

PEOPLE

FIRST



SDLP

PEOPLE

FIRST

PEOPLE *FIRST*

MANIFESTO

2022



Colum Eastwood MP

Dear Friends/ A chairde,

This Assembly mandate has finished exactly as it started - with the Executive in a state of collapse because political leaders continue to put their own narrow self-interest ahead of the needs of people in all of our communities.

Working families across Northern Ireland are experiencing an unprecedented crisis in the cost-of-living. People are being hit again and again by soaring electricity, gas, oil and food bills. And all the while, they are being let down by politicians who are obsessed with the Protocol or with their own position at Stormont.

Enough is enough.

In this election the SDLP's first, second and third priority is getting direct support to every household across the North to combat the price hikes that are forcing people to turn off their radiators or cut back on their food shop.

We are presenting an ambitious manifesto for change - a manifesto to put people first. This document is filled with proposals that will make a difference to the lives of the people we represent on day one of a new Assembly.

It contains a cost-of-living action plan that will get more than £1,200 to families most in need. A strategic plan to slash hospital waiting lists and save lives.

Concrete steps that will make childcare more affordable for working parents. Our overriding objective is to help people who have been abandoned by the politics of division and collapse.

On May 5th, vote for the candidates who will put you and your family first.

Vote SDLP.

Our **Five** Pledges to Put **PEOPLE** First:

1. We'll **tackle the cost-of-living** crisis by giving every household a minimum of £200, with **a family with two children on free school meals receiving over £1200** between now and December.

2. We'll reduce waiting lists by investing **£1 billion in the health service**, and supporting **a 6% pay increase for nurses**.

3. We will **increase free pre-school childcare provision from 12.5 hours per week to 30 hours per week** with further extra provision for 0-2 year olds and families on lower incomes.

4. We will **double the current level of investment in the Social Housing Development Programme** to combat the shortage in social housing.

5. We'll invest **£500 in every child's future when they're born, with an additional £500 when they turn 10** in a Children's Future Fund.



**Our number
one priority:**

Tackling the Cost-of-Living Crisis

People in Northern Ireland are facing a devastating cost-of-living crisis. A perfect storm of spiralling energy costs, rising national insurance costs and cuts to Universal Credit all mean that families, single parents and workers are facing difficult decisions about how they will put food on the table and heat their homes. The SDLP's six-point Cost-of-Living Action Plan will make a real difference to people across the North, with every household receiving a £200 payment and more support for those who need it. Under our plan, a family with two children on free school meals would receive over £1200 between now and December.



We will:

- 1. Pass emergency legislation to free up £300 million of funding to tackle the cost-of-living emergency.** When SDLP MLAs return to the Assembly, our first priority will be freeing up £300 million and getting emergency support out to everyone who needs it.
- 2. Provide a direct £200 payment to all households and extend the £100 Emergency Fuel Payment Scheme.** The Department for Communities should make a direct payment of £200 to every household to offset higher energy and other prices. The Department for Communities should also extend the earlier £100 Emergency Fuel Payment Scheme for families on lower incomes until the end of the year.
- 3. Relaunch the Free School Meal Payment Scheme from 1 April for the remainder of the year including through the Summer.** This funding would mean that families with school-age children can offset rising food costs. For a family with two children this scheme would provide £108 per month directly to their bank account, or £972 for the remainder of the year. The three schemes above would mean £1272 of support provided to a family with two children who receive free school meals.
- 4. Reduce the cap on energy market profits and ensure savings are passed to consumers.** In Northern Ireland, energy companies are permitted 2% of revenue as profit whether their revenue is £100,000 or £10,000,000. The current regime means that regardless of the level of profit made, energy companies can keep 2%. As more profits are made, this 2% threshold should be reduced and prices lowered accordingly.
- 5. Press the British Government to introduce a one-year VAT holiday for domestic energy charges.** The fact that higher energy bills means higher VAT returns for the Treasury and the British Government is unacceptable. Families face rising National Insurance costs, cuts to Universal Credit, rising energy bills and rising food bills. When basic foodstuffs are charged at zero vat, then vital services like energy should also be charged at zero vat for the next year.
- 6. Press the British Government to introduce a windfall tax on energy companies.** A windfall tax should be introduced on the profits of energy companies, to be used exclusively and directly for household support for bills and energy efficiency initiatives including insulation schemes.



**Slash Waiting
Times & Save
Lives:**

Our Health Plan to Put People First

Our health and social care system is suffering from a state of slow-motion collapse, the effects of which are being felt by families and individuals of all ages. Today's health service is one in which people are experiencing long delays for ambulances, emergency treatment, hospital beds and planned procedures.

Our Twelve-Point-Plan will improve our health service, reduce waiting lists, and save lives. It is a plan to save our health and social care service and preserve a free, accessible NHS for generations to come.

While it is important to take politics out of health, we cannot take health out of politics.

1. We will demonstrate political leadership.

Despite numerous recommendations in various reports, there is a widespread feeling that they have not been implemented and the Executive has failed to deliver the change required. We are committed to delivering these changes.

We will also build a service led by collective leadership and we will appoint an additional Permanent Secretary, to report directly to the Minister, who will oversee the Transformation of our service. We will ensure funding of £1bn, £200million per year for the next five years to address the elective care backlog and close the capacity gap.

2. We will create Elective Surgical Hubs.

When emergency and elective surgical practice are coupled together, elective surgery is often cancelled or re-scheduled when emergency practice gets busy. There must be a separation of elective and emergency surgery either on the same hospital site or by concentrating elective surgery in protected 'stand-alone' hubs so that no matter how busy emergency practice gets there is no reduction in elective practice.

It is therefore clear that we need to build capacity in our system by establishing Elective Surgical Hubs to separate emergency and scheduled care. In this way, we can ensure elective surgery takes place on separate sites from emergency care.

3. We will support nurses in their work to nurse our system back to health.

Our nursing workforce is the heart of the NHS. Their sacrifices have been immeasurable for their profession and for all our lives. However, we must recognise that our nursing workforce is stretched almost to the limit after the efforts they have expended during the pandemic and that many are leaving the profession.

We must act urgently to tackle the problems faced by nursing staff.

The SDLP believes that nursing staff merit at least an increase of 6% in their pay. This is affordable, sustainable and our nurses deserve no less. Similarly, the SDLP

would act to remedy some of the problems in the workforce by ensuring a clear progression pathway from Band 5 to Bands 6 and 7.

The SDLP would ensure a better balance in the remuneration between the Chief Nursing Officer and the Chief Medical Officer. In addition, the scenario which today sees agency nurses paid more than senior Health Service nurses on the same ward at the same time is not acceptable.

4. We will invest in mental health treatment and support.

The rate of mental illness in Northern Ireland is 25% higher than in Great Britain and people in NI face a complex set of mental health challenges involving trans-generational trauma in a divided society.

We commit to fully funding the ten-year Mental Health Strategy.

We will appoint a Junior Minister with responsibility for Mental Health to ensure that mental health is afforded the importance in the Department that it deserves. We would ensure that Protect Life 2- the Suicide Prevention Strategy is fully resourced and implemented.

It is evident that the needs of young people must also be addressed, including pupils in schools as well as students in universities. We support the expansion of primary school counselling, the provision of additional mental health training for school staff and psychological support services for children with Special Educational Needs.

5. We will provide more care outside hospitals.

The health service should reach into all our communities and support all of us where we need it most, when we need it most. A growing body of evidence suggests that the most successful and important innovations in health and social care systems take place in the home rather than the hospital. Our focus should be to keep people out of hospitals and the lack of effective community care contributes directly to the problems faced by Emergency Departments. We will support the increased provision of health and social care services outside of hospitals.

6. We will build a world-class workforce for a world-class service.

In the health and social care system, our people are our greatest asset. This has been exemplified in the past two years, when our workforce has made heroic sacrifices.

Despite these efforts, too often our doctors, nurses, midwives, and other Allied Health Professionals are being failed by a broken system. While they work around the clock, our politics is letting them down. Now as we emerge from COVID-19, our workforce is exhausted and burnt out from the global pandemic that tested our health service to its limit.

Even before COVID-19, Northern Ireland suffered from an almost complete lack of health and social care workforce planning, poor data collection and management and almost no population health planning to futureproof the service. In part, the lack of medical workforce planning and the attempt to keep all services in all places has led to an over reliance on locum and agency staff. Many millions of pounds have been spent trying to bridge gaps in rotas.

