remains a growing threat, it should act as a call to action to reduce emissions and expand renewables.

The SDLP continues to:

- Work to progress law and policy on the threat of climate change including the development of an ambitious climate change strategy.
- Reform planning to help process renewable energy applications.
- Seek EU research and development funding for renewables, particularly from Horizon 2020.
- Work with the British-Irish Council to seek out opportunities for all its members, particularly in the EU, for renewable energy growth and development.
- Set challenging emission reduction targets noting that the scale of agricultural emissions is still being determined.

ENVIRONMENT

Through our strong ministerial leadership of the Department of the Environment the SDLP continues to work for the highest environmental standards, making strides to improve environmental protection where many ministers before us failed to act.

The SDLP has ensured stronger future protection for our marine environment through the passing of the Marine Act.

We have reduced the environmental impact of discarded single use carrier bags through the introduction of a carrier bag levy. Money raised by that levy, at least £2.2m this year, is provided to a Challenge Fund; a people's fund which enables communities, schools and environmental NGOs across the North to carry out projects with practical benefits for the environment.

We have established new enforcement mechanisms to tackle environmental crime by setting up an innovative strategic partnership between a fully reformed Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and the PSNI. We will introduce a Better Regulation Bill to give NIEA uniform inspection powers and the ability to issue one streamlined integrated permit to a business. This will ensure compliant businesses are freed of red tape and receive fewer inspections while the poor and non-compliant will get far more attention from NIEA.

We will continue our work on tackling climate change by bringing forward an ambitious climate change strategy which will lay the groundwork for the introduction of a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill.

We will bring forward legislation to enhance road safety, particularly among new, young and rural drivers to reduce the number of injuries and deaths on our roads.

The SDLP is proud that our partners in the Socialists and Democrats group in the European Parliament are committed to European environmental protection. In partnership with them the

SDLP will:

- Bring forward legislation to support renewable energies and increase energy efficiency through both public and private investment.
- Redirect big proportions of EU funding programmes including structural funds, European Social Funds, the Framework Programs for Research and Technological Development and the Trans-European Networks Programme to green jobs and growth.
- Work to support green energy producers and those creating green jobs and growth by enabling them to be more competitive.
- Develop a European strategy for matching workforce skills with the needs of the Green Tech sector as well as developing a Europe-wide database for high skilled green jobs.
- Equip large green growth projects through the European Investment Bank, which is of particular importance given the failure of the Executive to properly fund a Northern Ireland Green New Deal.
- Work for ambitious statutory re-cycling targets.

4. CHANGE FOR THE BETTER FOR HARD PRESSED HOUSEHOLDS



The SDLP is privileged to be part of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats grouping (S&D group) in the European Parliament which is fundamentally committed to ensuring that no-one is left behind.

Many people in Northern Ireland are currently feeling the strain, be that in relation to unemployment, welfare cuts or changes to health provision.

The SDLP is committed to tackling these issues to lift some of the burden off our hard pressed households.

We are acutely aware of the pressure negative equity and the lack of nursery school provision for all children is placing on low-income households.

As the only Assembly party to vote against both the increase in pension age for public servants and the reduction of redundancy pay for civil servants, many of who are low paid, we have demonstrated our commitment to protecting hard pressed households.

This is of special importance given the cuts being imposed on Northern Ireland by the Westminster Tory Government and the right wing policies of the DUP in Northern Ireland's Health and Social Development Ministries.

3 STRONG COMMITMENTS TO ENSURE CHANGE FOR THE BETTER FOR HARD PRESSED HOUSEHOLDS

The SDLP believes house building targets for social and affordable homes must be doubled to tackle the North's housing crisis.

The SDLP is committed to supporting hard working families, will stand against welfare reform and will not accept the principle of a bedroom tax.

The SDLP believes there is an urgent need to review the implementation of the "Transforming Your Care" changes on-going in the health service.

HOUSING

The SDLP has long been associated with the campaign for decent homes. The provision of social housing has again become highly politicised.

The actions of the current Social Development Minister, using welfare reform as a smokescreen for hacking away at the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, is a sign of the DUP ties to a Tory cuts agenda and their determination to re-politicise housing allocations.

When responsible for Social Development the SDLP defended the record of achievement of the Housing Executive. We also exposed malpractice in the some parts of the Executive, instigating a fundamental review of the Executive and into abuses in maintenance contracts.

That commitment to openness and fairness should be continued. Instead thorough equality screening of Department of Social Development (DSD) policies is being avoided by the current minister through the instigation of pilot projects.

Everyone longs to have a decent affordable home that allows them to live in their local community. A warm home is also widely recognised as a key component of good health outcomes.

