



**let's deliver
real progress**

SDLP Manifesto
Assembly Elections 2007



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Please note that certain objectives appear under more than one heading to give a complete overview of each topic at a glance

Delivering Real Progress



Your Ambitions – Our Agenda

The SDLP stands in this election proud of our record and confident of our prospects. We have stood consistently for the Good Friday Agreement's core principles of a lawful society and an inclusive democracy. The SDLP has held nothing back. We only want to move forward.

You deserve better than endless 'process' and stop-go politics. You need non-stop progress. The SDLP alone can be trusted to deliver that. The DUP and Sinn Fein want their ambitions for themselves to become the people's agenda in this election.

For the SDLP, people's best ambitions are our only agenda. Your highest hopes are our driving political purpose.

This manifesto outlines the SDLP's clear, strong policies on issues that really matter to you – including water charges, rates, healthcare, jobs, poverty, education, policing and climate change.

It underlines our determination - not just to deliver political progress - but to grow our economy, improve our society and fulfil the promise of a better way to a better Ireland.

It sets out our radical proposals for:

- Economic growth, social justice, environmental protection and cultural vitality;
- Ambitious targets for North South development;
- Cohesive plans for joined-up government;
- Greater transparency, effectiveness and accountability;
- Strong safeguards against ever-higher rates and other unjust charges; and
- Imaginative ideas for far-reaching investment and improving public services.

The difference between politics not working and a government working for you will be a strong SDLP. Ongoing political uncertainty is not a reason not to vote. It is a reason to vote SDLP. Your vote can make the difference. Use it to deliver real progress.

Vote SDLP on Wednesday 7 March.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Durkan".

Mark Durkan MP
SDLP Leader

Delivering Key Priorities



Delivering the Agreement

- Stand strong for the Agreement and seek the immediate restoration of its democratic institutions of Government;
- Keep pressure on all parties to respect the commitments at the heart of the Agreement to an inclusive and lawful society; and
- Seek the Agreement's full implementation and development, including delivery of commitments in the Agreement and St. Andrews on devolution of policing and justice; North/South co-operation; human rights; equality; demilitarisation; a shared future; victims; and the Irish language.

Delivering a United Ireland

- Seek the recalling of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation;
- Engage in outreach with the unionist community to persuade them of the benefits of a United Ireland and reassure them of the protections that the Agreement offers them in it; and
- Seek a referendum on a United Ireland when the Agreement's institutions are operating stably and campaign vigorously for a yes vote.

Delivering Public Services, Investment & Government Reform

- A fairer rates system based on ability to pay;
- Strategic capital expenditure and Service, Community & Enterprise all-Ireland funds;
- Joined-up government across all departments;

- Strong long-term protection of ratepayers' interests in the form of a revenue regulator; and
- Two new Assembly Committees that will examine government administrative expenditure as well as delivery and performance.

Delivering Quality Healthcare

- Cleaner hospitals through improving and monitoring cleaning standards and integrating hospital cleaning back into healthcare management;
- Invest in health promotion, primary care and tackle health inequalities to reduce the burden on acute care;
- Secure finances to implement the recommendations of the Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Difficulties;
- Ensure access to clinically effective drugs (where appropriate) for treatment of conditions such as MS, Alzheimer's disease and Arthritis; and
- Improved access to NHS dentistry services across the North.

Delivering Quality Education for All

- The right for children to have a wide ranging education;
- An end to academic selection by opposing the use of pupil profiles and Computer Adaptive Testing as a method of selection;
- Effective implementation of the Special Educational Needs Order;
- Promote the introduction of modern languages at primary school; and
- Investment in early years education.

Delivering Economic Growth & Jobs

- Single all-Ireland corporation tax regime at 12.5%;
- Create an all-Ireland Research Fund and an Enterprise Growth Fund;
- Create broadband capacity of 8Mbps across the North;
- Investment in biotechnology and creation of biotechnology council; and
- Increased provision of workplace based training packages.

Delivering Safer Communities

- Work for an all-Ireland sex offenders register and end automatic 50% remission for dangerous offenders;
- Push for Garda secondments to the PSNI as well as lateral entry;
- Creation of North/South bodies on policing and justice including an all-Ireland Criminal Assets Bureau and an All-Ireland Law Commission;
- Create an all-Ireland Public Safety Body;
- Harmonisation of road safety measures on the island; and
- Better measures to tackle anti-social behaviour, including penalty notices.

Delivering Investment in Workers & Skills

- Campaign for a regional Pension Protection Fund;
- Cross-departmental strategy to augment protection and awareness of the rights of migrant workers;
- Widen access to Higher Education through additional core funding packages for families on low incomes;
- Eradicate adult illiteracy and innumeracy by 2015; and
- Create an all-Island Research Alliance.

Delivering Affordable Quality Homes

- Explore proposals for a 'use it or lose it' policy on lands zoned for development;
- Increase the upper limit threshold in the Co-ownership Scheme;
- Release more land for social housing from the government land bank; and
- Address differentials between the two main communities in waiting times for public housing.

Delivering Social Inclusion

- Further development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy to ensure adequate oversight, dedicated resources and realistic targets;
- Address the shortage of available, affordable and quality childcare;
- Work to eradicate child poverty by 2020; and
- Implement the Money & Debt Advice strategy.

Delivering a Sustainable Environment

- Introduce stronger targets on emissions with year on year reductions so that emissions will be 20% below 1990 levels by 2010;
- Establish an All-Ireland Independent Environmental Protection Agency;
- Campaign for the immediate cessation of Mox production at Sellafield;
- Introduce marine legislation that will address the issues of pollution and habitat protection; and
- Annual publication of a State of the Environment report.

Delivering Balanced Regional Development

- Legislate for decentralisation of government functions and agencies including at least 2000 jobs to towns across the North, targeting areas with high unemployment;
- Create a new all-Ireland transport and infrastructure body;
- Develop a plan to convert public transport to operate on bio-fuels;
- Secure major capital investment for the Belfast-Derry rail line; and
- Develop a light rail system for the Belfast Metropolitan area.

Delivering for Agricultural & Rural Communities

- Complete an all-Ireland Animal Health Strategy;
- Develop an all-Ireland strategy for the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy;
- Work for a fairer rates relief package for agricultural properties;
- Replace PPS 14 with a system that is fair to rural communities and cherishes the environment; and
- Develop a cross-cutting Rural White Paper to focus on the promotion of economic regeneration and social inclusion.

Delivering A Shared Society

- Increased shared spaces and more mixed estates;
- The prevention of sectarian or national flags flying on public property;
- A strategy against hate crime for the criminal justice system; and
- New powers for the Community Relations Council to support the Good Relations work of local government.

Delivering Equality & Human Rights

- Deliver the Single Equality Bill to harmonise protection against discrimination and guarantee equality for all groups;
- Deliver effective rights protection of our young particularly in the area of mental health;
- A comprehensive Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland; and
- Eliminate the differential in unemployment rates between the two communities by 2012.

Delivering for Victims, Truth & Remembrance

- An over-arching victims strategy;
- A victim centred Truth Body to direct the process of truth and remembrance for all victims, compile a register of victims and re-open police files at the request of victims' families;
- Well resourced and unimpeded inquiries; and
- Paramilitary assets to be used to fund victims' families compensation.

Ag soláthar Acht Gaeilge - Delivering for the Irish Language

- Tacaíonn an SDLP le Acht Ghaeilge atá cuimsitheach, bunaithe ar chur chuige cheartasach a dhéanfaidh teanga oifigiúil den Ghaeilge agus a bhronnfaidh cearta fiúntacha ar chainteoirí na teanga i réimsí éagsúla – na hinstiúidí polaitiúla, an rialtas áitiúil, riar na córa, an tOideachas, agus na meáin chumarsáide ina measc.
- Support a comprehensive Irish Language Act founded on a rights based approach which will make Irish an official language and afford worthwhile rights to Irish speakers in various aspects of public life including: the political institutions, local government, the justice system, education, and the media.

Delivering on International Affairs

- Lobby for full implementation of the G8 commitments to increase volume, quality and effectiveness of aid;
- Increase the number of Fair Trade towns and cities across the North;
- Reverse the decision to export refugees and asylum seekers to Scotland; and
- Campaign against the use of our airports to facilitate Extraordinary Rendition.

Delivering for You - Leading & Winning



At the time of the Westminster elections, the SDLP asked voters to make us stronger to help us deliver our vision of a better way to a better Ireland.

Since then, we have worked to deliver on what we were elected to do.

Although we have been held back by suspension from taking forward our plans on all important bread and butter issues, we have nonetheless succeeded in delivering on key planks of our agenda.

The SDLP has been:

- Winning on the North South agenda;
- Delivering on policing;
- Exposing the truth on water charges;
- Defending the Agreement;
- Leading the campaign against MI5;
- Holding out for power-sharing;
- Safeguarding human rights;
- Preventing cover ups;
- Winning the argument on guns; and
- Keeping pressure on loyalist paramilitaries.