If we are returned to the Executive, we will undertake comprehensive, transparent, and thorough workforce planning and legislate for safe staffing, to reduce our reliance on locum and agency staff.

We will also reform the pensions system for our GPs and other health and social care professionals. At a time when we need a strong workforce more than ever, 44% of our doctors are planning to retire early and the punitive pensions system financially disadvantages people who invest extra hours in seeing patients.

7. We believe that prevention is better than cure.

Northern Ireland currently operates a service designed to deal with illness when it arises, instead of promoting health. The SDLP's focus is not only on reforming waiting lists but also on preventing people from becoming unwell. We must develop a new model of person-centred care focused on the prevention of illness.

This includes the need to create healthy neighbourhoods for people. We are proud of the work already undertaken by SDLP Infrastructure Minister Nichola Mallon in this area and would build on this work in the next mandate. We need to create opportunities in every community to address loneliness and isolation, make Health Impact Assessments mandatory and use Health Equity screening tools for legislation and regulation.

It is imperative that we invest more in active travel including walking and cycling by continuing Nichola Mallon's work over the last two years, who has invested more than £20m in funding for blue/green infrastructure to promote active travel and supported transformation that included £100,000 for Belfast Bikes. We would also commit to implementing the Clean Air Strategy and consider the use of Clean Air Zones.

8. We will expand cross-border healthcare co-operation.

Collaboration across the border is of vital importance to ensure effective health and social care services. There are a number of positive examples of recent cross-border working including cancer and cardiac services in the Northwest and the All-Island Congenital Heart Disease network.

We need to build strategic alliances across the island between all agencies, bringing the patient front and centre. It is important to ensure parity of recognition for cross-border qualifications to allow health and social care workers both to train and practice on both sides of the border with ease.

Altnagelvin, the Southwest Acute Hospital and Daisy Hill should become cross-border centres of excellence with immediate work to begin on how services can be expanded, to include direct co-operation and support from the Irish government. Such co-operation can include direct partnership with healthcare institutions across the border, and wider co-operation across the North and across the island.

9. We will build Multi-Disciplinary Teams across all sectors.

We will prioritise the use of Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs) in care pathways and extend beyond the current MDTs to include paramedics and community-based consultants for example in elderly care. Members of these teams can include doctors, physiotherapists, social workers, or others who work together to deliver integrated care, holistically aligning specialisms to improve patient outcomes.

10. We will cut cancer waiting times.

Each year, almost 10,000 people are diagnosed with cancer. It is essential that we not only rebuild cancer services from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but that we also improve the diagnosis and treatment of people living with cancer, as well as prevent people from getting cancer. People living with cancer deserve integrated care along with tailored support for their financial and emotional wellbeing needs.

We are committed to ensuring that people living with cancer are supported and that in the months and years ahead, diagnosis and care meets their needs. We would fully implement the Cancer Recovery Plan, Building Back: Rebuilding Better as well as the Cancer Strategy 2022-2032. We will provide the recurrent funding necessary to ensure the success of its recommendations and deliver a multi-year cancer workforce settlement. We also support a strategic transformation of Palliative and End of Life care. We would also mandate the next Health Minister to publish an annual progress report on closing health inequalities in cancer care.

11. We will do everything possible to immediately reduce waiting times.

For those desperately in need of urgent support, we are also conscious of the need to intervene to reduce health waiting times in the short-term. We would follow the examples of effective programs elsewhere, for example by introducing senior clinical decision makers at the 'front door' of A&E to help manage patients. We will explore the use of an Emergency Health Intervention Fund to intervene and expand capacity in areas experiencing long waiting times. We will work closely with key stakeholders in the sector to co-design this scheme to ensure maximum value for money.

12. We will invest in Primary Care.

Primary Care is fundamental to the future of our health service. Primary care accounts for 95% of the care patients will need throughout their lives, yet it receives only 8% of the Department of Health's budget. The SDLP supports ensuring that the Department of Health allocates 11% of its budget to meet the needs of general practice. Increased recruitment, retention and training of GPs is also essential. Given the current age profile of GPs and their importance for the workforce, we must ensure that we increase GP training places and ensure access to loans for medicine as a secondary degree. The SDLP is committed to ensuring GPs have the time and resource to train medical students and the future generation of doctors, including by tackling unsustainable workloads and supporting our GPs who are exhausted and burnt out after the pandemic.

Social Care:

Quality Care for All

By 2027, the number of people aged over 65 in Northern Ireland will outnumber those aged under 15. Our older people should have the guarantee that if they need care, it will be of the highest quality.

Social care will be required by all of us at some stage of life and we all know a relative, friend or partner that has needed the support that social care provides. Their services are invaluable to our communities and they are a critical part of our health service.

The SDLP is committed to ensuring that everyone has access to high quality, personalised services that promote the dignity and rights of older people and place a stronger emphasis on health in later life.

We would fully resource and implement the recommendations arising from the report 'Power to People: Proposals to reboot adult care & support in N.I.' The implementation of the proposals from 'Power to People' must be co-designed with the sectoral groups and fully include the voices of people who use social care.

We must also recognise the immense contribution of carers, many of whom struggle financially and do not get the support that they need. By 2037, it is expected that there will be at least 400,000 carers in Northern Ireland. The SDLP would put carers at the heart of the reforms of Adult Social Care by introducing a new Carers Strategy, appointing a Carers Champion and improving and investing in services and support systems for carers.

We also pledge to fully fund the rollout of the Regional Dementia Care Pathway, launched in 2018 and make dementia a standalone priority in the reform of adult social care.



Early Years:

The First Four Steps

Our Plan for Early Years & Childcare Provision

The first one thousand days of a baby's life are the most critical in its development. By the time a child reaches primary school, the attainment gap between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers has already emerged, sometimes irreversibly.

High-quality educational experiences help to promote readiness to learn for very young children when they enter primary school and allows both parents/guardians to work, raising household incomes and promoting gender equality.

Northern Ireland's childcare and early years provision lags other parts of the UK and Ireland. Prohibitively expensive childcare results in economic disempowerment for mothers and is a huge drain on family financial resources. Reform means expansion of existing provision, but it also means expanded early years support, parental support and educational support for very young children. We must provide a broad and deep choice from which parents and carers can avail even before their child is born.

The First Four Steps:

Our Plan for Early Years & Childcare Provision:

1. We will expand ante-natal support for all parents:

We will ensure that ante-natal support & services currently provided to expectant mothers are expanded to include ante-natal nurturing programmes, support groups for new parents, and direct referral to additional services where required.

2. We will expand early years parenting support initiatives for parents of children of 0-2 years:

A range of services in the community currently offer a set of interventions in the early years. For example, Lifestart has developed a home-based, monthly programme for new parents that is delivered by trained and qualified advisors and is regularly reviewed by experts. This type of approach adopts the style of a home visitor as an experienced, knowledgeable friend rather than as a medical professional. The programme is usefully based on a dialogical approach to early interventions, often more useful than didactic approaches.

3. We will increase the provision of free pre-school childcare from 12.5 hours per week to 30 hours per week:

Parents everywhere are struggling to meet their childcare bill and many have been forced to change jobs or cease employment entirely to pay for this vital infrastructure. Many parents have cited extortionate childcare costs that are more expensive than mortgages per month and many parents work extra shifts or an entire second job simply to pay for their childcare.

We believe that no parent should be forced to choose between caring for their children and pursuing their chosen career, particularly women who are often most adversely affected by the high costs of childcare.

Our proposal includes the expansion of free pre-school childcare from 12.5 hours per week to 30 hours per week for all parents. This can be delivered on a flexible basis to meet the needs of the parents across the working week.

We also recognise the contribution made by childminders in providing flexible childcare, especially for shift workers. We would work with representatives of childminders to support and develop the workforce, including exploring ways to enhance their training and professional development.

4. We will develop a world-class early years system:

It is long past time to recognise that early years education is a public good and high-quality child care should be available to everyone, regardless of background or geography. It is clear that Northern Ireland desperately requires a common framework that is comprehensively applied, supported and resourced. This would include improved training and higher levels of investment. The SDLP would develop and implement a fully resourced Early Learning and Care Strategy and significantly broaden the approach of the Childcare strategy.

The Children's Future Fund:

A Fair Start for Every Child

There are children born in Northern Ireland who grow up in homes with no savings or assets and there are many more who reach adulthood with no financial cushion as they enter full-time education or work.