Additionally increasing the number of social houses built would provide a significant boost to the construction industry and social clauses in house building contracts, put in place by the SDLP, means that the successful contractors must make a reasonable contribution to work experience for young people and opportunities for the unemployed.

The SDLP believes:

- The Northern Ireland Housing Executive must remain the strategic regional housing authority.
- The Housing Executive and the housing associations sector require reform but it is essential that DUP are not able to dismantle the Executive and that we do not return to unfairness in housing allocation.
- The system of housing allocation must continue to operate on the basis of objective housing need, the most vulnerable must be protected and prioritised, and housing allocations must continue to be made under the principle of fairness and equity.
- The new build social housing targets need to be doubled in order to meet housing need.
- Areas of greatest housing need must receive priority consideration when new projects are being planned and funded.
- A DSD commitment to social housing provision would provide security to thousands of working families who currently suffer as a result of the insecure nature of private tenancies.



WELFARE REFORM

Like our S&D group partners in Europe the SDLP is fundamentally committed to supporting those hard-working households, older people and individuals with disabilities who require additional support from government.

We are deeply concerned that major aspects of the Coalition Government's welfare reform agenda are having and will continue to have a significant detrimental impact on our community, especially the working poor.

It is undeniable that welfare support requires constant monitoring, certain parts of the system are failing to function as best they could and some reform is required, particularly in eliminating the 'benefits trap' to enable people to move off benefits and into work.

However it must also be recognised that the Coalition Government reform plans will impact more severely in Northern Ireland given our historically high levels of disadvantage, lower paid workforce, a higher proportion of families with children and a higher number of individuals in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.

The SDLP will work on the upcoming Assembly legislation to attempt to mitigate the negative impacts and will continue to press the Northern Ireland Executive to make opposition to a wide range of the welfare reforms the highest Executive priority. For example, the SDLP will not accept the principle of a bedroom tax.

The Executive must collectively and robustly negotiate with the Coalition Government to pursue all possible legal and operational flexibilities within Universal Credit and for financial support to mitigate the negative impact of welfare cuts and changes imposed on Northern Ireland.

RIGHTS

The SDLP was founded on the principle of equality and rights for all citizens and this philosophy continues in our work today. For that reason we are proud that our partners in the S&D group are also working to enhance social inclusion for all generations. Human rights, enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, are just as important as social, economic or environmental progress in the Europe we want to build.

In Northern Ireland there is currently not sufficient legislation to protect the rights of children and older people in accessing services, including healthcare services.

Comparable legislation is in place in most countries in Europe and this inequality must be addressed by the NI Assembly.

In order to best support and protect our children and older people the SDLP believes legislation must be brought forward to prohibit age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services. In this spirit the SDLP will also work in Europe to progress "Towards an age-friendly EU by 2020", promote active and healthy aging and to create greater societal understanding of the needs of dementia sufferers, their family and carers in order to improve the quality of life of people with dementia.

We also wish to see the Health Minister's decision to refuse to lift the ban on blood donations from gay or bisexual men overturned. It is imperative that European Directive 2004/33/EEC regarding the technical requirements for blood and blood components is followed.

TRANSFORMING YOUR CARE

There is genuine and justified public anxiety about the current condition 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.

The recent crises experienced in our A&E departments can be linked to the confusion within management of emergency service provision and the confusion amongst the public as to how best to access the appropriate level of care.

Given that no consultation was undertaken prior to the implementation of Transforming Your Care and the subsequent problems that have occurred it is imperative that a progress review is instigated to ensure accountability and transparency.

The SDLP seeks reform of the outdated health service recruitment processes for doctors to ensure adequate provision of staff for all our hospitals, particularly in rural areas. This would avoid further problems like the difficulties experienced by the Downe Hospital in recruiting middle grade doctors.

Work must be undertaken to expand primary care provision to reduce GP waiting times and build trust in community healthcare initiatives so to ease the pressure on A&E services. Only when this happens will patient outcomes improve.

The SDLP, fearful of the type of crises we have witnessed within frontline health service provision this year, rejected the 2011 NI Assembly Budget because of its failure to focus sufficient resources toward frontline health services and health service jobs.

The SDLP recognises the need for modernisation of our health service provision and support the implementation of reasonable means of achieving efficiency savings in health service administration but this must not come at the expense of the patient.

All savings made through efficiency savings elsewhere in the health service must be reallocated to frontline services.

SUPPORT FOR CANCER PATIENTS

The SDLP is committed to the three patient-centred principles which underpin the European Cancer Patient's Bill of Rights:

1. The right of every citizen to receive the most accurate information and to be proactively involved in his or her care.
2. The right of every citizen to optimal and timely access to appropriate specialised care, underpinned by research and innovation.
3. The right of every citizen to receive care in health systems that ensure improved outcomes, patient rehabilitation, best quality of life and healthcare.