“The words which come quickest to mind when writing about the SDLP are decency, courage and tenacity... Over the long barren years when there was little hope, or little to hope for, the SDLP kept faith with its democratic message... And in Drapier’s view, that endurance is going to see it through the next 30 years as well. ”

Drapier, Irish Times

Winning on North South

The SDLP is convinced that this island can be transformed through North South cooperation to the benefit of nationalists and unionists alike.

At the time of the last election, we were gravely concerned that the North South agenda was on go slow due to suspension. Other parties were doing little to challenge this – for example, the Sinn Fein/DUP Comprehensive Agreement did not offer a single extra area for North South cooperation or implementation.

That’s why we launched our **North South Makes Sense** campaign. That campaign has done much to get the North South agenda moving again. As a result:

- Plans for all-Ireland free travel for older people are now underway;
- The South is now investing unprecedented money in the North’s infrastructure through the National Development Plan;
- The two Governments are working on developing proposals on North South funds; and
- The Single Electricity Market is due to open later this year.

Most importantly, it is now accepted that the North South agenda has to continue on whether or not we achieve devolution by 26 March.

The SDLP will continue to lead the campaign on North South and work in particular to deliver the rich rewards of an all-Ireland economy.

Delivering on policing

The SDLP has always argued that the best way of delivering Patten was by getting on the Policing Board. Recent moves by other parties have vindicated our position.

While others stood on the sidelines, the SDLP has been delivering Patten. As the report of the independent Oversight Commissioner shows, over 86% of Patten has been delivered in only year five of Patten’s ten year programme of change. As he has also found, the Police, Policing Board and Police Ombudsman have done what was asked of them.

Our achievements include:

- Collusion exposed - because the SDLP insisted that the Office of the Police Ombudsman have the power to investigate the past;
- Special Branch dismantled and replaced by police intelligence structures that “*meet the best practice requirements of any police force in the world*” according to the Oversight Commissioner;
- Catholic levels in the regular police now over 21% - and rising; and
- “*More accountability than any police agency that I am aware of*” in the words of Kathy O’Toole, Patten Commission member.

And we are working to deliver more - like the new police college, accessible police stations and faster police response times.

Exposing the truth on water charges

The SDLP has led the campaign against water charges and exposed the truth about the direct rule administration's plans. For example, the direct rulers denied that there would be privatisation. The SDLP exposed the truth: that the Treasury was pressing for "greater private sector participation."¹

The SDLP has also exposed the truth about the level of water charges. Contrary to British Government assurances, limits on water charges through an affordability tariff are only planned until 2010.

The SDLP opposed water charges in Westminster and will continue to do so in the Assembly.

"The SDLP have shown leadership and courage for many years and continue to do so to this day."

**Pat Rabbitte TD, Labour Party Leader
November 2005**

Defending the Agreement

The SDLP believes that the Good Friday Agreement offers nationalists and unionists alike the chance to work together as partners and as equals.

We do not believe that there is anything wrong with the Agreement. All that is wrong is that too often parties have failed to honour it.

That is why we have stood by the Agreement – and opposed attempts by others to weaken its protections. It is also why we opposed the flawed Comprehensive Agreement negotiated by the DUP and Sinn Fein in 2004. At St Andrews we succeeded in undoing a lot of the damage done by that deal. For example:

- We have defended inclusion – and ensured the abandonment of the Comprehensive Agreement's proposal for a new form of automatic exclusion.
- We have ensured that DUP ministers cannot veto who ministers are – something that was conceded to them in the Comprehensive Agreement.
- We have cut out much red tape on North South that was also conceded to the DUP in the Comprehensive Agreement.
- Above all, we have ensured a sunset clause – so that the DUP will not get any of the changes conceded by others to the workings of the Agreement if they do not go into Government by 26 March 2007.

The SDLP will continue to defend the Good Friday Agreement – and work for the restoration of its democratic institutions of government.

Leading the campaign against MI5

The SDLP has been leading the campaign against British Government plans for MI5 to take over primacy for intelligence policing in the North. We have told the truth about MI5.

We have exposed their dangerous lack of accountability and the way that they will be able to operate beyond the scrutiny of the Police Ombudsman.

We will continue to oppose the MI5 takeover and campaign for the Police Ombudsman to be able to investigate wrongdoing by MI5 in the North.

Holding out for power-sharing

The SDLP has stood strong for power-sharing at local government level – and opposed plans that could lead to the dominance of any one community over the other.

Unlike Sinn Fein, we rejected the seven council model – which we argued was bad for minorities and bad for power-sharing. We did not make the mistake of presuming that the seven council model would ensure a 25% minority in every council area and power-sharing.

There are two simple reasons for this. First, the seven council model does not ensure a minimum 25% minority in many council areas. In some, the nationalist minority would be well under 20%. Second, the British Government has not even given a commitment that there would be power-sharing even where there is a 25% minority.

The SDLP will continue to hold the line for real power-sharing, equality and partnership in local government.

¹ Civil Service Memorandum revealed in the Water Service Judicial Review

Safeguarding human rights and opposing paramilitary vigilantes

The SDLP is for restorative justice. But we made clear that the Government's plans in December 2005 did not go far enough – and risked creating state paid paramilitary vigilantes.

We forced David Hanson to admit that the Government had “got it wrong” and bring forward revised proposals.

Those revised proposals, though improved, still do not go far enough – and we are still working to ensure that people are protected from rough justice and paramilitary control.

Preventing cover ups

The SDLP succeeded in getting the British Government to withdraw the Northern Ireland (Offences) Bill.

That Bill would have allowed loyalist, state and republican killers alike to avoid not only jail but even truth or the discomfort of having to look their victims in the eye.

The SDLP exposed the dirty deal done by Sinn Fein and the British Government to cover up the past and forced the withdrawal of the Bill.

We will continue to seek a better deal for victims and oppose cover ups of the past.

Winning the argument on guns

Some said that IRA decommissioning could never happen, would never happen and should never happen.

The SDLP pointed out that the Agreement said that it must happen. We also argued that the failure to decommission was only giving anti-Agreement unionists the excuse that they needed to hold back change. Our argument won out. Decommissioning happened. And the reason given? Because the failure to decommission was being used to hold back change.

“...I believe that the pivotal role of the SDLP in courageously opening political dialogue with the republican movement must not be cast aside. Both governments need to recommit themselves to the inclusive, all-party, transparent model of negotiations envisaged by the Good Friday Agreement.”

**Enda Kenny TD, Fine Gael Leader
18 October 2006**

Keeping the pressure on loyalist paramilitaries

While IRA decommissioning marks a major step forward, the SDLP remains concerned at the failure of loyalists to decommission or end their activity.

We were the only party to object to the Northern Ireland (Offences) Bill which would have let loyalists avoid both truth and justice without having decommissioned a single bullet or ended their drug dealing and intimidation.

We were also the only major party to put pressure on the Secretary of State to declare the UVF ceasefire over – after they had murdered no less than four people.

The SDLP will keep the pressure on loyalist paramilitaries to wind up their activity and destroy their weapons.

Equally, we will continue to insist that so called “dissident republicans” respect the will of all the people of Ireland by ceasing all activity and decommissioning all weapons.

Delivering the Agreement



The SDLP is determined to deliver all of the Good Friday Agreement. Because we believe in each and every one of its key principles. And because, as a truly republican party, we stand by the will of the Irish people, North and South, who voted for it.

The SDLP is the only party to have worked all the Agreement's institutions – and a strong SDLP is essential to get the Agreement working. Left to themselves, other parties just cannot deliver.

At the time of the Westminster elections we promised to defend the Agreement and keep on pressure to get its democratic institutions of government restored. That is what we have done – especially at St Andrews.

"Recent statements by Mark Durkan...have revealed him as a politician who is both surefooted and determined. He will not easily be forced to abandon the Good Friday Agreement gains."

Irelandclick.com November 26 2002

We have kept the pressure on the problem parties to live up to the two key principles at the heart of the Good Friday Agreement: **an inclusive democracy and a lawful society.**

And we have succeeded in undoing a lot of the damage done to the Good Friday Agreement by the flawed Sinn Fein/DUP Comprehensive Agreement of 2004. For example, we have:

- defended the right of all parties to sit in the Executive in accordance with their democratic mandate;
 - ensured that the power of DUP ministers to veto who other ministers could be has been scrapped;
 - got much red tape on the North South agenda removed;
 - Above all, we have ensured a sunset clause – so that the DUP will not get any of the changes conceded by others to the workings of the Agreement if they do not go into Government by 26 March 2007.
- But there is more work to do:
- The SDLP will:
- Stand strong for the Good Friday Agreement and seek the **immediate restoration** of its democratic institutions of Government.
 - Keep pressure on all parties to respect the commitments at the heart of the Agreement to an **inclusive democracy** and a **lawful society.**
 - Seek the **Agreement's full implementation and development**, including delivery of commitments in the Agreement and St Andrews on:
 - devolution of policing and justice;
 - North/South co-operation;
 - human rights;
 - equality;
 - demilitarisation;
 - a shared future;
 - victims; and
 - the Irish language;
 - Keep pressure on all paramilitary groups to **decommission** all their weapons and **end all activity** – including loyalists and dissident republicans.
 - Seek the implementation of the SDLP's **North South Makes Sense** proposals.
 - Continue to undo the damage of the **flawed SF/DUP "Comprehensive Agreement."**
 - Seek the removal of the **DUP's veto on the devolution of justice** conceded by Sinn Fein in the "Comprehensive Agreement" and legislated for by the British Government in the NI (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006.
 - Stand for good government and continue to oppose the DUP proposals that would cause **gridlock, deadlock** and allow **tit for tat vetoes** by different ministers.
 - Ensure **repeal of the Suspension Act** and an end to stop-go politics.
 - Seek **new partnership arrangements** between the British and Irish Governments in the event that we do not secure restoration by 26 March 2007, while still working for restoration.
 - Oppose attempts by others to allow the **Assembly** to continue past 26 March 2007 if we do not achieve restoration.