The Children's Future Fund would be the first fund of its type anywhere in Europe. This fund would see £500 invested for every child at birth, with an additional top up of £500 at age 10 in a pooled investment fund for all children and young people in Northern Ireland. Each child would have their own account, held in the fund, which their family could make extra contributions to, and they could make their own contributions from age 16.

With the fund reaching a size of over £100m within ten years, and nearly £300m by the time the first child reaches the age of 18, it would be used exclusively to invest in green technology, climate change technology, digital technology and other ways to invest in the future of our young people.

At age 18, when children become adults, they can either withdraw their full invested amount, make a part-withdrawal, or continue to add to their investment, drawing payments at future life milestones.

The Children's Future Fund would be a strong example of how when we work together, we can achieve so much more.

A photograph of a woman with glasses looking down at a book held by two children. The image is overlaid with a green tint. The text 'Education:' is written in red above a horizontal line, and 'A Fair Chance for All' is written in white below it.

Education:

A Fair Chance for All

We want an education system which ensures every eighteen-year-old is fit & ready for the world.

When our education system succeeds and flourishes, our society succeeds and flourishes. And when it stumbles and fails, so does our society. The North's education system is complex, with areas where we are leading the way, but other areas where we fall well behind what our children and young people deserve. Our promise at this election is that we will build an education system which ensures every eighteen-year-old is fit & ready for the world. That means radical reform from early years to age eighteen, and something that all of us - child, adult, teacher, learner - can commit to.

We want a system which delivers for all children. It is vital we all set ourselves the ambition to deliver it.

The SDLP will:

1. Deliver a curriculum for the 21st century:

Our young people deserve a curriculum that is relevant, appropriate and accessible based on three core principles:

- **Skills development is of equal importance to subject content:**

Our young people must have opportunities to engage fully with material, to absorb the subjects they enjoy and to understand the content of their learnings. Through this learning, they should acquire skills such as problem solving, innovation, critical thinking, initiative and a range of others.

- **We will assess what we value rather than value what we assess:**

Assessment through purely written format benefits some young people but ignores the skills of others. Written exams and tests are no longer the only method of assessment and by employing innovative assessment methods we can empower all our young people to fully demonstrate how they can apply their learning.

- **Our schools should teach a broad curriculum which means that no child leaves school disadvantaged:**

It is clear that there are many gaps in our curriculum and the SDLP is committed to:

- Compulsory language learning: the SDLP would introduce the compulsory study of modern foreign languages from primary school and require that all children take a modern language to GCSE level. As multilingualism increases across the globe, the decline in language learning here is of deep concern.
- Provision of standard Relationships and Sex Education to ensure that it is up-to-date, comprehensive and LGBT-inclusive.
- Introduction of world-class Careers Guidance and Advice: Introduce a dedicated Career Centre in every school that provides modern and effective career advice. Too often career advice is not a priority in our schools and leaves many young people unprepared to navigate the world of further/higher education or work.

We are resolutely opposed to the unfair system of academic selection. The Covid pandemic has brought further into focus how manifestly unjust this system is which penalises and labels children before they have even reached their teens.

The SDLP supports the Independent Review of Education and contributed to its work . We will seek to establish a time-bound commission in any Programme for Government to explore how we can further reduce and eventually eliminate academic selection in post-primary schools.

2. Tackle Educational Underachievement:

We are committed to developing a framework to tackle the root causes of educational underachievement, so all children have a fair start in life. We fully endorse the recommendations of the Fair Start report and call for the immediate implementation of all its recommendations - the Department of Education's process so far has not been acceptable.

We would also work to eliminate the hidden costs of education, including by tackling the extortionate costs of school uniforms which put families under huge pressure every year. The cost of school uniforms and PE kits should not have to be a consideration for parents trying to get the best education for their child.

3. Support the development of our unique education system:

The SDLP will prioritise reversing the years of defunding of the education system.

We recognise the unique tapestry of the system here, including faith-based schools, integrated schools, Irish medium schools and controlled schools. We support the principle of parental choice and will work to ensure that our education sector continues to excel.

We support specific initiatives to empower the Integrated Education sector and Irish Medium sector, both of whom face institutional and historical challenges. The SDLP has a long history of supporting integrated education, both in our words and deeds. We have also backed our commitment with financial support when Mark Durkan served as Finance Minister.

While recognising the flaws in the recent Integrated Education Bill we worked with its authors to ensure it passed

and successfully moved 15 amendments to improve it.

We welcome the fact that around 60% of schools are involved in some sort of shared education initiative and want to see this number increased.

The SDLP is also calling for the Department of Education, CCEA, the Education Authority and C2k to work together to ensure maximum support for the Irish Medium Sector which faces a range of problems including over reliance on temporary accommodation, SEN assessments being carried out in English, lack of quality learning resources and a requirement for expanded teacher training.

4. Increase the provision of teacher education, professional development & leadership training:

The teaching of our children and young people is one of the most important professions and responsibilities in society. At present, there are few formal structures to support teachers through their professional development. Many teachers' only option for further professional development is to self-fund postgraduate and other courses.

The quality of our teaching education is strong in Northern Ireland. The SDLP will explore the possibility of extending the PCGE from one year to two years (similar to the Republic of Ireland, Singapore, Finland and others) and also the option of allowing people to study to become teachers with part-time courses.

We will also prioritise dedicated special educational needs training in all teacher training programmes.

In addition, there is not sufficient formal training or institution for training of school leaders, nor an effective body which promotes coordination and training between teachers between schools and school management between schools. We would prioritise funding for the expansion of such programs with the aim of improving the educational outcomes of all our schools.



5. Improve Special Educational Needs provision:

The SDLP has long campaigned for proper support for autism services and brought forward the Autism Act in 2011. Over the last five years the rate of autism in schoolchildren has increased exponentially and continues to do so. It is vital that there is a regional plan for special schools and special education provision in mainstream schools. We will increase funding for the EA assessment process, for special educational schools and special education units in mainstream schools. We will take all necessary steps to reduce the waiting time for statementing, given the significant delays in the current system.

6. Improve Teacher and Examiner Pay:

The SDLP believe that teachers have not been appreciated by successive Education Ministers. We will be arguing if we are in the Executive that there should be an increase in pay above inflation for teachers and school-based support staff. We support an equitable payment for the people setting and marking exams. Unlike in GB, our examiners have been excluded from payments schemes during Covid-19 disruption. The SDLP support pay parity for Education Welfare Officers. We will also work to improve the working conditions of substitute teachers and their needs, including for career development.

7. Safeguard Local Schools and Review Area Planning

For many small towns and villages, the local school is central to the local community but the current rules governing the sustainability of schools are 15 years old.

The SDLP believes that the rules around area planning need to be reviewed. We believe that many school closures are a false economy, and the current figure of 105 pupils for a sustainable primary school and 500 for a sustainable post-primary school is flawed, especially in rural areas.

Tackling the Climate Emergency

Our Commitment to People and the Planet

Climate breakdown is the seismic global challenge facing this generation. Failure to take action now will result in significant changes to our global climate and weather patterns that will devastate developed and developing economies across the world, leaving millions destitute and poverty-stricken. Global warming is happening at a much faster level than anticipated and extraordinary action is now required.

The SDLP will not be found wanting on tackling the climate crisis and our record is clear:

1. As Infrastructure Minister, Nichola Mallon funded and introduced the first ever zero-emission hydrogen buses on the island of Ireland.
2. We co-sponsored the cross-party Climate Change Bill and ensured that the Executive Climate Change Bill's targets were ambitious while providing direct financial support for transition in communities where it is needed most.
3. Former Minister Alex Attwood introduced the plastic bag levy, raising millions for environmental projects and removing more than one billion plastic bags from circulation since 2012.
4. Mark Durkan also introduced a moratorium on fracking and Nichola Mallon refused planning permission for the Hightown incinerator.
5. Dolores Kelly advocated for a separate Environment and Nature Restoration Bill that would have created legally binding targets to tackle biodiversity and set a timeline for the introduction of an Independent Environmental Protection Agency in Northern Ireland.
6. In the last Executive, Nichola Mallon as Infrastructure Minister has put the weight of her department behind climate action including investing tens of millions in greenways, announcing an All-Island Strategic Rail Review, signing the Glasgow Declaration on zero emission vehicles, publishing a ten-year plan for the Belfast Cycling Network and taking action to replace the entire fleet of buses in Derry with hydrogen powered vehicles. She was also the only Minister to use an electric vehicle, invested hundreds of thousands of pounds of funding for electric vehicles and announced an Electric Vehicle Taskforce.
7. In Westminster, Colum Eastwood MP brought a Climate Emergency and Green Jobs Bill last year that would have mandated the British government to declare a climate emergency, introduce a strategy to create new green jobs and guarantee a just transition and create a green corporate levy on companies to fund bold climate action.