These principles are especially important as Northern Irish patients are currently not receiving equality in access to care when compared to patients in England and Wales who have access to an additional 38 life extending drugs.

This is particularly troublesome given that Queen's University Belfast are at the cutting edge of life and health science research and have recently made another breakthrough in ovarian and breast cancer.



INVESTMENT IN PREVENTATIVE HEALTH

The SDLP is committed to greater action on preventative health and keeping people out of hospital. 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%.

Those leading health reforms in Northern Ireland must aspire to increase the total percentage of the health budget to match and then overtake by 2020 the EU average of 4% to ensure long-term health improvement, health protection and the social wellbeing of people in this region.

This type of spending can also provide for an ‘upstream’ focus on prevention and health improvement and support for those with long-term conditions and chronic pain.

This preventative spending is essential if we are to reduce the financial, personal and social costs to patients and our health and social care system. Much of this reduction can be achieved through improved investment in primary care.

It is also important to ensure the public are more aware of the impact their lifestyle and environment have on their health. By encouraging and enabling people to adopt healthier eating and drinking habits, do more exercise and give up smoking we can improve health outcomes.

In order to achieve this an Executive programme fund should be created to kick start a long-term, cross-departmental preventative health strategy and to better link the work of the Department of Health in tackling health inequality with the fragmented and at times questionable work of other departments, particularly the Office of First and deputy First Minister.

HEALTH INEQUALITIES

The SDLP is focused on the elimination of inequalities that mean people living in more deprived areas are more likely to be affected by chronic health conditions.

The SDLP’S commitment to job creation, improving educational attainment and consequently career prospects, our campaign to double social housing construction and our commitment to fighting the welfare reform proposals coming from Westminster will all help tackle health inequalities and must be undertaken in conjunction with better preventative health planning.

We also require thorough rural proofing of our health service provision to address the problems of access to health services in rural areas of the North, especially areas West of the Bann.

This is essential given the problems that have been experienced in providing sufficient numbers of middle grade doctors in hospitals like the Downe and the difficulties of providing adequate ambulance response times in rural areas.

CROSS-BORDER HEALTH CO-OPERATION

Working across borders, sharing knowledge and resources, and solving common problems are key principles for EU health research and innovation and principles we must commit to on this island. The Department of Health North-South Feasibility Study published in 2011 after a two-year delay was the first and so far only substantive example of all-island health policy collaboration. It is important that the positive recommendations of that strategy are now implemented to begin working towards future delivery of health in an all-Ireland context.

North-South co-operation is central in addressing challenges like long waiting lists, particularly in border areas 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 both urban and rural communities.

The Health Minister has already made some progress with his Dublin counterpart in providing paediatric cardiac services on an all-island basis while retaining some services in Belfast. The SDLP encourages further assessment and decisions of areas where economies of scale could provide specialist services on an all-island basis which otherwise cannot be provided on the island, such as specialist treatment for eating disorders.

This would be a vastly superior alternative to the emotionally and financially costly option of flying patients to England for treatment. With over 40% of the island's public finance expended on health, and the need to improve services and do so at best value, a dynamic all-Ireland health approach is vital.

HEALTH INNOVATIONS

Innovation in healthcare research has the potential to benefit society in a number of ways. Investment in life and health sciences research, such as the expansion of facilities at Queen's University and the Clinical Translational Research and Innovation Centre in Derry have already demonstrated the potential for job creation.

However of much greater importance is the potential improvement in health outcomes which can result from healthcare innovation in areas such as drug development and medical technologies. Additionally improving and adequately supporting internet E-health has the potential to save money and provide increased ease-of-access to healthcare services for patients.

The SDLP aims to make Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) easily accessible to everyone, particularly those involved with sporting activities. We would welcome a European wide strategy which educates the general public on the potential benefits of AEDs and increases availability of these life-saving machines.

5. CHANGE FOR THE BETTER FOR OUR SHARED IDENTITY

The EU is one of the greatest examples of conflict resolution in history. In Northern Ireland we too must seek to move on from conflict to achieve collective prosperity. This requires a strong, influential voice at the heart of Europe.

To embed peace in Northern Ireland a meaningful prosperity process, creating well-paid jobs, curtailing youth unemployment and halting emigration is a necessity.

However this will not work alone, it must be done in tandem with refocusing on the need to confront the contentious issues still outstanding from the Good Friday Agreement, which the Haass/O'Sullivan process attempted to tackle.

The SDLP will continue to work with the other parties to achieve positive outcomes on those key outstanding issues of tension through the implementation of the outcomes of the Haass/O'Sullivan process and the introduction of legislation.