"[I]n the eyes of his party and many bystanders, the SDLP leader has every right to call himself the Agreement's champion."

**Fionnuala O'Connor, Irish Times
Friday 8 October 2004**

Delivering a United Ireland



The SDLP believes in a United Ireland. And we are the only party with the vision, the standing and the strategy to deliver unity.

We believe that all the rights, protections, and inclusion that nationalists have sought within Northern Ireland while it is in the United Kingdom, must equally be guaranteed to unionists within a United Ireland.

So our vision of a United Ireland is based on equality. We are emphatic that unity must not be about the entrapment of a new minority.

That is right in principle - since in a United Ireland we will still need to find a way of sharing our society as equals every bit as much as we do today - and that is what the Agreement is all about.

It is also right in practice. The best context for holding and winning a referendum is when it is clear that the Agreement is fully bedded down and that all its protections will continue regardless of the referendum's outcome. A majority is most likely to vote for a United Ireland when reassured that it is neither a vote against the Agreement nor a vote for constitutional uncertainty.

Achieving a majority for Irish unity any time soon will require the persuasion of some unionists. It will also require the reassurance of many others. Because we have always stood for peace and partnership, only the SDLP can persuade a majority in the North in favour of unity - just as we persuaded a majority of the North in favour of the Good Friday Agreement.

That is why only the SDLP can deliver a United Ireland.

Working towards a united Ireland the SDLP will:

- Seek the recalling of the **Forum for Peace and Reconciliation**. At the last Forum, Sinn Féin would not sign up to the emerging consensus on how unity could be achieved. At this Forum we will seek the Agreement of all parties to our vision of and strategy for unity.
- **Engage in outreach with the unionist community** to persuade them of the merits of a United Ireland and reassure them of the protections that the Agreement offers them in it.
- Seek a **referendum on a United Ireland** when the Agreement's institutions are operating stably and campaign vigorously in favour of a yes vote.

'In a United Ireland we will still need to find a way of sharing our society as equals every bit as much as we do today - and that is what the Agreement is all about.'

Delivering Public Services, Investment & Government Reform



Reforming Government

Under direct rule, little has been done to tackle the legacy of under-investment in infrastructure, healthcare and our schools. In fact, in many cases the situation has worsened. In the last year Education and Library Boards have received significantly less funding, hurting the children whose futures we should be investing in.

The SDLP has pioneered the advantages of an all-island approach to issues such as infrastructure, economy, health and education. The recently published National Development Plan provides further detail of the benefits of a co-ordinated approach. The NDP sets out a major proposed framework for all-island co-operation with significant Irish Government investment in North/South projects and initiatives for the mutual benefit of all on the island. Many of the initiatives announced in the NDP reflect policies from our North South Makes Sense campaign – a result of our intensive lobbying of Government Ministers and Oireachtas committees.

For four and a half years the population of Northern Ireland has been living in the limbo of direct rule. This has meant that a new Executive will face many immediate challenges such as investment in infrastructure and people, ensuring sustainable governance and meeting our commitments on climate change. The SDLP is committed to securing better services not only for today's generation but also for future generations. We want to reverse the years of decline by reshaping government and rebuilding public services; investing in a future that we all deserve.

SDLP Goals: Social Partnership Approach

- Ensure that an **integrated approach** is adopted with regard to the implementation of **cross-cutting strategies**.
- **Reshape the Programme for Government**, working with **businesses, trade unions** and the **voluntary sector** on a basis of real social partnership to agree a five year programme of priorities for Government for the people of the region.
- **Reform** the role and **broaden membership of the Strategic Investment Board** to include unions and voluntary sector groups to ensure longer-term, robust decision making.
- Work to ensure that **services currently dependent on EU funds**, that reflect the priorities agreed by social partners, are in future supported by **new mainstream recurrent expenditure**.
- **Pool transferable benefits** that have been acquired through civil service and elected representatives' travel and redistribute them to charities (e.g. air miles).

Reforming Government

- **Spend less on bureaucracy and more on front line services** (roads, nurses, schools etc.) The SDLP has proposals to introduce the permanent scrutiny of government performance in meeting set targets, and government spending on department's running costs rather than on services. The SDLP will strive to improve public accountability, transparency and efficiency throughout government.

- **Legislate to require decentralisation** of government functions and agencies including at least 2,000 jobs to towns across the North within the next 5 years, targeting areas of high unemployment in order to secure balanced regional development (see also Regional Development section).
- **Utilise the leverage of government spending** through criteria for awarding government contracts, to achieve equality and environmental targets as well as economic regeneration.

Local Government Reform

- **Secure a legal requirement for power-sharing**, ensuring cross community protection in representation and decision making.
- **Continue to oppose the seven council model** announced in the Review of Public Administration. The proposed structures will lead to the creation of super-councils that have an insufficient rates base to sustain them. The SDLP will work to secure a model that ensures effective local representation, value for money, equality of opportunity and quality services for rate payers.
- **Reform the delivery of public services**, creating opportunities for local ownership and delivery. For example, councils, voluntary bodies or new partnerships could be invited to bid for central government funds to deliver services locally.

Investing in Public Services & Infrastructure

- Reconfigure the **Strategic Investment Board** (see also Social Partnership) to enhance the professional expertise available in considering funding options for all public-led investment projects.
- **Release under-utilised public land and assets** and secure the further release of military bases to generate economic and social dividends for the whole community.
- Establish new **'not for profit'** models for investment in the development of better public services.
- Following the launch of the NDP ensure that a number of **all-island funds** are created including:
 - **Strategic Capital Funds** to support infrastructure and capital spending. Our proposals would require each jurisdiction to contribute to dedicated North-South funds for part of such spending, taking account of regional imbalance. The funds would be deployed through joint planning and spending to achieve shared benefits. The funds would be similar to the Executive Programme Fund, but on an island-wide basis.
 - **Services, Community & Enterprise Funds** for programmes and services rather than capital investment which will help counter the decline in European funding.
- Promote greater co-operation and information exchange between the Comptrollers and Auditors general on the island, with a view to public services in each jurisdiction given the similarity of challenges faced in delivering efficiency in services North and South.

Revenue Regulator

People are rightly aggrieved by the big rates increases imposed in recent years and the impact of water charges to come.

Ratepayers – both householders and businesses – have cause to worry about even more excessive demands being made on them in the future.

- The Treasury will be pressing the Assembly for higher rates and will put the squeeze on reliefs including the “affordability tariff” introduced for water.
- The RPA's purported savings are unlikely to be realised, the new councils might not get the extra resources to match their new responsibilities and some councils will have much weaker rates bases all adding up to “Super-Rates Bills” from the Super-Councils.
- The Policing Precept is designed to impose another band of rates on top of everything else.
- Future revaluations could be used to hugely increase the rates yield rather than just redistribute the existing burden.

The SDLP promises to guard against all these factors in the Assembly, the Executive and in Councils. But we are also offering strong, long-term protection of ratepayers' interests in the form of a **Revenue Regulator**.

This independent office would be a **watchdog against excessive rates increases** and other charges being **levied on householders and businesses**. It would effectively have **“stop and search” powers** on plans and actions by **regional and central government** that are imposing costs on ratepayers. It will have power to investigate and cap not just specific charges by the Assembly, departments or Councils but their cumulative impact on households and businesses.

In the role of **“Payers' Champion”** this office would work with the Consumer Council to ensure that people are only asked for a fair contribution for good services. It would also work with the Audit Office

- to encourage **cost restraint** within **local and regional government**;
- to **improve transparency** and **reliability of estimates with rates** or other revenue implications; and
- to **ensure justification for any revenue demands** or other charges by regional or local government.

The SDLP proposes that this office will also review the **equity and efficacy of relief measures**.

As an independent office it would **prepare reports** for the **Assembly** including one during the budget cycle. In order to give Assembly weight to its work we envisage the office engaging with a dedicated Assembly Committee modelled on the Public Accounts Committee or, given its close work with the Audit Office, the PAC itself.

Policing Precept

The SDLP is **opposed** to the **introduction of a policing precept** and would fully expect central government to continue to meet its obligations to cover the costs of implementing the Patten reforms, which are so central to political progress and the future stability of Northern Ireland. The SDLP stress that a **key issue in the devolution in justice and policing** will be the **adequacy of the budget transfer from the NIO to the Assembly**. The Treasury will try to short-change Northern Ireland and force the Assembly to levy a heavy policing precept on the rates. The SDLP has been the most vocal party against this future risk to ratepayers.