We can no longer shirk the challenge or neglect the opportunity before us to build on this strong record to protect Northern Ireland and play a part in combatting the climate emergency for future generations. Our promises are:

1. We will ensure the NI Executive declares a climate emergency:

While the effects of climate change are now clear to see, the NI Executive has failed to declare a climate emergency. We need to send a signal to society, business and our citizens that we are taking this challenge seriously at the heart of government.

2. We will ensure a just transition:

Economic equality and ecological transition go hand in hand. Accepting and addressing the causes of the climate crisis is critical. Protecting the environment is a moral, economic and health imperative that, if planned and implemented correctly, can benefit people, communities and businesses.

We must balance our duty to preserve, protect and enhance the environment with the social and economic rights of all workers. We have to support workers to develop new skills that will allow us to lead emerging and transformed industries.

3. We will build a Green Economy:

The SDLP is committed to taking advantage of the opportunity before us to tackle the climate crisis while building a green economy. We have long called for a Green New Deal, to support our move to net zero and to create a new generation of well paid, socially productive, jobs.

We support investing in renewable technologies and we will incentivise greener energy production to position NI as a leader in green technologies.

We believe that financial incentives, such as the rates system, and utility regulation can assist with the transition to net zero. We have urged the British Government to eliminate VAT on building materials that will contribute to improved home energy efficiency. By refurbishing homes, we would improve their energy efficiency, reducing costs and creating 24,000 jobs. One of the first steps towards net zero must be to reduce carbon emissions by cutting our energy use, including through better home insulation.

4. We are committed to increasing renewable & clean energy supplies:

Our energy sources must be clean, non-polluting, sustainable and provide security of supply. They must also be renewable and affordable, to both consumers and businesses.

The SDLP believes we should move beyond the Single Electricity Market to a Single Energy Market for all of Ireland. The small size of our energy market disadvantages businesses and consumers here, who are unable to benefit from the economies of scale and greater competition that exist in a larger market.

Air quality must also be at the heart of energy policy, including for that of home heating and transport. Citizens deserve to breathe clean air and children deserve to live free from the pollution that limits their health and life chances.

5. We will protect and restore our environment:

We will introduce a Biodiversity and Nature Restoration Bill in the next mandate to give legal underpinning to targets to tackle biodiversity loss and set a timeline for the introduction of the independent Environmental Protection Agency. We will place a legal duty on the NI Executive to advance nature restoration. Recognising the contribution of farming communities to the future development of a green economy, we would deliver a new Agriculture Act to set a legal framework for future sustainable farming.

We remain fully committed to the moratorium on fracking in Northern Ireland. The SDLP has stood strong against the exploitative gold and mineral mining taking place in some of our communities and would permanently ban fracking in the North.

An Ambitious Future for our Infrastructure



From our homes to our hospitals and our schools, reliable, effective and efficient infrastructure is key to every aspect of our society. For people, communities and businesses, high-quality, world-class infrastructure is needed for Northern Ireland to grow our economy and radically improve lives and livelihoods.

During the Covid pandemic SDLP Minister for Infrastructure Nichola Mallon:

- Kept our public transport network going, providing over £20 million in support for taxis and private bus operators
- Transformed MOT centres into COVID-19 testing sites to protect people from the virus
- Used the Crumlin Road Gaol site to decontaminate our ambulances

As society recovers from Covid, Minister Mallon has planned for the future by:

- Progressing an Infrastructure Commission to ensure we better plan and deliver sustainable and inclusive infrastructure
- Holding the first ever Infrastructure Youth Assembly to listen to young people

We have delivered strategic planning after years of delay by:

- Granting planning permission for Casement Park, ensuring the GAA finally has its rightful state-of-the-art home in Ulster
- Refusing permission for the Hightown Incinerator in South Antrim

We are shaping a New Ireland, including by:

- Securing 1 billion euros from An Taoiseach's Shared Island Unit to deliver all-island projects such as the iconic Narrow Water Bridge and the Ulster Canal
- Exploring the future of all-island infrastructure as part of our New Ireland Commission

To put people first, Minister Mallon also:

- Stopped water charges being introduced and legislated against motor insurance price hikes
- Invested more funding than ever before into the Rural Roads Fund

In a new mandate, the SDLP will keep working to put people first. We will:

- Progress the establishment of the first ever Infrastructure Commission
- Transform the planning system to end delays and enable the creation of jobs and the protection of our environment
- Strengthen all-island partnership working to deliver enhanced local investment
- Continue to prevent water charging and price hikes for people across the North



Now more than ever, the North needs transport and infrastructure investment that better connects our communities but also protects our natural environment against the climate crisis. For too long communities have been left behind here and previous Ministers have been lacking in ambition for our citizens, our economy and for our island community. With one Minister in two short years, the SDLP has used the power we have to put people first, while in the midst of the pandemic and Brexit.

To end regional imbalance and make our roads safer, we have:

- Progressed the A6 road from Derry to Belfast and continued to push ahead with the A5
- Put the phase three Derry – Belfast rail line back on track
- Driven new Feasibility Studies for re-opening the rail line between Portadown and Armagh
- Created 20mph zones outside more than 200 schools, helping to keep our young people safe
- Legislated to increase penalty points for driving with a mobile phone
- Invested £85,000 for local community road safety initiatives

To improve all-island connectivity, we have:

- Frozen public transport fares to help people during the cost-of-living crisis
- Provided free public transport to our NHS workers during the Covid pandemic
- Ensured free public transport for those fleeing domestic abuse and for refugees fleeing Ukraine

To tackle the climate crisis and change how we travel, we are:

- Investing £74 million to deliver 100 zero emission buses
- Investing £350,000 in match funding for Councils to grow their e-charging network
- Investing £30 million to replace the entire fleet of buses in Derry with electric vehicles
- Creating the first ever blue/green infrastructure delivering £20 million of projects including greenways and new active travel infrastructure
- Investing in a ten-year, £100,000 plan for cycling in Belfast

In a new mandate, the SDLP will prioritise:

- Tackling the climate crisis through the increased use of zero emission vehicles and increased funding for councils for e-charging networks
- Driving active travel change with further cycle and greenway networks across the North
- Finishing the job of expanding our all-island rail network to better connect communities



Tackling the Brain Drain & Investing In Third Level Education

The single most striking manifestation of the profound societal and economic challenges still afflicting NI is the volume of young people leaving our shores. We have the highest levels of educational migration in these islands, and too many of our young people never return here.

In 2019, 17,000 young people from Northern Ireland were studying in Great Britain and more than two-thirds had no plans to return after graduation. On top of this the MaSN (Maximum Student Numbers) cap, which limits the number of third level places offered here means that some young people who want to study in the North are unable to do so.

To make this a place young people want to stay, or return to, the SDLP will:

1. Remove the MaSN cap: By designing a sustainable funding system for higher and further education, along with a regionally balanced course offer we can support universities and third level institutions to expand student numbers across all campuses.
2. Immediately prioritise reaching student numbers of 10,000 at Magee. The SDLP played a critical role in ensuring the inclusion of the Graduate Medical School in New Decade, New Approach and we remain steadfast in our promise to see expanded student numbers in the North West.
3. Provide direct funding to expand university 'Widening Participation' initiatives. This will widen access to university courses for those from disadvantaged backgrounds who may be the first in their family to attend third level education programmes.
4. Establish the Make Change Programme for the Northern Ireland Civil Service - this ambitious public service scheme would recruit top graduates, experienced professionals and ambitious school leavers into the Northern Ireland Civil Service to develop their skills and train them for a career in the public service. It is designed to get the best and brightest of our young people into public service to tackle the thorniest policy challenges we face.
5. Expand apprenticeships and FE courses. We need to fund more apprenticeships, including employer-led apprenticeship programmes and link directly with an improved careers service in schools to ensure 16-18-year-olds are fully aware of all opportunities available.
6. Propose a Lifelong Learning Bill. This will create education and training opportunities, including part-time courses, for people right through their life. This will allow those with caring and other responsibilities, who are disproportionately female, to access skills development and education right through their lives.
7. Ensure that no student is unable to access third level education due to financial constraints. Through direct grant provision and the expansion of tuition fee loans including for those taking a second degree, all those who wish to avail of university study will be able to do so.