Within this work towards legislation the SDLP will ensure that sustained, face-to-face, genuine dialogue remains the primary means to address differences over parades and the key principles of rights, responsibilities and relationships are firmly respected and embedded in a strong code of conduct for parading that comprehensively deals with how people conduct themselves on the public highway, not least outside homes, schools and churches. While no agreement has yet been achieved on the display of flags the SDLP will continue to work for legislation to tackle the blight of unofficial and illegal flags.

We will continue to support the establishment of a commission on identity, culture, and tradition as proposed in the Haass/O'Sullivan process, supported by the full engagement of the two governments. The strongest part of the Haass/O'Sullivan process was not the parties, the governments or the facilitation. It was the input of civic society, who yet again, demonstrated a strong desire for resolution. None did this more clearly than victims and survivors. It is for them and wider civic society that we must not let the progress made in the Haass/O'Sullivan process to deal comprehensively and ethically with the past slip away.

The SDLP remains steadfastly committed to creating a shared future for all our citizens. All those in leadership positions in Northern Ireland must develop ambition far above the baseline of working for what best suits one half of the community or the other.

3 STRONG COMMITMENTS TO ENSURE CHANGE FOR THE BETTER FOR OUR SHARED IDENTITY

The SDLP wants to address the past comprehensively and ethically, demands strong parades legislation, calls for greater recognition of our identities and traditions and seeks equality on official flags. We support the Haass/O'Sullivan proposal for a "Commission on Identify."

We in the SDLP are committed pro-Europeans and proud internationalists. We will protect human rights and seek a robust, updated NI race equality law.

The SDLP continues to seek the introduction of Acht na Gaeilge and full OFMDFM reporting on progress in implementing the European Language Charter.

COMMUNITY SAFETY

The SDLP is committed to combatting crime and creating safer communities for all through the further embedding of community policing.

All those in leadership in the North must be steadfastly committed to addressing our past and unwaveringly focused on combatting crime and ensuring safer communities for everybody.

RACE RELATIONS

The SDLP has long campaigned for and supported the rights of people from across Europe and beyond who now live and work in the North.

Given the sad fact that racist attacks and intimidation still occur all too often, it is essential that government demonstrates leadership to tackle racism.

The SDLP believes it is essential that the long overdue replacement to the 2005 racial equality strategy is brought forward, funded by an associated minority ethnic development fund and underpinned by updated and robust race equality law.

CROSS-BORDER SAFETY

This island stands to learn much from partnership practice between European jurisdictions and one notable area where further partnership must be developed is cross-border policing.

Cross-border partnership must continue to be strengthened and deepened as part of the strategy to confront the dissidents and serious organised crime, such as illegal fuel, waste and milk smuggling and to demonstrate the benefits of enhanced North-South integration throughout this island.

The SDLP has demonstrated such cross-border partnership through their work in the Department of the Environment, taking a strategic all-island approach to tackling environmental crime and by working to achieve an all-island road safety strategy which aims to better support young drivers and reduce to zero the number of tragedies which occur on Ireland's roads.

We will continue to work with both the Dublin and London Governments to tackle serious and organised crime. We hold significant concerns as to the role of the National Crime Agency and the funding cuts for specialised services such as tackling child exploitation that resulted from its establishment. We will continue to ensure that this supersized agency is properly held to account in Northern Ireland.

The SDLP is committed to tackling human trafficking. We will support the human trafficking and exploitation legislation progressing through the Assembly and will work to ensure this region fulfils its obligations under the European Convention against Trafficking.



ACCESS TO JUSTICE

The SDLP acknowledges the need to reduce spending on legal aid however this cannot occur in a way that undermines basic access to justice. We oppose much of what is being proposed in the criminal legal aid reforms particularly the proposals to reduce funding for family and children's services.

The SDLP will work to ensure the Department of Justice reforms to legal aid do not adversely affect a wide section of ordinary people as they attempt to access assistance in claims for accidents at work, serious road accidents, and particularly support when taking family law and children's cases.

INTERNATIONAL

Along with being proud Europeans we in the SDLP are proud internationalists. We owe much to the international community for the assistance provided to Northern Ireland in the past half century and we will continue to play a committed part in international affairs having long advocated international development issues at all levels of government.

The EU must remain at the forefront of advancing peace and sustainable social and economic development worldwide. We are proud to be members of the Party of European Socialists who are deeply involved in international issues and we will work with their Foreign Policy Network to keep global shared prosperity, human rights and human dignity at the centre of EU discourse. Europe has a major role to play on the international scene and can be influential in global human rights issues such as working for Palestinian statehood and a peaceful resolution to addressing peace in the region through a two state solution.

IMMIGRATION

As committed internationalists the SDLP respects the basic values of the European Union and the principle of free movement of workers within its borders.