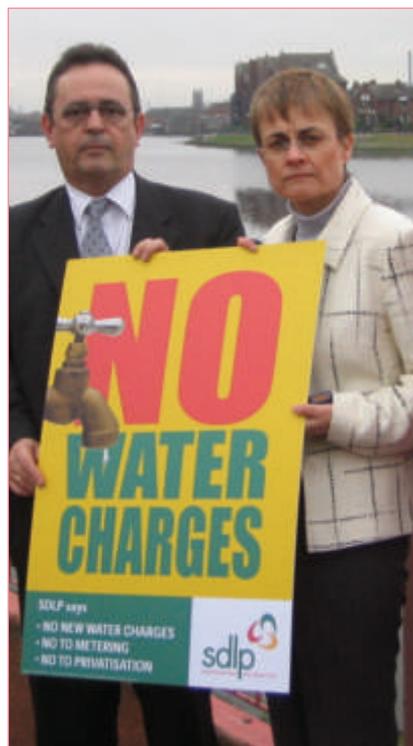
Water

The failure of other parties to agree has allowed direct rulers the opportunity to push through the Treasury agenda of introducing water charges. The SDLP has been **consistent** in its **opposition to new water charges** as we already pay for water through our rates and we should not be forced to pay twice. In the short term we will do what we can to reverse the damage that this legislation has caused and the way that this new company has been established. Such an obligation would require the same commitment and clarity from other parties. In the long term the SDLP will mitigate against privatisation of our Water Service.

- Within the next Assembly **scrutinise and review the water reform process** in terms of **fairness, affordability and sustainability**, with a view to legislating for restoration of the transparent link between rates and water, for which the Barnett formula does not make provision;

- **Oppose any plans to privatise the water service;**
- **Modernise the water service and improve water quality;**
- Review other options for the status and **structure of the Water Service** including mutualisation;
- Upgrade the **sewage system to meet EU** and modern environmental standards; and
- Develop a **modern and streamlined procurement process** for all major capital and structural maintenance contracts in order to ensure increased accountability and transparency, providing better value for the public.

THE SDLP WILL CONTINUE TO OPPOSE SEPARATE WATER CHARGES AND WILL RESIST PRESSURES FOR PRIVATISATION OF THE WATER SERVICE



Rates

The SDLP has clear concerns about the new rating system and in the Assembly will work to secure:

- A **fairer system** which is based on **ability to pay;**
- **Provide relief for students** in the form of **student financial support** packages rather than provide relief to landlords;
- Lobby for **extra finances for the support package for older people** with particular attention to single pensioner households;
- The **extension of transitional relief** beyond the three years if the rating system has not been reviewed by then;
- **Disability relief** that is **not dependent on home adaptations;**
- A **revenue regulator** to act as a **'ratepayer's champion** (see above);
- A **transparency mechanism to monitor where savings are being achieved** e.g. the Audit Office overseeing the Review of Public Administration; and
- Create **two high-powered Assembly committees** styled on the cross-cutting Public Accounts Committee. One to challenge departments on the cost of **governmental administrative expenditure** and one to focus on **policy delivery and performance.**

Delivering Quality Healthcare



The Review of Public Administration is a big challenge to Northern Ireland's public services and throughout the review speculation and expectation have been high. This provides an opportunity to reshape Northern Ireland's public services in the best interests of the patient.

We must ensure that the 5 Health Trusts relate effectively to the relevant council areas and we must ensure that all service users have equal access to their appropriate trust. It is evident that mixing public and private health care undermines the National Health Service. Everyone has a right to the best health care under the National Health Service. While people have the right to choose private health care we must ensure that it is not at the expense of the NHS.

The SDLP is committed to a well-resourced National Health Service, with excellent and efficient healthcare, delivered free at the point of need without reference to ability to pay. It is imperative that the RPA delivers organisational change that will improve the quality and speed of patients' care. The benefits of better organisation in our hospitals could be seen most clearly in more available beds, more efficient A&E departments and more appropriate staff in frontline services.

Within an island of 6 million people it makes sense to share expertise and equipment. The SDLP is committed to improved cross border arrangements regarding acute hospitals and GP out of hours services.

SDLP Goals: Investment

- The SDLP is committed to ensuring a **well-resourced health service** where money is spent more efficiently and effectively.
- Dedicate additional resources into prevention and treatment of **cancer, heart disease, stroke and respiratory disease**, among the largest causes of mortality in Northern Ireland.

Review of Public Administration

- Use the **RPA to cut bureaucracy** and ensure that all savings are directed to front line services and tackling waiting lists.

Waiting Lists

- Priority must be given to **cutting waiting lists**. We need firm limits for waiting times in every speciality with investment in diagnostic equipment and staff.

Health Promotion

- The SDLP views a **positive health agenda** as key to reducing demand on our health service. We need to tackle challenging lifestyles by encouraging people to adopt healthier lifestyle choices e.g. stop smoking, reduce alcohol consumption, eat a better diet and exercise more. We support groups like the Healthy Living Centres who are getting this message through to hard to reach groups in the community.

Health Inequalities

The SDLP acknowledges that our health is affected by a series of wider determinants such as environment, education and poverty.

- Improve the health of those worst-off in society by **widening access to services** in schools, workplaces and the community.
- **Co-ordinate approaches** from the Department of Health Social Services & Public Safety and the Office of First Minister & Deputy First Minister and other relevant departments to ensure action on **anti-poverty measures** that will help reduce health inequalities.
- Support **community development approaches** and professional networks involving people working in nursing, environmental health and health promotion north and south of the border that will meet local health needs, improve people's health and tackle health inequalities.

Primary Care

- Over 90% of the care we receive is delivered at primary level in the community through GPs and other allied professionals. The SDLP will work to secure a **well-resourced primary care-led service** delivered through real partnership between GPs and other health workers in order to reduce demands on acute services.

Hospitals

- Co-ordinated strategy that will enable **hospital staff and other health care** workers to work in an environment **free from fear of attack**.
- Recruit and retain staff as required and encourage **modern, flexible work practices** that will keep personnel working in the NHS.
- Provide **additional care packages**, step down care and the expansion of rehabilitation services to ensure that people regain their independence after a hospital stay.
- Better management and simple changes in working practice to ensure major **improvements in bed availability** by tackling inappropriate admissions, and poor anticipation of need e.g. in a winter crisis.

Healthcare Acquired Infection

It is totally unacceptable that vulnerable ill people go into hospital with the hope of getting better, but pick up a preventable infectious disease that contributes to further ill health.

- Improve **basic hygiene and cleaning standards** which will be **constantly monitored**.
- Provide **highly visible hand washing facilities** on hospital wards for patients, staff and visitors.
- Integrate **hygiene and cleaning services back into hospital management** and explore new ways of fighting healthcare-acquired infection such as MRSA.
- Even though the occupancy bed turnover is increasing rapidly there needs to be **strict adherence to hygiene standards**.

Access to Services

- Principles of equality and rural proofing must be adhered to so local hospitals across the North will deliver consistently high quality health care. In all **rural areas it is essential to have the retention of the ability to assess trauma** patients and stabilise them before they are safely transported to the trauma centre.
- Given the poor road infrastructure in some rural areas it is vital to have a fully resourced **ambulance service with adequate paramedic and technician provision**.
- Ensure the **delivery of services for at risk, hard to reach and isolated groups and communities** e.g. the delivery of tailored men's health programmes. Primary care services are especially important in rural areas from the GP service to the community groups e.g. NI Rural Women's Network.
- Ensure that **local needs are addressed** while **providing consistently high quality care**. It is unacceptable that certain treatments and clinical drugs are available in some trust areas and not in others.
- **Wider access to National Health Service dentistry in all areas** and increased training places for dental hygienists and nurses as well as an improved working environment for dental care staff in the NHS.

Mental Health

The SDLP believes that good mental health is imperative to an individual's general well being.

- Provide the necessary **funds to implement in full** the recommendations of the **Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disabilities and the Suicide Prevention Strategy**, addressing the chronic lack of child and adult mental health services as a matter of urgency
- Advance **island wide co-operation in mental health services** providing better services for adult and child psychiatry.
- Develop an all-Ireland approach, which would include an **all Ireland Forum on Mental Health**, to suicide prevention, co-ordinating approaches and resources to reduce the alarming number of suicides on the island.

Nursing and Personal Care for Older People

Older people should receive high quality health care and support which should be free at the point of use.

- During devolution the SDLP secured funds to introduce free nursing care; the SDLP continues to **support the Royal Commission proposals on free personal care** and will continue to work towards this goal.

'The SDLP is committed to a well-resourced National Health Service, with excellent and efficient healthcare, delivered free at the point of need.'

Access to Clinically Effective Drugs

- Work to **ensure access to clinically effective drugs** (when appropriate) that enhance quality of life, particularly in relation to conditions such as **Alzheimer's disease, Arthritis and Multiple Sclerosis**.
- Develop a **strategy for these conditions** so people with these illnesses can identify the key elements that they should be able to expect from their health service.