Ending Poverty & Building a Just Welfare System

The blight of poverty and an unfair welfare system is a scar on our society. The £20 Universal Credit cut marked the largest overnight welfare cut since World War II, pushing already struggling individuals and their families over the poverty line and into crisis. The loss of £1040 a year is disastrous for the affected families and has a knock-on effect on the local economy. This was just the latest insult to those who rely on the welfare system for support.

To tackle poverty and build a fair society, the SDLP will:

1. Explore the potential of re-introducing the £20 uplift for Universal Credit claimants and individuals in receipt of legacy benefits to assist low-income households.
2. Implement the recommendations of the Discretionary Support Independent Review to increase flexibility and access to financial support for those struggling to make ends meet via Discretionary Support and the Contingency Fund.
3. Bring PIP and ESA assessments in-house to end the injustice inflicted on vulnerable people by private companies. We will also review and improve the appeals process to make the experience more positive for claimants and address the significant delays by ensuring that PIP appeals are heard within three months.
4. Vote for pension justice for the generation of WASPI women. The SDLP opposed the rubber-stamping of this unjust policy and sought to protect women here. The decision to increase the state pension age has unfairly impacted 77,000 women here born in the 1950's. The SDLP will seek to reverse this punitive decision, reduce the State Pension Age and protect pensioners who have fallen victim to this draconian policy.
5. Explore the potential of implementing a Universal Basic Income (UBI), including UBI pilot schemes. This radical idea could work on an age or geography basis.

Tackling fuel poverty

The amount afforded to pensioners under the Winter Fuel Payment has not changed since 2010/2011. Given the colossal rise in fuel prices, the SDLP will commit to review and increase the rate of Winter Fuel Payment to protect pensioners.

Tackling poverty and empowering citizens will be a key priority for the SDLP which includes the restoration of a social security system that treats claimants with dignity and guarantees an acceptable standard of living. SDLP MLAs will seek to secure additional resources to support the most vulnerable in our communities and to ensure that any underspend is redistributed towards tackling poverty.

Building Homes & Preventing Homelessness



SDLP MLAs will support positive housing decisions and prioritise spending on social housing and new build programmes. Access to a good quality, secure and affordable home is a fundamental right and a foundation for individuals, families and communities to flourish.

There are currently over 43,000 applicants on the Housing Executive waiting list, of which nearly 25,000 are identified as in housing stress. • **The SDLP believes that a radical approach is needed immediately to tackle the shortage in social housing. We commit to doubling the amount invested by the Executive every year in the Social Housing Development Programme. The paltry current level of investment- slightly over 1% of the total Executive budget - is a shameful indictment of the failure of the Department for Communities to tackle the housing shortage.**

In addition, we will:

1. Prioritise social housing developments in the planning system - we will place a legal requirement for councils to complete social housing planning applications within three months and provide funding for additional staff as required.
2. Broaden financial options available to NIHE and Housing Associations, on top of the expanded government investment, to accelerate their building programmes.
3. Explore the use of incentives to free-up development land for affordable and social housing.

These new homes must be targeted within areas of greatest need. This will require a co-ordinated approach by the Department for Communities, Housing Executive, local councils & planning authorities who will work directly with social housing providers and housebuilders to tackle this endemic problem once and for all.

We will also prioritise the implementation of the review into the social housing allocation points system to ensure fairness.

The SDLP will work to see the creation of more shared housing schemes, more mixed developments to include social, affordable and private homes and reform of common selection and regulation of the private rented sector.

Homelessness Prevention

The SDLP will support robust homelessness prevention proposals that take into account the soaring costs of living and post-pandemic landscape.

The SDLP will support the introduction of a standalone housing outcome within the Programme for Government, one which guarantees access to good quality, affordable and sustainable housing for all. We will introduce a duty of co-operation on Government departments to tackle homelessness and take a Housing First approach to chronic homelessness. It is vital that this policy area is informed by the cooperation with and expertise from people with lived experience of homelessness, in order to deliver effective and comprehensive services. We will expand affordable housing schemes which give more first time buyers the chance to own their own home. We will increase the Property Value Limit (PVL) for Co-Ownership in light of rising house prices to ensure more people can get on the property ladder.

Currently over 88% of Universal Credit claimants are facing shortfalls between their rent and the amount of housing costs they receive, on average £139 per month. We will work to lift the cap on Local Housing Allowance

(LHA) rates to provide an added layer of protection for low-income households.

We will do more to support homeowners via the introduction of a Mortgage Rescue Scheme. The financial impact of COVID-19 has exposed the vulnerabilities of homeowners who were provided with minimal assistance and placed at greater risk of homelessness as a result.

Given the cruel cut to Universal Credit, the end of the mortgage payment holidays and the clear failings of the SMI loan, homeowners desperately need a safety net. Owner occupiers should be afforded protections through a tailored mortgage support package. We will work to restore the Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI) as a benefit rather than a loan as instigated by the Tories as an element of Welfare Reform.

Unreasonable accommodation remains among the top causes of homelessness with 3,576 households seeking suitable housing to meet their needs. The SDLP will ensure that applicants with disabilities are not set at a disadvantage when it comes to securing a property that restores their dignity and independence.

Private Rented Sector

The SDLP will progress work to strengthen measures provided under the Private Tenancies Act including the introduction of rent controls, implementing legal minimum standards for housing fitness, reforms around grounds for eviction, developing a Landlord Licensing Scheme that includes a fit and proper person test,

suitable management and financial arrangements and mandatory compliance with relevant legislation.

We will establish a service for tenants to make complaints easily without resorting to the courts.

Establish a new Empty Homes Strategy

As of November 2021, there were 20,068 vacant domestic properties across Northern Ireland. These properties must be utilised or purchased by NIHE and Housing Associations and added to their stock. The

SDLP will aim to explore the development of a grants scheme to encourage owners to renovate these properties to facilitate their sale/ rent on the open market.



Good Government & Institutional Reform

Governance & Civil Service Reform

As well as the poor performance of our largest political parties in terms of delivery, it is clear that our civil service and broader system of governance requires radical reform and improvement to better deliver public services and rebuild public confidence and trust.

In addition to fully implementing all of the recommendations of the RHI Inquiry – less than half of which have been enacted – the SDLP will make reforming the NI Civil Service a priority and rebuild confidence in the performance of public bodies. That includes acting upon the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Audit Office in their capacity and capability study, which found serious and systemic problems around performance management and workforce planning.

In negotiations ahead of a new Executive, the SDLP will prioritise:

- Introducing a programme of Departmental Capability Reviews, designed to highlight weaknesses and improve performance in each Executive department – mapped against Programme for Government delivery
- Making the Head of the Civil Service accountable for a broad based agenda of Civil Service reform, replacing the complicated system of dispersed responsibility
- Reforming Civil Service recruitment and performance management to better manage the workforce and increase the ability of departments to recruit externally where it is valuable
- Continuing the rollout of Civil Service hubs to ensure more civil servants can work from home and benefit regional economies
- Exploring opportunities to consolidate the Civil Service estate in greater Belfast, with a focus on greater presence in Belfast city centre, maximising economic impact for Belfast city centre and encouraging greater use of public transport and active travel
- Ending the policy of automatic ‘reshuffling’ of Permanent Secretaries

Petition of Concern

The SDLP believes that other recurring blockages which have frustrated democratic responsibilities can be overcome by correcting the misdirected petition of concern rules in line with the explicit wording of the Good Friday Agreement. This would mean that it would stop being a petition of veto but instead would trigger

a special proofing procedure to ensure due deliberation on the outlined concerns in respect of rights and/or equality.

Election of First Ministers

The current mechanisms to elect First Ministers and an Executive facilitate the politics of veto and give no incentive to compromise. The simplest way to address this would be to reverse the change to the election of First Ministers which was added in at St Andrews.

The new variant of political uncertainty threatening to frustrate the due formation of an Executive after this election stems from the St Andrews Agreement's departure from the Good Friday Agreement's categorical provision for the Assembly's joint election of First Ministers. That clear departure from the Good Friday Agreement has injured the joint character of the First Ministers' office, their accountability and the Assembly's intended standing as "the prime source of authority in respect of all devolved responsibilities."