Rather than allowing Euro sceptic parties, particularly UKIP, to indulge in rhetoric exploiting peoples' worst fears we must work to address issues while standing firmly by the common basic principles of immigrant integration policy within the European Union.

This includes acknowledging that integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation from all immigrants and residents of member states. For example, encouraging migrants to have a basic knowledge of our society and language while ensuring we provide access to education and services is essential for mutual respect and successful integration.

Sadly at the moment the island of Ireland is once again seeing net out-migration and many of our young people are seeking the benefits of employment in other EU states.

The Irish diaspora is a great example of the contribution immigrants make to host societies. The SDLP will always welcome immigrants to Northern Ireland, particularly those currently helping us fill our skills gaps.

It is essential we address the wider problem of unemployment to increase employment opportunities for both those that grew up here and economic migrants to Northern Ireland.

CULTURE

Ireland has a rich creative, linguistic and artistic heritage and many Northern Irish poets, authors, musicians and artists are world renowned. The SDLP is committed to continued support for community arts and for the development of our artistic talents into economic drivers in tourism and the creative industries. A great example of this was the success of the Derry City of Culture year, which demonstrated the enormous potential of the North's unique identity in encouraging cultural tourism.

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

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

We must build on this potential. As every £1 invested by the Arts Council generates a return of over £3 to the local economy we must better nurture business entrepreneurship within our arts community so to develop a sustainable indigenous creative industry in Northern Ireland, which is boosted by, and not dependent on, international investment.

The SDLP will:

- Encourage our arts community to develop future focused skills to develop the potential of our creative industry.
- Ensure that the voice of local creative industry groups and individuals is heard in Europe, particularly regarding draft legislation that may follow on from the "European Commission Communication on Promoting Cultural and Creative Sectors for Growth and Jobs in the EU."

- Aim to maximise the amount of monies drawn down from EU funding streams for culture events and arts festivities in the North of Ireland by raising awareness of available funds such as the newly established Creative Europe Programme 2014-2020 and Horizon 2020.
- Highlight the utmost importance of complementary skills in the STEM (Science, Technology, Education and Maths) subjects to our young aspiring artists.
- Ensure schools are able to provide more arts services in conjunction with STEM learning.

INCLUSION

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

The Europe 2020 Strategy aims to tackle poverty and social exclusion, particularly among older people, and the SDLP will work with the task force to ensure better linking and understanding between generations and through increased intergenerational opportunities, particularly in the arts.

The SDLP will promote the need for a dedicated women's measure in European programmes to address women's inequalities in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000).

The SDLP believes in protecting children and vulnerable young people from cyber bullying and wish to see the continuation of the EU #DeleteCyberbullying project and will encourage the Northern Ireland Executive to engage with this exchange of best practice.

ERASMUS+

Building on the successful student exchange programme Erasmus, the EU has recently established the Erasmus+ programme combining all the EU's current schemes for education, training, youth and for the first time, sport.

The SDLP is keen to ensure Northern Ireland makes the most of this new €14.7 billion catch-all framework program with its simplified funding mechanisms. It is important that Northern Ireland works to match the EU's 40% increase investment commitment in these areas.

Erasmus+ will support transnational partnerships among education, training, and youth institutions and organisations to foster cooperation and bridge the worlds of education. It is important we use this as a vehicle to tackle Northern Ireland's skills gaps.

LANGUAGE EQUALITY

The SDLP welcomes the growing language diversity in Northern Ireland. While we acknowledge that most of the languages in growing use here are minority languages only in the context of Northern Ireland, we welcome the multiculturalism that this diversity signifies.

We are committed to improving the provision of support for all minority language groups, and in particular improving the status of Irish, the respect given to the language and the image of the language in the community.

The SDLP will keep pressing for the full implementation of commitments relating to the Irish language, notably the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. We will continue our work on an Irish Language Act in the Northern Ireland Assembly which will fulfil the rights of Irish speakers.

Irish became an official language of the European Union on 1 January 2007. However due to the lack of language experts at the time restrictions were put in place on the amount of information required to be provided in Irish.

Thankfully the initial lack of language experts no longer exists so it is important that when the derogation ends in 2017 Irish is treated on a par with the other 24 official European languages.

This will create a substantial long-term benefit for the influence of Ireland in the European Union, as a certain proportion of people taking these jobs may eventually move onto jobs with responsibility for policy areas in the European Union.

The SDLP will:

- Press OFMDFM to respect the Irish language by fully engaging with and reporting on their progress, measured against the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and their obligations to support Ulster-Scots.
- Work with the Irish Government to ensure they submit an official request to the European Union not to renew the derogation on the Irish language.
- Highlight the job creation potential of this move: 180+ high value jobs would be made available between now and 2017.
- Press the Irish Government and Department of Culture in the North to establish a recruitment campaign between now and 2017 to ensure staff are in place for 2017 to fill the jobs which will be created.
- Continue to work closely with practitioners and community representatives to take forward legislation to allow provision and support for the development and use of the Irish Language.