Valuing Carers

- Increased support for **carers with greater access to advocacy** and information services
- Access to **suitable respite provision** for the individual being cared for.
- Provision of services that **promote good health** and reduce the negative impact of caring on carers' health.

Disability

- Provide a co-ordinated **cross departmental approach** so that people with physical and mental health issues have all the resources they require to lead a full and satisfying life.

Autism

The SDLP believes that early intervention and early diagnosis is key in dealing with this developmental disability.

- Ensure that a **comprehensive cross-departmental strategy** is implemented to secure the security and human rights of people with autism.

Tackling Drug and Alcohol Addiction

Increasing usage of alcohol and drug addiction cause major problems for our society.

- Secure **additional resources** for the implementation of the **Drug and Alcohol strategies** and adequately resource public awareness campaigns on binge drinking.

Delivering Quality Education for All



The present time is one of uncertainty in which politics and political bargaining are threatening to take priority over our children's future. The SDLP supports positive education reforms but will protect schools and communities from arbitrary school closures. The education system is under immense pressure with declining pupil numbers and post primary arrangements.

The SDLP views a high quality education as a human right. Schools should be allowed to retain their ethos, whether that be state, integrated or faith-based and the SDLP supports the right of parents to choose what environment their child is educated within.

We want to deliver an agenda for progress which is transparent and gives confidence to parents and teachers about the shape of the post-primary education system. We brought this debate to the heart of Westminster.

The SDLP has a proven track record on education. Our engagement with teachers unions and parents associations has given voice to those most informed about the pressures and potential for progress in today's education system.

SDLP Goals: Education Reform

- **Implement** the findings of the **Costello Report** affording all children the right to unrestrained access to wide ranging education and not be stigmatised by early experiences of rejection.
- **Invest in educational reforms** that will develop well-balanced and highly skilled citizens of the future.
- **Ensure the end of academic selection by opposing** efforts to use new **pupil profiles and Computer Adaptive Testing as academic selection by the back door** and ensure profiles are designed to achieve their objective to help parents make an informed decision about their child's educational future.
- **Develop all-ability, co-educational school system** based on the availability of a common curriculum and a wide spectrum of choice suited to each pupil's particular needs.
- **Replace A-Levels with a broader Post-16 curriculum** that would offer all young people wider career options and life pathway choices.
- **Develop an agreed future Sustainable Schools' Policy** through collaboration between the Minister for Education and education providers, which serves the community and upholds parental choice with attention to the Bain Independent Strategic Review of Education.
- **Invest in a safe and comprehensive school transport system** that will provide for equal rights to 'home to school transport' for all pupils particularly those in rural areas.

Acknowledging Special Needs

- **Ensure effective implementation** of the Special Educational Needs Order to enable children with a disability to attend mainstream secondary, primary and pre-schools if desired.
- **Oppose cuts in education spending** that would see a reduction in funding for SEN services rather than an increase as experienced in England and Wales. The bureaucracy involved in securing SEN should be cut, not the funding of services.
- **Support the development of increased teacher-training and classroom support** in mainstream schools to ensure that the enrolment of children with a disability **works in the** interests of child, teacher and other pupils.
- **Support the introduction of an Autism Act for Northern Ireland** to help ensure that children with autism spectrum disorders receive the services they need throughout life. Also, advance the opening of the Centre of Excellence for Autism at Middletown in County Armagh.
- **Invest in improved services for young adults with learning disabilities** (post 19), to connect health and employment with training provision and making better use of existing facilities.

Investing in Early Years & Primary Education

- Invest in and develop **integrated early years care for 0-6 year olds** incorporating the complete range of services including breakfast clubs, educational provision, child care and after school clubs, 2 years funded pre-school access for those who need it and investment in Children's Centres as a means of tackling child poverty and disadvantage.
- Implement the **Foundation Stage Primary Curriculum and the Play Policy for Northern Ireland** alongside a strategy to create physical environments for young children which meets their developmental needs.
- Invest in the **training, registration and professional development** of the workforce dealing with early years provision through the delivery of a Transformation Fund emphasising recruitment and working conditions so as to overcome low levels of pay.
- Develop an **effective literacy strategy** through promotion of a structured language framework based on the model describing knowledge, understandings and skills appropriate at each year from Primary 1 to Year 10.
- Promote plans to explore the possibility of introducing **modern languages at primary school** and devise a coherent language strategy to prepare our children for full participation in a global economy of the future.

- Ensure the effective implementation of a schools' policy to support **ethnic-minority children** who have English as an additional language to ensure that all children reach their full developmental potential.

Irish Medium Education

- Build on commitments in the Good Friday Agreement to Irish Medium (IM) Education through the establishment of a **10 year development fund**.
- Increase funding for the Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta to support parents to develop IM Education through preschool, **primary and post-primary education**.
- Ensure oversight and delivery of the 10 year plan to establish a network of Irish Medium post-primary provision in key locations initiative by the establishment of an IM satellite of Coláiste Feirste in Cookstown.

Citizenship

- Support the **Young Enterprise Fund** designed to strengthen links between schools and businesses to work with schools in devising an active citizenship programme that will complement the citizenship curriculum.
- Build on the success of existing schemes, to promote an awareness of **social responsibility, participation** and the beneficial use of leisure time among young people.
- Include **personal budgeting, financial awareness & consumer rights** within the citizenship agenda.

Supporting the profession, managing change

- Invest in support for teachers, prioritising health and well-being issues for our teaching professionals through effective implementation of the Curran Report Part II proposals for improved working conditions.
- Secure **fair pay for teaching professionals** by restoring pay parity with England and Wales and seek the inclusion of Northern Ireland in the terms of the legislation protecting teachers in cases of false allegations.
- Increase funding to colleges in the North to teach and examine the Irish language teaching qualification to **remove barriers to the movement of teachers** between the North and the South of Ireland.
- Develop a **cross-border General Teaching Council** to develop a coherent approach to teacher qualifications, superannuation entitlements and the movement of trained professionals between jurisdictions.
- Ensure that change is managed in partnership with teachers, parents and governors, supported by the development of a **North-South Consortium** to deliver a coherent and integrated approach to School, Youth and Teacher exchanges.

Delivering Economic Growth & Jobs



The island of Ireland must recognise and react to the challenges presented by globalisation. In the North there has been a legacy of underinvestment in our infrastructure and we have become too reliant on the public sector. It is imperative that the Assembly address the direct rule era of neglect and develop local solutions that will attract foreign direct investment, promote private sector growth and value the work of small to medium sized businesses.

The Comprehensive Study on an all-Island economy and the National Development Plan demonstrate how North-South collaboration can produce benefits for all people on the Island of Ireland. The SDLP has embraced this vision and has developed policies that will enhance the competitiveness and growth of economies North and South. The NDP offers unprecedented opportunities in terms of co-operation on infrastructure improvements, research & development and innovation “these projects and initiatives will benefit the entire island of Ireland ...they will benefit the entire community in Northern Ireland on the basis of sound economic principles and equality”². The SDLP will work to create the political stability that is required to make Northern Ireland an attractive place to invest in.

“SDLP economic plan may cure North's malaise. The document's range of vision is unprecedented.”

Marc Coleman, Economics Editor, Irish Times, 13 February 2006, following the launch of 'North South Makes Sense'

SDLP Goals: Economy

- Continue to press for a **single all-Ireland corporation tax regime at 12.5%**.
- Place a **cap on industrial rates** with a menu of **reliefs or exemptions** to take into account areas of high unemployment.
- Establish **targets for economic growth, job creation and all-Ireland business co-operation** and resource a proper strategy to achieve this.
- Establish an **all-Ireland economic policy unit** under the auspices of the North-South Ministerial Council.
- Develop a **North-South strategy to maximise overseas investment**.
- Create a new **“Enterprise Growth Fund”** comprising a loan fund and equity fund to work together to increase the number of business start ups, promote social economy enterprises and also to enhance the all-island business co-operation model.
- Implement IBEC-CBI Joint Business Council's 20 key actions for economic co-operation and international business.
- Extend the brief of **InterTradelreland** to include the development of overseas investment opportunities. InterTradelreland has successfully pioneered innovative programmes such as Fusion and Expertise Ireland which have created trade and business development networks across the island. InterTradelreland together with Invest Northern Ireland and the IDA, should develop a common strategy to attract investment from overseas, promoting the island as a whole and working with individual companies to tailor specific packages to help them take advantage of separate and shared strengths of the different regimes North and South.
- Establish a **Cross-Border Economic Development Zone** to promote development in the Border, Midland and Western Region and the western counties of Northern Ireland.
- Work with Enterprise Agencies with a view to **increasing measures to enable those from low income backgrounds** with sound business proposals **to become self employed** (see also Employment & Learning).