It was bad enough that the St Andrews abandonment of the Good Friday Agreement's clear terms facilitated the tribalisation of Assembly elections into a "first past the post" contest for First Minister. In the last mandate, these St Andrews terms were gamed to prevent formation of an Executive, keeping the Assembly in abeyance for nearly three years, thereby frustrating the mandate of all parties elected. The democratic process is now threatened with a new version of such mandate-blocking tactics or threats at a time of acute public

policy challenges and chronic public service pressures.

The SDLP has previously tabled proposals to return to the Good Friday Agreement's explicit premise of joint election of Joint First Ministers by the Assembly based on open rights to joint nomination. We would want to take the opportunity of such a restorative correction of the St Andrews aberration to widen the democratic options for validating such joint election. Our MPs have previously tabled amendments to allow a range of thresholds for the restored joint election of First Ministers to include parallel consent, qualified weighted majority and/or two thirds of MLAs.

Such changes would allow for more truly collective responsibility across parties and reduce the opportunity for one party to paralyse the Assembly, Executive and North South Ministerial Council by refusing an unduly conferred exclusive right of nomination. This would also prove to be more conducive for the collaborative preparation of a long overdue meaningful Programme for Government.



Economy, Jobs And Skills

We believe in a prosperous, world class economy that delivers equality and opportunity to all our citizens. We pioneered the introduction of City Deals in Northern Ireland that will play a key role in ensuring access to training for young people, increasing employment and ensuring that our technology infrastructure meets the demands of the modern economy.

We are committed to building an economy which delivers for all who live here:

1. Maximising the potential of dual market access and all-island economic growth

Brexit has been a disaster for relationships on this island and between these islands. Despite the noise around its implementation, the Protocol offers essential protections for the island of Ireland from the creation of a hard border and also offers huge economic potential. The Protocol offers us the opportunity to overhaul our unacceptable underperformance.

In negotiations ahead of a new Executive, the SDLP will prioritise:

- A growth strategy tailored to our unique position under the Protocol, and developed with express buy-in, and funding, from the Irish and British Governments, and the European Union - with sectoral targets and reporting under the new Programme for Government
- The creation of a new European investment hub for NI, operated by Invest NI but with support from the International Development Association, UK Department of International Trade and European Commission
- As part of ongoing discussions on Protocol implementation, a joint EU-UK commitment to offer NI maximum access to both EU and UK trade deals
- An increase in InterTradeIreland funding, aimed at increasing outreach and training to small businesses across the island of Ireland

2. Finance and fiscal powers

The absence of an agreed Programme for Government and multi-year Budget has dogged the delivery of public services for too long. Northern Ireland urgently needs a new agreed Programme for Government and Budget but we also need more control over how we raise revenue and allocate spending. The last five years have illustrated decisively that the current system of improvised allocations and endless haggling between Stormont and the Treasury over the block grant is a barrier to devolved Government delivering.

The SDLP welcomes the establishment of the Fiscal Council, which will report regularly on Executive spending plans, and the Fiscal Commission, whose final report will come after the election but whose interim report set out the logic for increased revenue raising for the Northern Ireland Executive. We want to see greater fiscal devolution, but we want to deliver it in a way that is sustainable and successful.

In negotiations ahead of a new Executive, the SDLP will prioritise:

- An agreed three year Budget, matched to a new Programme for Government
- Reduced Corporation Tax
- A cross-departmental, ministerial-led group to respond to the detailed findings of the Fiscal Commission
- Subject to the findings of the Fiscal Commission, a PfG target to meaningfully increase the tax varying and borrowing powers of the NI Assembly by the end of the mandate
- A new regional Investment Bank for Northern Ireland - in part modelled on the Scottish National Investment Bank - capitalised initially by currently unused Financial Transactions Capital
- A commitment to putting the Fiscal Council on a statutory footing in the first six months of the new mandate
- An urgent review of the use of Reform and Reinvestment Initiative (RRI) and Financial Transactions Capital (FTC) powers to ensure they are being deployed to maximum potential effect

3. Sustainable, broad based economic growth

A new Executive must embed meaningful actions to stimulate broad based economic growth, with clear actions and reporting mechanisms.

In addition to the actions on fiscal devolution and exploiting dual market access, the SDLP will prioritise:

- A fundamentally reformed Invest NI, with a new mandate to improve regional imbalances and maximise the economic potential of NI's dual market access under the Protocol
- Proper funding of the skills strategy, increasing Northern Ireland's low uptake of apprenticeships and demanding the UK Government make good on promises to replace lost European funding



4. Addressing Regional Imbalance

It is essential that, as a priority, we address the regional imbalances across the North. This requires greater public and private investment into the North West – especially Derry and Strabane. Similarly, the high unemployment areas of West and North Belfast must be targeted for

much greater levels of job creation. Invest NI must be instructed to incentivise commercial investment into areas of the highest deprivation and joblessness.

5. Building an Economy that works for parents

Parental leave should be a right made available to all workers. Our full-rate equivalent maternity leave is one of the lowest across Europe and the OECD. We believe the Real Living Wage should be used as a baseline for Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) from weeks 7 to 52. Until the eligibility criteria for SMP is expanded, Universal Credit Regulations must be amended so that Maternity Allowance is treated as ‘earnings’ instead of ‘unearned income’. This would mean that women are not left

worse-off than their counterparts who qualify for SMP. We support the introduction of a Paternity Allowance.

In addition, we will implement an expansion of the Sure Start Maternity Grant- similar to the Best Start Grant in Scotland which is made up of three one-off payments; Pregnancy and Baby Payment, Early Learning Payment and School Age Payment, to help towards the costs of being pregnant and looking after a child.

6. Changing How We Work

The pandemic has changed the way we all work and has shone light on the advantages of a more flexible approach to working both for employers and employees. During the pandemic, businesses and workers have adapted to working from home which has not only had benefits for productivity but importantly has given people a better work-life balance. In the past people, and especially working mothers, have made the decision

not to request flexible working as they believe that this would be viewed negatively by their employer or limit opportunities. Modern working practices need to be made more inclusive for parents and those with caring responsibilities and this means ensuring that there is an availability of good quality jobs offered on a more flexible and part-time basis.



Our Place in Europe

The SDLP was among the strongest opponents of Brexit on these islands, warning not only of its harmful economic effects, but of the corrosive impact it would have on the delicate set of relationships on the island of Ireland, and between Ireland and Britain.

The Protocol is just one of the consequences of hard Brexit, and offers essential protections to the island of Ireland. The unavoidable truth is that, without the Protocol, the external border of the EU would be on the island of Ireland. Such an outcome would be intolerable for border communities and practically impossible for businesses.

The noise over the Protocol distracts from two issues: the economic potential of the Protocol, and the new disruptions on the island of Ireland not covered by the Protocol. Where there are genuine implementation issues to be worked through, this should happen in a spirit of practical cooperation between the UK and EU.

We want to maximise the potential from NI's position and create structures to ensure that as many stakeholders as possible are having their voices heard.

The SDLP will pursue:

1. Securing a majority in the 2024 Assembly consent vote to uphold special post-Brexit arrangements for Northern Ireland
2. Permanent observer status for selected NI MLAs on the EU Committee of the Regions and observer status in the European Parliament on major EU legislation which will apply to NI
3. Enhanced governance arrangements, going beyond the proposals in the European Commission's 'non-papers' of 2021, including:
 - A new dedicated European Affairs Committee in the NI Assembly, with powers to take evidence from UK Ministers and EU officials and annual meetings in Belfast of the EU-UK Parliamentary Assembly to focus on NI issues
 - An enhanced role for the North-South Ministerial Council in EU affairs



Justice, Legacy & Victims

Our vision: A safe, shared society that protects people from crime, meets the needs of victims, safeguards justice, truth and accountability and promotes the rehabilitation of offenders.

Legacy:

There is an urgent need to comprehensively and ethically address the legacy of the past and the needs of victims and survivors. This is one of the single greatest contributions to reconciliation and healing in NI. To protect state and militia interests, the British Government is proposing an abhorrent amnesty for state and paramilitary perpetrators. We are strongly opposed to this amnesty. It is a serious act of bad faith that will breach obligations

undertaken in all-party agreements and the international treaty further to “Stormont House.” The perverse message to the victims of state and paramilitary actions is that they should abandon justice and that they are barriers to reconciliation.

We remain committed to putting victims first, to truth, justice and accountability and to a comprehensive human rights compliant process.