COMHIONANNAS TEANGA

Cuireann an SDLP fáilte roimh fhás éagsúlacht theangacha i dTuaisceart Éireann. Cé go bhfuil úsáid teangacha mionlaí ag dul i méid anseo, agus nach teangacha mionlaí lasmuigh de Thuaisceart Éireann iad, cuirimid fáilte roimh an éagsúlacht ilchultúir is inchiallaithe iontu seo.

Táimid tiománta do sholáthar tacaíochta lucht labharthas na dteangacha mionlaí ar fad, ach go háirithe, stádas na Gaeilge, an meas ina léith agus a híomhá i measc an phobail a bhísiú.

Leanfaidh an SDLP ag teannadh ar fhorfheidhmiú na ngealltanas i léith na Gaeilge, ach go háirithe an Chairt Eorpach um Teangacha Reigiúnda agus Mionlaí. Leanfaimid lenár gcuid oibre ar Acht na Gaeilge i dTionól Thuaisceart Éireann a chomhlíonfaidh cearta phobal na Gaeilge.

Tugadh aitheantas don Ghaeilge mar theanga oifigiúil de chuid an Aontais Eorpaigh ar 1 Eanáir 2007. De thoradh an easpa sáineolaithe teanga um an dtaca sin, cuireadh sraonadh i bhfeidhm ar an mhéid eolais a bhí a dhíth chun soláthar trí Ghaeilge.

Ar an dea-uair níl easpa sáineolaithe anois ann agus is den tábhacht é ar chríoch an mhaolaithe i 2017 go nglacfar leis an Ghaeilge ar chomhchéim leis an 24 teanga oifigiúil eile de chuid an Aontais Eorpaigh.

Rachaidh seo chun sochair fadthéarmach thionchair na hÉireann san Aontas Eorpach go mbeidh méid áirithe daoine a thógfaidh na poist seo agus a bhogfaidh, i ndeireadh dála, isteach i bpoist a bhfuil freagracht ar limistéir polaisithe ag baint leo laistigh den Aontas Eorpach.

- Cuirfidh an SDLP brú ar OFMDFM(OPA/OLPA) dileagla a bheith acu ar an Ghaeilge trí thuairisciú ar dhul chun cinn de réir bearta An Chairt Eorpach um Theangacha Regiúnda agus Mionlaí agus de réir a n-oibligeadaí tacú leis an Ultais.
- Oibriú le Rialtas na hÉireann le cinnte a dhéanamh de go ndéanfar achainí oifigiúil ar an Aontas Eorpach gan athnuachan a dhéanamh ar an mhaolú ar an Ghaeilge.
- Béim a chur ar acmhainn chruthaithe fostaíochta na seifte seo: go gcruithófar 180+ post idir an t-am seo agus 2017.
- Brú a chur ar Rialtas na hÉireann agus ar Roinn an Chultúir sa Tuaisceart le feachtas fostaíochta a chur ar bun idir an t-am seo agus 2017 le cinnte a dhéanamh de go mbeidh foireann réidh i 2017 leis na poist a chruthófar a líonadh.
- Go leanfar ag obriú go dlúth le cleachtoirí agus le hionadaithe pobal rachtaíocht a thabhairt chun cinn le forálacha a éascú agus le tacú ar fhorbairt agus ar úsáid na Gaeilge.
- Déanamh cinnte de go mbeidh Stráitéis na Gaeilge foilsithe agus curtha i bhfeidhm sa Tuaisceart.
- Acmhainní cuí a bheith ag pobal na Gaeilge thuaidh and theas leis an teanga a fhréamhú agus a fhorbairt sna pobail áitiúla.
- Lántacaíocht a bheith ann do chóras gaeiloideachais ón leibhéal réamhscolaíochta ar aghaidh.

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER



IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT



MESSAGE FROM THE ENVIRONMENT MINISTER

This local government election represents the beginning of an exciting new chapter in local government. I have successfully brought forward the Local Government Bill and this will result not only in a reduction in the number of councils but an increase in their responsibility, accountability and transparency. It will bring power closer to the people.

Central to the new councils will be the SDLP ethos of power-sharing and the protection of minority views – which we have ensured is enshrined in legislation. People want to see their politicians working in partnership and my SDLP council colleagues will establish new, as well as build on existing partnerships with and within communities and with businesses seeking to create prosperity with our cross border colleagues, with central government and statutory agencies to deliver better services.