² National Development Plan 2007-2013 Transforming Ireland a Better Quality of Life for All

Research & Development

- Establish an **all-Ireland research fund** to develop capacity in target sectors and help maximise the commercial potential of research as quickly as possible. Linking Higher Education institutions with business to provide a 'mix and match' service.
- Commission **economic research bodies North and South** to work together to produce proposals for further all-Ireland co-operation and development in social and economic policy.
- Seek a **new tax relief** and rate relief on an offset basis against spending on Research & Development

Communications

- **Eliminate broadband blackspots** that still exist throughout rural areas in the North. Unlimited availability of broadband is essential if rural areas are to become viable locations for competitive businesses. Telecommunications should be developed on an all-Island basis in line with priorities set out in the NDP. (See also Rural Development).

- Support **competition to bring down the price of broadband.**
- Create **broadband capability of 8Mbps across the North** and develop a very high speed communications infrastructure to encourage inward investment, particularly from the financial services sector.
- Continue to work with governments, regulators and operators to secure standard and **affordable national rates for mobile phone calls whether they cross the border or not.**

Tourism

Tourism Ireland has successfully marketed the island of Ireland abroad resulting in a 7% increase in visitor numbers despite an adverse global environment.

- Build on the success of Tourism Ireland by facilitating **greater co-operation between Tourist Boards North and South** developing practical approaches such as the integration of websites, such benefits would include an **all-Island accommodation booking system.**
- **Enhance the tourism marketing budget** to maximise tourism potential of the island.
- Greater **cross-border co-operation to attract world-class events** such as the World Rally Championship.

Biotechnology

- We are committed to fully exploiting the considerable potential that currently lies untapped within universities and the health service. We believe that biotechnology can offer one of the best areas for potential growth and there needs to be initial financial **pump-priming of biotechnology** opportunities. The SDLP in government would establish a **biotechnology council** to drive this agenda forward.

Small Medium Sized Business

- Work to ensure that **labour law** policy takes into account the particular **needs of small and medium sized businesses** and that clear guidance is provided for employers.
- Include **entrepreneurial skills** in the school curriculum.
- Increase provision of **workplace based training packages** particularly to target skills deficits and up-skill the existing workforce.

Delivering Investment in Workers & Skills



Many SDLP gains during devolution in the area of employment and skills have been eroded since the return to direct rule. During the lifetime of the Assembly, SDLP Ministers delivered innovative policies aimed at tackling unemployment, improving essential skills, providing free courses at Further Education colleges as well as providing improved financial support including the reintroduction of grants for third level students. Evidence shows that many school leavers are being deterred from entering third level education by fears of significant debt following the introduction of top-up fees.

The SDLP views employment as a key route out of poverty which is why we must develop affordable and sustainable childcare policies that will allow many economically inactive people to return to the workplace.

We will work to ensure that adult education acts as a means of personal fulfillment, as well as a way of addressing skills needs. The SDLP will continue to work to attract high-value jobs in particular. We must learn from the economic successes of the South and match investment plans, particularly in the areas of research and development.

SDLP Goals: Protecting Workers

- Campaign for a **Regional Pension Protection Fund** to address the needs of those whose employers may not have sufficient reserves putting them at risk of poverty in the future due to insufficient pension provision.
- Ensure **dedicated funding** to implement the recommendations and targets of the new **Anti-Poverty strategy**, particularly in the area of childcare, and focusing on lone parents and areas of greatest need. The SDLP will fight to protect the Right to Work of everyone equally.
- Deliver a **cross-departmental strategy to augment protection and awareness of the rights of Migrant Workers**, as outlined by the Human Rights Commission in the recent 'Migrant Workers Advice Guide.'
- Campaign for the UK government to sign the **UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers**.
- Remove tax barriers imposed on cross-border workers – those living on one side of the border and working on the other – including implementing the recommendations on the Study of Obstacles to Mobility.

Employability and Tackling Unemployment

- Deliver **programmes** to match the **skills of the unemployed and economically inactive** to the needs of the **flourishing economy**.
- Continue the progress made on overcoming the barriers to employment, using innovative strategic measures under the guidance of the **Taskforce on Employability and Long-Term unemployment**.

Adult Illiteracy and Innumeracy

- Raise awareness of the many successful and effective programmes run in Adult Education, and work to **remove the stigma attached to adult illiteracy**, to encourage high take-up and contribute to breaking the poverty cycle.
- **Eradicate** adult illiteracy and innumeracy by 2015 through a properly funded essential skills programme.

Student Support

- Secure an **independent review** into the system of **tuition fees** and its impact on student numbers.
- Secure an additional **Core Funding Package** to widen access to education for families on low incomes. The SDLP is committed to respecting the Right to Education in this way.
- Dedicate specific **extra funding for mature students, students with disabilities and students with dependents**.
- Continue to **oppose tuition top-up fees, and while they are still enforced, campaign for a ten-year cap**. In the past year alone, there has been a 16.7% drop in applications for third level education. This is over twice the decline experienced in England.
- Introduce **Career Development Loans** in the North.
- Lobby for the removal of the **upper age limit on student loans** to ensure that lifelong learning opportunities are extended to all.

Further Education

- Carefully **monitor** the new super-colleges on the **delivery of further and community education** to the local community.
- In light of the review of FE services, ensure **an effective delivery of those skills in demand from our economy**. Encourage efficient and effective cooperation between the six super-colleges, and other departments where necessary, to provide the highest level of education possible.
- Ensure proper funding for community **education programmes** particularly in areas of social disadvantage.
- Enable and **properly fund FE colleges**, to enhance students' educational experience through authentic, robust vocational experience.
- Encourage **efficient partnership among colleges**, business sector and voluntary sector groups to promote social inclusion and economic development and make FE services available to all.
- Develop greater flexibility for colleges to offer **e-learning**, currently only provided as an 'add-on' service for students already registered to attend classes in person.

- New arrangements put in place by the FE Review must still **acknowledge the vital social inclusion role of less vocational courses** and the fact that they can often be an important stepping stone towards courses providing job-skills.
- Ensure that schemes such as Invest NI's **Knowledge Transfer Programme** are made more accessible to local companies.
- Provide **FE lecturers** with parity of pay with school teachers.

Higher Education

- Establish an **all-Island Higher Education Outreach** programme mobilising expertise and experience to assist Higher Education in developing countries and to mutually benefit from shared experience.
- Build on the work of the Business Alliance to create an **all-Island Research Alliance** based on the Georgia Research Alliance to work with colleges and other institutions to operate a 'mix and match' service with businesses, maximising the economic potential of new research as quickly as possible.

- Encourage the Higher Education system and business to **maximise applications for the European Research Area and in the European Research Framework Programme**. Increased investment in technology is essential for our economic future.
- Promote greater **accountability in Higher Education institutions**, in terms of planning, development, policy, equity of access and transparency, in the context of respect for academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

Widening Horizons

- Acknowledge the **community sector as a valuable service provider** and grant mainstream funding on a multi-annual basis to promote long-term planning and sustainability.
- Fast-track moves to **end discriminatory rules restricting eligibility for key civil service posts** to UK nationals only.
- Compile a **comprehensive database of all training provision** to be made available to local training and employment agencies, schools and colleges.

Delivering Safer Communities



Communities in the North want the rule of law – and safer communities. That’s why the SDLP has been working on the Policing Board, District Policing Partnerships and Community Safety Partnerships.

And we are delivering Patten. As the Oversight Commissioner has said, there has been “excellent progress” in implementing Patten, with over 86% implemented in just year five of a ten year programme of change.

Achievements include:

- Collusion exposed - because the SDLP insisted that the Office of the Police Ombudsman have the power to investigate the past;
- Special Branch dismantled and replaced by police intelligence structures that “*meet the best practice requirements of any police force in the world*” according to the Oversight Commissioner;
- Progress to a more representative service – with Catholic levels in the regular police now over 21%, women accounting for over 1/3 of appointees and unprecedented numbers from minority ethnic communities applying to join; and
- “*More accountability than any police agency that I am aware of*” in the words of Kathy O’Toole, Patten Commission member.

While other parties delivered themselves on policing, the SDLP delivered Patten. But our work is not done – and more is to come. This is our agenda for law, justice and safety.

The Rule of Law

- The SDLP believes that everybody is equal before the law and that neither the state nor paramilitaries should be above the law.
- We will continue to demand that all parties and paramilitaries accept the rule of law.

“Unionists, loyalists and republicans should urgently support the effort the SDLP is making to force the British government to ensure the Police Ombudsman, the Human Rights Commission, the Policing Board and other arms of the oversight community are provided with the right and the means to hold the security service publicly to account just as rigorously as they do the PSNI.”

**Chris Ryder, Belfast Telegraph
17 January 2007**

Safer Communities and Criminal Justice

The SDLP will:

- Work for an **all-Ireland sex offenders register**.
- Support the **tagging of dangerous offenders and faster, tougher sanctions** for breach of licences.
- End **automatic 50% remission** for dangerous offenders.
- Seek greater use of **post release supervision and intermittent sentences** to reduce re-offending.
- Avoiding clogging prisons with fine defaulters through **supervised attendance orders**.