Systemic Reforms:

The SDLP supports substantive reforms to the criminal justice system to deliver faster, fairer justice with increased accountability. This includes clear timeframes for cases, ensuring proper communication between victims, the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service and the increased use of technology. The SDLP considers that the Public Prosecution Service has serious questions to answer

on prosecutorial decisions, the management of legacy cases and related matters. The SDLP believes these matters need proper interrogation, fault-lines identified and appropriate actions. The criminal justice system must also not cause renewed trauma for victims and a review of all stages of the system should be conducted to deepen this requirement.

Victims:

We will work towards a victim-led programme of policy initiatives. This will include the implementation of the recently announced Adult Restorative Justice Action Plan. We support the CJINI recommendation

to implement an effective communication strategy to raise awareness of the Victim and Witnesses Charters and how information that signposts services, support providers and entitlements to services can

easily be accessed. The SDLP believes that the apology to victims of Historical Institutional Abuse should never have taken so long, and that victims and survivors were casualties of the political dysfunction that plagues the

Executive. We support the full implementation of the remaining recommendations from the HIA Inquiry and the speedy release of acknowledgement payments and provision of other required support to survivors.

Changing the focus to rehabilitation:

There have been advances in the management of NI prisons, but further structural and staff reforms of the prison service are needed to promote rehabilitation whilst ensuring the safety and dignity of both prison staff and prisoners. It is clear that the imprisonment of those who cannot pay fines or debts in certain categories of cases is not appropriate. The SDLP will introduce a

progressive approach including support for community mediation methods and non-court approaches of dispute resolution. To help reduce re-offending we will establish a 12-month post-release supervision programme following international best practice models which have been shown to dramatically reduce the number of those who re-offend.

Addressing People Trafficking:

People trafficking is an abhorrent crime and we must rid our society of this terrible practice. We would work together across government, the charity sector and statutory agencies to marshal our resources to eradicate people trafficking and modern slavery. A comprehensive

strategy to end this practice would ensure that community groups and individuals have the resources at their disposal and that action is taken to raise awareness among the public with training of relevant groups so that the indicators of human trafficking are recognised.

Organised Crime and Corruption:

The SDLP has been consistent in our calls for a greater degree of cooperation between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána to deal with crime associated with the border. Fuel laundering, smuggling and human trafficking are all areas in which inter-agency cooperation has been and continues to be required to successfully achieve convictions. The SDLP fought hard for local

oversight and robust accountability protections for the National Crime Agency. We are now calling for stronger collaboration between all relevant agencies to deliver a specific anti-corruption strategy for Northern Ireland and a significant uplift in resources. There should be a dedicated NI assets recovery and enforcement organisation.

Tackling Paramilitarism:

Paramilitary activity must be faced down. There must be a comprehensive approach to ending paramilitarism and associated criminality. The law enforcement approach to seek out and close down all involved in paramilitary criminality needs escalated and the legacy

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

Tackling Domestic Abuse:

In 2021 there were over 88 domestic abuse incidents a day with domestic abuse crimes rising by 9% in the previous 12 months. In a recent poll, less than half of women stated that they felt safe walking the streets.

Even more recent figures confirm the very low level of prosecutions that arise in rape and sexual abuse cases. We must ensure that the Violence Against Women & Girls Strategy is fully implemented and resourced.

Policing:

A Representative Police Service

We believe that communities should have a visible and dependable police presence on our streets - this requires a gear change in policing with the community and ensuring that no community is managed by “gatekeepers” who exercise undue influence in local areas.

The SDLP will continue to support and advocate for a police service which is representative of the community it seeks to serve. We will continue to challenge the Chief Constable & Northern Ireland Policing Board on the police service’s recruitment, retention & promotion policies especially with regard to underrepresented groups. The recruitment, retention and promotion of officers and civilian staff from the Catholic tradition is a serious challenge and requires the deployment of every measure including affirmative action.

The SDLP recognises the valuable contribution of Neighbourhood Policing Teams & supports their retention.

We will ensure better police training on domestic abuse & offences arising from coercive control as well as historical abuse.

The SDLP will better protect people in their own homes.

Cybercrime, economic crime & fraud is growing. Every aspect of our lives from the NHS, transport systems to communication networks is vulnerable. We will work with the Chief Constable & Northern Ireland Policing Board to ensure that a modern, technology advanced police service is equipped with the capacity and skills to combat online crime.

We will work with the PSNI to eliminate real/perceived bias against BAME communities.

The SDLP considers that the Policing Board badly fails to punch to its statutory weight and this too needs robust action. There are structural and operational issues that need decisive action to deliver better policing and to best navigate present and emerging uncertainties.

New Ireland Commission

The SDLP believes that Irish unity offers a hopeful, prosperous and sustainable future for the people of this island. This conviction is rooted not in narrow nationalism but in the profoundly held belief that it offers the opportunity to build an inclusive, better, positive future - a shared home place, a reconciled people and a better life for all our communities.

The path to uniting the people of this island is through partnership, co-operation and reconciliation, the basis of the Good Friday Agreement. While the DUP has led unionist communities into chaos and the British Government has left them behind, the SDLP's vision is a new Ireland which champions the identities of all so that all are celebrated and included.

Dialogue and Discussion:

Last year we created our New Ireland Commission and the Commission has taken forward its mandate with much of its work conducted quietly and privately in the effort to grow confidence, show respect, to recognise that building relationships should be carefully crafted.

We have engaged in hundreds of private dialogues at regional and national levels with people and organisations.

A second parallel process of local dialogue conducted through SDLP MLAs and others broadens

the base of the project, builds a greater number of relationships and helps grasp variations in thinking.

Our "Experts and Reference Panel" was established to guide the conversation and inform outcomes, Its membership includes sectoral, education, rights, climate and faith leaders, North and South. The panel has held a series of private conversations including with our new communities and citizens, activists in unionist and loyalist communities, political commentators, victims and survivors and academics.

Our ambition:

Previous generations gave us peace and agreement. The SDLP is committed to shaping a path toward a united, just and reconciled new Ireland. We hope to generate a new consensus on the future. The party will consider what a reunified Ireland would look like, providing analysis and recommendations on what kind of institutional structure, what kind of public service and private sector structure and what kind of civic structure a new, united Ireland will comprise. And we will listen to and learn from the diversity of voices and the difference from across those voices.

The SDLP will also build towards a New Ireland by pressing the Irish Government to extend voting rights in Presidential elections to Northern citizens as well as to the diaspora; to deliver a paradigm shift in the scale and working of North-South relationships and develop all-island plans for infrastructure, energy, planning, tourism, health, higher education, research and development and enterprise. By working together across the island, we can realise the full potential of our economy and our society.



Our Rights

The SDLP is a party founded in civil rights and is committed to preserving and enhancing the rights of all who live here.

Workers' Rights:

Employment law is a devolved power and Stormont must take advantage of this to strengthen the protection of employees. The SDLP was the only Northern Ireland party in the House of Commons to support a ban on the practice of hiring and re-hiring – a gross exploitation of workers. Employment rights are an essential protection from exploitation, and they should apply from day one of employment. All

employees must have the right to belong to a trade union. We are committed to fair pay agreements for all workers, including those who work in our vital public services.

Gender discrimination must be made a thing of the past. Stronger protection is required for women from discrimination in pay and promotion.

LGBT+ Rights:

We are committed to ensuring the full realisation of LGBT+ equality. As the party that introduced the first successful motion for equal marriage in the Assembly, we are determined to continue our passion for equality. We will introduce a comprehensive ban on all forms of conversion therapy. We would also take every necessary

measure to ensure sufficient funding for LGBT+ organisations and support services, particularly in rural areas.

It is of paramount importance that we stand up for trans people as well in their struggle for equality and access to appropriate healthcare.

Rights of Ethnic Minorities:

Ethnic minority groups in Northern Ireland are diverse, and include newly arrived refugees, people seeking sanctuary, long-settled citizens, migrant workers and their families. The SDLP will work closely with the representatives of ethnic minorities to ensure Racial Equality and Refugee Integration Strategies that are fully resourced.

The SDLP will actively support the campaign currently being conducted by representatives of

ethnic minorities in the North to ensure that freedom of movement can be enjoyed by all our residents.

The SDLP will ensure that the eradication of hate crime in Northern Ireland will be given the resources and political prominence it deserves. The SDLP supports the campaign for all refugees and people seeking sanctuary to have the right to work.

Disability Rights:

We are committed to ensuring that the rights of people with disabilities are upheld and protected and that they do not face any barriers to their full participation in society.