SDLP councillors will continue working to create jobs, create cleaner, greener and safe communities and secure better facilities where they are needed. We are giving planning powers back to local government which will make planning more responsive to local needs and circumstances. People will have a greater say in community planning. The SDLP will ensure that this new planning system is fast, fair and fit for purpose.

We secured £30m from the NI Executive to ensure the rate payer is not left to pick up the tab for these improvements and we will continue to push for a fairer rates system based on the ability to pay, protecting hard-pressed businesses and those on lower incomes.

The SDLP will continue to ensure that this new, enhanced local government model will achieve effective local representation, value for money, equality of opportunity and quality of services for ratepayers.

Mark H Durkan MLA
Environment Minister

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local government in Northern Ireland is undergoing fundamental change. Structures which have been under review since 2002 are finally subject to reform.

Decisive and effective SDLP leadership in the Environment Ministry from first Alex Attwood, and currently Mark H Durkan, has provided certainty to local councils for the first time in 12 years.

The SDLP has ensured local government reform is now being implemented, following 12 years of failure on the part of direct rule ministers and DUP - Sinn Féin disputes.

3 STRONG COMMITMENTS TO ENSURE CHANGE FOR THE BETTER FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The SDLP will continue to take a “town centres first” approach to planning to protect the economic and social heart of community life.

The SDLP has and will ensure openness, fairness, equality and good relations are embedded in the community planning work of the new councils.

The SDLP has assisted businesses by increasing the economic development powers of councils and will not permit your rates to rise above inflation.

EFFECTIVE REPRESENTATION

Power-sharing government has required compromise. The decision to proceed with the 11 council model was that of the DUP and Sinn Féin.

The SDLP has articulated serious reservations about the quality of local representation provided by councils covering such large and diverse areas.

To help address this problem the SDLP has ensured the transfer of additional powers to councils, so councils are now being empowered to better develop prosperity within their districts, and negotiated a £50 million package to support councils and rate payer relief.

Changes advanced by the SDLP will ensure effective local representation, better value for money, enhanced equality of opportunity, quality services for ratepayers and certainty for council officers and other staff.

LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

As part of the SDLP commitment to deepening democracy in Ireland the SDLP has embedded increased accountability within the new local government structures.

We believe power-sharing must be embedded across Northern Ireland and government should always be representative and reflective of both communities.

The SDLP has ensured that promoting good relations is at the heart of the new councils' community planning.

Under the new local government governance arrangements sharing council positions of responsibility across political parties and independents will be enshrined in law for the first time.

The new council structures will be more accountable to local people. As democratic republicans we believe that power lies fundamentally with the citizen, so we have ensured the public will also now have more access to council meetings and documents. The SDLP has also ensured a new ethical standards regime will be instituted with the establishment of a new mandatory code of conduct for councillors.

The SDLP has put an end to dual mandates by placing a bar on MLAs, MPs and MEPs from being elected or sitting as councillors.

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The SDLP has ensured that under the new local government model the economic development powers of the councils will increase, bringing decision-making on a wide range of local economic development issues closer to those people and businesses that they directly affect.

The SDLP will lead on developing individual council and collaborative capital investment strategies in local government areas which are capable of successfully leveraging government finance for investment in major projects to benefit their local economy.

Alongside this we will vigorously promote a strategy to develop access to new sources of finance for the new councils including using council's increased rateable base to gain access to funds from the European Investment Bank.

To boost local business and employment we will work towards more efficient methods of payment of invoices to service providers to ensure that businesses always benefit from working with councils.

RATES

The 2015/16 local government rates will be the first set by the 11 new councils. The amalgamation of many of the old councils to form the new councils has the potential to effect local government rates.

The SDLP has consistently pressed the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure they and not the new local councils should pick up the tab for the reform of local government.

In that regard the SDLP ensured that the Executive committed up to £30 million for a rates relief scheme.

The SDLP has and will continue to encourage fiscal responsibility in the new councils to ensure the ratepayer is not burdened by local government reform.

In the longer term, reducing the number of councils and new ways of working will enable councils to make savings, benefitting the ratepayer.

In the next mandate the SDLP will assist both the business and domestic ratepayer by ensuring council rates do not rise above inflation.

PLANNING

In developing a new strategic planning policy statement in which over 20 separate planning policies will be incorporated into a single policy SDLP Minister Mark H Durkan MLA is demonstrating much needed leadership in simplifying our planning rules.

The new arrangements will provide greater clarity to businesses and ensure a more streamlined planning process. This supports faster decision making and consequential economic benefits.

The SDLP has also ensured a new council led community planning process. This will allow our councillors to work in partnership with other public service providers to develop and implement a vision for the economic, social and environmental well-being of the district. It will complement their existing work in community planning which is beginning to safeguard local people's right to help shape the places they live and the local services they use.