- Ensure that **suspended sentences and deferred sentences** can attach conditions requiring reparation to victims or other activity.
- Support **penalty notices for disorder**, with safeguards and bearing in mind the Scottish fine system.
- Ensure that police officers are better equipped with **investigation skills** so that prosecutions come to court and are upheld.
- Support best practice in **designing out** crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Favour **diversion over prosecution** for young offenders where appropriate.
- Support the availability of **properly regulated human rights compliant restorative justice** working with the criminal justice system.
- **Oppose partial or rough justice** through poorly regulated restorative justice schemes.
- Ensure a **multi-agency approach to anti-social behaviour**.
- **Review anti-social behaviour order** legislation to ensure that these orders are only used as a last resort, subject to proper safeguards, and following proper consultation with education and social services.
- Integrate the work of Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) into District Policing Partnerships (DPPs) and in the interim, seek **better coordination** between them.
- Seek an overarching **hate crime strategy** for the criminal justice system.
- Review the **prison establishment**, modernise the estate and seek a balanced workforce.

- Work to deliver proper facilities for **women prisoners and young offenders** and provide proper treatment of those with mental illnesses.
- Seek continued reform of **Forensic Science Northern Ireland** to ensure that it is fit for purpose.
- Campaign for **reasons to be given to victims when criminal charges are dropped or not brought** – as a rule, not an exception.
- Seek **new leadership of the Prosecution Service**, as the Criminal Justice Review envisaged.

Delivering Patten and better policing

The SDLP will:

- Continue to **get police officers out from behind their desks and onto the streets**. Closure of police stations that don't contribute to policing will help.
- Hold the police to all **targets against crime set by the Policing Board**.
- Ensure that the police meet local policing priorities through **District Policing Partnerships**.
- Lead the campaign against the **MI5 take over** of intelligence policing and for the Police Ombudsman to be able to investigate MI5 wrongdoing.
- Continue to push for **Garda secondments to the PSNI – as well as lateral entry**.
- **Oppose the use of plastic bullets** and will seek a safe, non-lethal alternative.
- Push for **vacated police and army sites to be returned to community use, building on Mark Durkan's Reinvestment and Reform Initiative**.

- Work for a **routinely unarmed police service** with emergency support units.
- Work to secure the long delayed **Police College** and support North/South training at it.

“The SDLP is to be congratulated for not taking a rejectionist approach and staying in there to work to see its vision of a balanced, credible and accountable new police service for Northern Ireland slowly bearing fruit.”

**Irish Echo Editorial
27 November 2002**

Devolving Justice

The SDLP will:

- Seek **devolution of justice** by the May 2008 deadline - if not sooner.
- Push for the British Government to **take away the DUP vetoes** on the devolution of justice conceded by Sinn Fein in the Comprehensive Agreement.
- Ensure **no reduction in the powers of the Policing Board and the Police Ombudsman**.
- Seek a **single new Department** to deal with both policing and justice issues.
- Seek a **new generation of North/South bodies** on justice including:
 - an **All-Ireland Criminal Assets Bureau**, with the powers of the Criminal Assets Bureau; and
 - an **All-Ireland Law Commission**.

Normalising the North

The SDLP believes that we are all entitled to a normal society. We welcome progress such as the dismantling of towers in South Armagh – but are impatient for more.

We will:

- Seek the repeal of **the permanent policing powers given to the British Army** in the Justice and Security Bill.
- Campaign for an end to the **“continuity Diplock Courts”** provided for in the Justice and Security Bill. The Criminal Justice Act 2003 already provides sufficient safeguards against juror intimidation.
- Work on the Policing Board to **close or defortify intrusive and militarised police stations**, building on progress already achieved and continue to deliver accessible and acceptable police stations.
- **Reduction in troop levels** to 5,000 and below.
- Ensure the **full implementation of Joint Declaration commitments on normalisation**.
- Oppose **British Government proposals for 90 day detention** without charge and also work for **increases of recent years to be reversed**.

“Not for the first time, in contrast to the near-silence from the Adams McGuinness team, it has been left to SDLP Leader Mark Durkan to voice civil libertarian criticism of the new Westminster justice and security bill. As it emerges that soldiers may stop, search and make arrests in Northern Ireland, unlike the rest of the UK, and that the Human Right Commission may investigate alleged abuse dating only from August of this year, Sinn Fein's willingness to take Tony Blair's word about MI5's accountability looks ever more feeble.”

**Fionnuala O'Connor Irish Times
Friday 9 February 2007**

Public Safety

Public safety initiatives are spread across a number of government departments and agencies. That has meant fragmentation – and lives being lost.

The SDLP wants to:

- Create an **all-Ireland Public Safety Body** to build on the successful collaboration on road safety advertising and education initiatives.
- Bring together all aspects of public safety under **one main government unit**.
- Implement and resource the strategies on **home accident prevention, workplace health and road safety**.

“The SDLP led the way in supporting policing, in reforming policing and in ensuring that the Patten Report is being implemented.

“There are people in the SDLP, including people in this room, who suffered intimidation and physical violence because they had the determination to do the right thing and to make a better life for their community. I salute their courage. They deserve our admiration.”

Taoiseach Bertie Ahern
31 January 2007

Road Safety

Over one hundred lives are lost each year on our roads. The SDLP wants to see this carnage stopped.

We seek:

- **Harmonise road safety measures on the island**, including the creation of an enforceable penalty points system to operate regardless of jurisdiction as well as greater co-operation on enforcement generally.
- Further **collaboration between the National Safety Council, the Road Safety Council and their respective government departments** particularly to address the high road traffic accident rates on border roads.
- A holistic approach to **road safety involving education, enforcement and road improvements**.
- Full implementation of the Northern Ireland **Road Safety Strategy**.
- Reduction of the acceptable **blood alcohol levels** for driving from 80mg/l to 50mg/l.
- Better highlighting of accident black spots.
- Increased **traffic calming measures** around schools, hospitals and residential areas.

Emergency Services

The SDLP wants to:

- Ensure that **rural areas are not disadvantaged** with regard to response times for accident and emergency services.
- Formalise and develop existing **co-operation between emergency services** north and south to ensure a rapid and co-ordinated response to save lives in the case of major accidents.
- Support the work of the Ambulance Service by ensuring that each ambulance control centre is staffed by **sufficient numbers of paramedics and technicians**
- Enforcement of legislation on licensees against under-age drinking, with more **spot checks**.
- Implementation of the **Drug and Alcohol strategy** and the recommendations of “**Reducing Alcohol Related Harm**”.

Delivering Affordable Quality Homes



During direct rule the cost of living has rapidly increased. The scheduled introduction of the new rating system and water charges will have dire consequences for many. Rising fuel costs mean that people who had previously been lifted out of poverty now face the prospect of re-entering it. In many parts of the North there is quite simply no affordable housing provision. Public housing stock is being sold but insufficient social housing new builds are completed each year to meet demand. While we welcome the Semple Review into affordable housing, it must be responded to with targeted interventions that will address the housing shortage.

The SDLP wants to deliver an enhanced poverty strategy that will also help those for whom returning to work is not a viable option. The SDLP is committed to developing effective and viable strategies to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland lives in a safe, warm and comfortable home. It is vital that we invest today in the sustainable development of homes for tomorrow.

SDLP Goals:

Improving Affordability

- Call for decisive **action and implementation by the government in response to any effective proposals** delivered by the **Semple Review** of Affordable Housing. Raising the level of new build social housing is the first key to dealing with the problem of housing affordability.
- Explore proposals for a **'use it or lose it'** policy on lands zoned for development. However this must be accompanied by enhanced service delivery from Planning Service and other statutory agencies.
- **Increase the upper threshold limit in the Co-ownership Scheme** to ensure that this option continues to be a viable strategy in the context of rising house prices.
- Tackle problems of affordability for first-time buyers through sharing the experience of programmes such as the **Affordable Housing Scheme**.
- Research **alternative models for improving housing affordability**. A restored Assembly would be in the best position to analyse demographic data.
- **Release more land** for social housing from the government land bank.
- Develop **greater powers for Credit Unions**, as investors in local social housing projects as is the practice in England and Wales.

Quality Homes

- Address the need for **sustainable 'Lifetime Home' standards** to be included in Building regulations so that planning powers can be exercised to guarantee improved quality and building standards, and greater attention to environmental priorities.
- Ensure that **building regulations for social housing developments include** the proviso that all new builds have the capacity to undergo renovation in the case of reduced mobility or disability, supported by the provision of grant aids for renovation of existing dwellings.
- Demand realistic **built-in benchmarks and rigorous oversight** of the government's aim to provide warm, safe homes for all by 2020.
- Tackle **fuel poverty to ensure that fuel payments** are improved to keep pace with ever increasing fuel costs.

Increase Housing Stock

- Develop a new **Housing Strategy** to address the urgent need for **social-living new builds**. The immediate need for increased investment means that a new strategy should be properly linked to the **Regional Development Strategy and planning policy**.
- Defend the right of the rural community to live in the countryside. The SDLP is committed to the **removal of PPS 14** and will ensure that it is replaced with a system that is fair to **rural communities** and that **cherishes the environment**.
- Increase the budget to provide for a **higher target of 2,000 additional new build dwellings** in the social rented stock per annum as well as sufficient planning to address the existing backlog of 2,000.
- **Address differentials** between the two main communities in waiting times for public housing, especially in urban areas.
- Tackle the shortage of construction workers on an all-Ireland basis by improving linkages between jurisdictions to facilitate **free and easy movement of skilled workers**.