The SDLP is committed to ensuring the full incorporation of the UNCRPD into domestic law including through action where necessary at Westminster and the Assembly to ensure legal protection for people with disabilities against discrimination.

Protections for people with disabilities must be realised in every area of government policy including through employment, tackling the disproportionate impact of the punitive welfare system on people with disabilities, ensuring a fully inclusive education system and delivering accessible social housing and public transport.

We would ensure an adequate and fully resourced Disability Strategy with accompanying legislative commitments.



Le tamall fada - thar thréimhse roinnt blianta - tá an SDLP ag obair ar son cearta teanga Gaeilgeoirí sna Sé Chontae. Tá sé i bhfad, i bhfad thar am go mbeadh na cearta sin ag cainteoirí Gaeilge ina dtír féin.

Rinne Dominic Bradley MLA agus Patsy McGlone MLA iarrachtaí in 2008 agus 2017 reachtaíocht chomhalta príobháideach a thabhairt os comhair an Tionóil.

Bhí foireann an SDLP (Patsy McGlone MLA agus Justin McNulty MLA) ag stocaireacht go láidir ar son Chearta Gaeilge sna cainteanna a thug Aontú Deich mBliain Úr, Modh Úr ar an saol (Mí Eanáir 2020) agus ó shin i leith sa Tionól féin.

I Mí an Mheithimh 2021 gheall Brandon Lewis, Rúnaí Stáit Thuaisceart Éireann, dá dteipfeadh Stormont, go gcuirfí reachtaíocht tríd Westminster. Theip ar Stormont agus de chóir agus dhá bhliain ina dhiaidh, tá Gaeil na Sé Chontae ag fanacht le reachtaíocht Westminster! Iompar náireach le cluichí polaitiúla.

Cuir Deireadh leis na cluichí- cumhdaigh cearta teanga i reachtaíocht gan mhoill.

Tógfaimid faoinár gcúram agus cuirfimid i bhfeidhm Straitéis 20 Bliain don Ghaeilge a bheidh bunaithe ar phróiseas comhcheaptha agus le treoir ó phainéal saineolaithe, rud a ghealladh faoi chomhaontuithe éagsúla, NDNA san áireamh.

Tabharfaimid tacaíocht láidir do Bhille don Ghealoideachas chun an dualgas reachtúil reatha a shoiléiriú agus a threisiú. Cinnteoidh sé seo go mbeidh polasaithe agus seirbhísí ar fáil chun freastal ar riachtanais agus ar fhás earnáil an Ghaeloideachais.

Tacóimid leis an éileamh go mbeadh staidéar ar nuatheanga ina ábhar éigeantach don TGMO (GCSE) chun srian a chur leis an mheath ar líon na ndaltaí a roghnaíonn an Ghaeilge nó nuatheanga eile ar scoil,

Mura mbeidh na hAireachtaí Oideachais nó Pobal faoinár gcúram le linn an téarma tionóil seo chugainn, cuirfimid an fhreagracht orthu beart a dhéanamh ar son na Gaeilge agus an Ghaeloideachais.

The SDLP has campaigned for the rights of Gaeilgeoirí in the North for a number of years and we believe that it is long overdue for those rights to be delivered here.

In 2008 and 2017, SDLP MLAs Dominic Bradley and Patsy McGlone tried to bring Private Members' legislation on Irish language rights before the Assembly. More recently, SDLP MLAs Patsy McGlone and Justin McNulty have lobbied strongly for Irish language rights, both in the talks that led to New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) in January 2020 and since then in the Assembly itself.

In June 2021, Brandon Lewis, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, made a commitment to passing legislation for Irish language rights through Westminster if Stormont collapsed. Almost one year later, Gaeilgeoirí in the North are still waiting. We are calling for an end to these political games and the enshrining of language rights in legislation as a matter of urgency.

We would also adopt and implement a 20 Year Irish Language Strategy based on a co-design and expert panel process as promised in successive agreements including New Decade, New Approach.

The SDLP would strongly support a Bill for Irish Medium Education to clarify and strengthen the current statutory duty and ensure policies and services are in place to meet the needs and growth of the Irish Medium Education sector. We support the inclusion of languages as a compulsory GCSE subject to reverse the decline in pupils studying Irish and other languages in schools.

Throughout the next Assembly mandate, if we do not hold the Education or Communities portfolios, we will hold them accountable to deliver for the Irish language and the direction and support for Irish Medium Education.



Strengthening our rural communities

The SDLP is committed to ensuring that farming communities and the rural way of life is protected in the North of Ireland and that our Government at all levels works for all our communities. In government we will:

Secure proper Funding for Farming and Rural Development:

During the next Assembly the SDLP will ensure new funding streams are established to support farmers and those in rural areas. Our objective is that this funding will be used to encourage the development of environmentally sustainable farming methods across the industry. This will include funding for just transition and climate change measures in rural areas, secured from Stormont and Westminster.

Propose an NI Agriculture Bill:

The SDLP will introduce specific measures to help rural communities recover from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and set a legal framework for future sustainable farming.

Secure Proper Rural Broadband:

All our communities must have access to high-quality broadband. The SDLP has worked with both Fibrus and BT OpenReach to highlight areas of poor broadband provision to help direct investment in improving broadband coverage in rural areas. We will continue to monitor delivery of this investment and its impact on rural broadband provision.

Improve Water Quality:

None of our rivers, lakes, transitional & coastal water bodies currently meet overall good status when ecological and chemical status are considered. The SDLP will insist that a newly established Independent Environmental Protection Agency prioritises improvement in the status of our rivers, lakes, transitional & coastal water bodies.

Enhance Animal Welfare

The SDLP has worked with the USPCA to campaign for an Animal Cruelty Offenders Register. Together we secured the support of the Assembly and the Executive for a register. We will continue the campaign to establish the register in the next Assembly term.

We will also advocate for better enforcement and regulation of the puppy trade, support a ban on hunting wild mammals with dogs and vote against an indiscriminate badger cull.



Arts & Culture

Artistic and cultural endeavours are intrinsic to this island and all traditions on it. Community arts provide a critical outlet for creativity at the highest level, but also provide huge ancillary benefits in terms of mental health, community integration, tackling loneliness and a vast range of other areas.

As with the rest of Ireland, the North and its artists have outperformed in terms of international recognition and achievement. In recent years alone, the Belfast-based arts group Array Collective has won the Turner Prize, author Anna Burns has claimed the Booker Prize and Derry Girls has been a TV phenomenon.

But despite all this, the arts in Northern Ireland is shamefully underfunded. Arts spending per head is dramatically lower than every other jurisdiction on these islands. Even when a £30 million Barnett

allocation was received to assist with Covid 19 emergency funding, the Sinn Fein-run Communities Department delayed for months before actually allocating the funding to artists and cultural organisations in crisis.

We want to see arts embedded into the Programme for Government, but the most urgent priority is simply delivering a meaningful increase in arts funding in the multi-year Budget. Given the relatively small scale of the arts budget to begin with, achieving an increase is eminently achievable – and overdue.

The SDLP will prioritise:

- A three-year budget settlement which doubles arts spending at a minimum, bringing NI closer to its nearest comparator, Wales, but still far behind the Republic of Ireland
- A new arts and cultural strategy embedded in the Programme for Government, supported by a standing artistic and cultural stakeholder working group to embed co-design
- An urgent working group between Belfast City Council and the Department for Communities to tackle the crisis in working space for artists in Belfast
- Promoting ministerial accountability for the arts, which is now buried in the Department for Communities following the consolidation of departments, through regular arts and cultural Question Times in the Assembly



NICOLA MALLON
North Belfast



COLIN McGRATH
South Down



CARA HUNTER
East Derry



MATTHEW O'TOOLE
South Belfast



SINÉAD McLAUGHLIN
Foyle



DANIEL McCROSSAN
West Tyrone



DOLORES KELLY
Upper Bann



MARK DURKAN
Foyle



CHARLOTTE CARSON
East Belfast



MANIFESTO

2022



PAT CATNEY
Lagan Valley



ELSIE TRAINOR
South Belfast



ADAM GANNON
Fermanagh and South Tyrone



SIOBHÁN McALISTER
East Antrim



PATSY McGLONE
Mid Ulster



DÉIRDRE VAUGHAN
North Down



BRIAN TIERNEY
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ROISIN LYNCH
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CONOR HOUSTON
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PEOPLE FIRST