TOWN CENTRES

The SDLP is proud to support our town centres, the economic and social hubs of our community life. However we recognise that our town centres are under significant pressure from both the economic downturn and new consumer internet shopping practices.

The SDLP is certain our town centres can and must remain the centre of social and community life. At Executive level SDLP ministers Alex Attwood and Mark H Durkan have shown leadership by promoting a “town centre first” approach to planning reforms. It is imperative that we protect and enhance the viability of town centres and make them the preferred option when planning decisions are made. The leadership of the SDLP Environment Minister must be echoed across government so to encourage town centre living and review restrictions on issues as diverse as car parking and pub licensing to support our local community businesses.

Through our leadership of the Department of the Environment the SDLP has sought to assist business growth by reducing bureaucracy and speeding up planning decisions.

This includes establishing “prosperity agreements” negotiated and agreed between the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and business associations and through the introduction of a Better Regulation Bill to transform and streamline environmental regulation for compliant businesses. This will free up NIEA resources to focus on poor and non-compliant businesses.

Having demonstrated leadership on planning at Northern Ireland Executive level the SDLP is also ensuring much better public access to planning decision making by devolving planning powers to the new councils.

This new level of access will enable businesses and community organisations to become involved in planning decision making at the pre-application stage.

The SDLP will also ensure the NI Executive considers how they could use rating and licensing to creatively develop hospitality business quarters. These could be micro versions of the newly announced Coleraine enterprise zone.

The SDLP will continue to fight for Executive financing of the dereliction fund which has benefitted many towns and villages during this economic downturn and which will again play its part in presenting a Northern Ireland in the best possible light to the global audience of the Giro d’Italia.

The SDLP has brought forward measures including training for councillors and council staff regarding the new regime which will allow for the smooth transfer of powers and on-going openness and accountability.



LOCAL COMMUNITY SERVICES

SDLP councillors across the North remain committed to seeing their councils operating in the most efficient, transparent, accountable manner and providing value for money.

With the additional powers and responsibilities soon to be at the disposal of local government more effective and accountable decisions can be taken locally.

This will enable SDLP councillors to continue to work to develop a more user-friendly approach to the new and existing services councils will provide.

The SDLP will work to deliver improved public services. This includes maintaining vital council services such as cleansing and waste collection that must remain at a constantly high standard to engender civic pride and to prevent the development of petty crime and anti-social behaviour.

We will ensure that the provision of council services for older people continues through discounted schemes at our leisure centres and activities at our community centres.

The SDLP will continue to ensure that the needs and voices of young people are always listened to as part of the decision-making process by encouraging councils to retain and develop youth councils and engagement via social media.

SAFER, HEALTHIER LOCALITIES

SDLP councillors across Northern Ireland aim to create shared spaces which are safe and healthy and that provide opportunities for all our citizens.

We are committed to working with the relevant health agencies in both urban and rural settings to ensure each council has an effective strategy to tackle health inequalities and that council policies are health-proofed.

Our councillors will work closely with the SDLP Environment Minister and other relevant officials to protect and enhance our parks, beaches and green spaces and we will work to develop age appropriate facilities in all community recreation facilities.

We will work to encourage healthier lifestyle by improving upon, and promoting the use of, existing health and wellbeing facilities, sports facilities, allotments and projects to enhance quality of life.

SDLP councillors will continue to ensure their councils have well-resourced anti-poverty strategies and work to inform those in the most need of the services and assistance which is available.

Many of our local councillors already sit on Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) and all are committed to working with the PSNI to improve the safety of their local communities.

This work includes encouraging councils to provide increased funding for community projects which promote individual and community responsibility, youth engagement, advice on security for older people, simple ways to report anti-social behaviour and infrastructure measures such as alley-gating. Our aim is to assist in reducing crime, tackling anti-social behaviour and allowing people to feel safe in their homes and on the streets.

LOCAL HOSPITALITY DEVELOPMENT

SDLP councillors are proud to represent their local area's and to actively promote each areas individual take on Irish hospitality.

Successive SDLP Environment ministers have complemented the work of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment to boost Northern Ireland's hospitality industry by exercising planning powers, funding archaeological investigations on key heritage sites and creating a heritage led-tourism fund which has seen money invested in monuments including the Downpatrick High Cross, Dundrum Castle, Carlisle Memorial Church and Tullaghoge Fort.

As planning powers also revert to local councils the SDLP will ensure local councils continue this positive collaboration to boost the huge tourism potential our region possesses.

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER **ATHRAIGH CHUN LEASA**

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Alexander Road
Belfast BT6 9HP

For further information:
Tel: 02890 247700
Emai: info@sdlp.ie
Web: www.sdlp.ie

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