- Address the issue of **sustainable rural development** in some of the most deprived border areas through North-South co-operation on initiatives at both local and departmental levels.
- Propose implementation of **Section 106** as used in England, making planning permission for large private developments conditional upon the allocation of 10-15% of the project to affordable housing.
- Implement proposed **procurement strategy for social housing** to allow smaller building firms and housing associations to continue to participate, for example, through supporting clusters of smaller companies.

Effective Administration

- Address need for **mixed housing stock** and well-resourced supported accommodation since owner occupation is not an option for everyone. Plus the need to support those who now own homes but are at risk of losing them due to financial difficulties.

- Guarantee **improved co-operation between the public and private sectors** that will produce plan-led development of high quality developments with timely and ample provision of water, sewerage, energy, communications and transport networks.
- Welcome transfer to the Housing Executive management of the Social Housing Development Programme and ensure that **sufficient resources are invested to produce an efficient and speedy transition**, allowing Housing Associations to make full use of their ability to channel substantial amounts of private finance into the development of good-quality, affordable social housing.
- **Reject government proposals under the RPA to transfer the “Supporting People” function from NIHE to Councils**. Supporting People should be run consistently across the North by those with relevant expertise.



- **Adjust the powers of the Planning Service under PPS 12** to allow the zoning of land to support housing developments of mixed tenure, size and type, thus implementing the Regional Development Strategy's aim of "mixed and balanced communities."
- Provide the **Housing Executive with first refusal on under utilised public land** for social housing before private developers.
- Revise the **insufficient and unfairly compiled housing growth indicators** through the Regional Development Strategy. Growth indicators must also be matched by the allocation of additional land.

Tackling Homelessness

- Ensure effective implementation of the **Promoting Social Inclusion** report on Homelessness.
- Make sure that the publication of the **Homelessness Strategy is a statutory** obligation for the Housing Executive and that the strategy is fully implemented by delivering the necessary co-operation and resources.

- Provide comprehensive **long-term social support on educational, financial and social issues** as a means of breaking the cycle leading to homelessness.
- Provide assistance under the Homelessness legislation that incorporates a **statutory right to review and right to appeal Housing Executive decisions.**
- **Enhance support for homeless teenagers and care-leavers.**

Private Rentals

- **Extend mandatory licensing** to raise living standards and landlord accountability.
- Protect **tenants of private landlords, through the introduction of a requirement to produce a written contract** with set minimum terms and a new scheme where deposits are held by an independent body.

Housing Benefit

- **Review the Housing Benefit system,** to prioritise fair rent levels and streamlined procedures for assessment, payment and review of claims.
- Secure adequate annual **finance to deliver the Supporting People Fund.**

Rental Arrears & Mortgage Debt

- Develop **new guidance for social landlords on rental arrears management** to require the publication of procedures and introduction of debt counselling to address problems quickly and prevent homelessness.
- Invest in independent agencies equipped to provide financial advice and devise a system to activate **timely support for those who find themselves in difficulties.**

Delivering Social Inclusion



The expanded aim of the Anti-Poverty Strategy to work to eradicate both poverty and social exclusion by 2020 is more progressive and comprehensive than previous proposals. The strategy fails, however, to acknowledge the need for a dedicated anti-poverty fund, a vital component that the SDLP has consistently called for. The current proposals have also failed to clearly map out an effective timetable of achievable benchmarks and oversight, which are essential to realising broader targets both interim and long-term.

The SDLP has successfully championed equality, social justice and economic rights for decades. We will continue to work towards the implementation of a more effective Anti-Poverty Strategy that can unleash the potential of all our people to contribute to the building of a prosperous economy and a fair and inclusive society.

Breaking down barriers to employment is not a viable route out of poverty for everyone. The SDLP is committed to improving social inclusion for all, particularly those most at risk: children, older people, people with disabilities and those living in rural and isolated homes. Party policy has long focused on the invaluable potential benefits of cross-border co-operation in the areas of reconciliation and social inclusion. The prioritisation of funding and development of social inclusion strategies within the National Development Plan is therefore greatly welcomed.

SDLP Goals: Tackling Poverty

- Demand further development of the **Anti-poverty Strategy** to ensure adequate **oversight** and the designation of **realistic targets** both interim and long term.
- Create a dedicated **fund to target social need** and support the Anti-Poverty Strategy, to underpin and act as a top-up fund for the 'skewing' of resources in individual departments towards areas of greatest social need.
- Support a **Ministerial-led cross-departmental forum** to oversee all aspects tackling poverty with a detailed remit stating the Forum's exact functions, operation, composition and powers.
- Develop **North-South cooperation** to promote social inclusion and eradicate poverty.
- Increase the **minimum income guarantee**.
- Ensure **coherence between intrinsically linked government strategies** on tackling social exclusion and poverty that need clear mapping of their shared objectives and common targets: Anti-Poverty Strategy, Investing for Health, Neighbourhood Renewal and Fuel Poverty.
- Ensure that **funding bodies are provided with all available research and deprivation indicators** that will allow them to target their resources at areas of need and promote consolidation of applications.

Reduce Barriers to Employment

- Extend the work of the **Taskforce on Employability and Long Term Unemployment** to tackle unemployment black-spots and address the issue of barriers to employment for people with disabilities.
- **Address the shortage of available, affordable and quality childcare** to allow parents to go back to work, particularly lone parents in areas of social need.
- **Give preference to government contractors** recruiting from the pool of **long-term unemployed**.
- Demand greater emphasis within government policy and the terms of the Anti-Poverty Strategy on the aim of **eliminating the unemployment differential** between the two communities by 2012.

Debt Management

- Introduce a centrally co-ordinated and well resourced debt advice plan to support **money and debt advice strategies** and make use of existing advice infrastructure and expertise.
- Co-operate with **CAB, Credit Unions** and others to put together the resources necessary to protect people from loan sharks and assist those with social debt problems.
- Establish a **Financial Services Authority** office in Northern Ireland.

Child Poverty

- Work to achieve the Northern Ireland-specific target to **eradicate Child Poverty by 2020** as stated in the Anti-poverty Strategy, with additional focus on extreme child poverty that often falls below the radar of government anti-poverty attainment levels.
- Increase **investment for the development of Children's Centres** in Northern Ireland at a rate that matches development in England.
- Call for the extension of a **centralised school meals reform plan** to Northern Ireland.

Older people, poverty & social inclusion

- Support the appointment of a **Commissioner for Older People**.
- **Increase the basic state pension** linked to a minimum income guarantee.
- Guarantee **mainstream funding for independent advice bodies** and voluntary sector bodies.
- **Reduce the age limit for free TV licence**.
- Work to secure **free personal care**.
- Support **voluntary and community organisations** working in partnership with older people so that policy is better informed and older peoples' needs met more effectively.

Fuel poverty

The eradication of fuel poverty is a vital element of the work to eliminate social exclusion and to achieve a sustainable future for all. People in warm homes are healthier, and children in warm homes are more likely to reach their full development potential. Developing an effective strategy against Fuel poverty will mean less strain on the health service and people will take fewer days off work through ill-health.

Work has been done to develop a viable strategy. The SDLP recognises that this is a cross department remit that involves not just DSD but also the Department of Health and by investing money in fuel poor homes will mean fewer people will suffer the physical effects of fuel poverty.

- Consolidate resources and authority within a coherent structure so that strategy and planning can **systematically target those most at risk**, particularly older people living in isolated rural communities.

- Commit additional **resources to provide energy efficiency solutions for fuel poor homes** in keeping with the targets set by the Fuel Poverty Strategy, to eradicate fuel poverty in vulnerable and fuel poor households by 2010 and in all households by 2016.
- **Broaden the Warm Homes** criteria so that those most vulnerable to fuel poverty can be assisted e.g. central heating to be made available to those who don't have an operational heating system.
- Work to formally establish **new building standards that act to prevent fuel poverty** through modern installations and energy efficiency improvements.
- **Incorporate renewable energy** as part of the fuel poverty solution.
- **Implement good practice models** from successful and productive local partnerships working together to eradicate fuel poverty at ground level.

Social Security and Tax Credits

- **Simplify and streamline benefit application procedures** and delivery.
- Make **effective use of technology** to reduce time-consuming form-filling.
- **Reform the Tax Credit system;** make award notices more readily understandable, call an amnesty on over-payments as a result of Inland Revenue errors, provide clearer guidelines on how people can challenge recovered over-payments and allow easy public access to information and support through Social Security offices.
- Remove the **age requirement for the DLA mobility provision** to enable parents of infants with a disability to seek support.
- Develop a more **user-friendly process for oral appeal hearings.**
- Offer greater assistance in completing forms to those applying for **Disability Living Allowance, Assistance Allowance or Incapacity Benefit.**
- **Increase the number of independent doctors** with the power to collect correct information at the outset of claims.
- Decrease **paperwork involved in the appeals process** so as to complete more speedily.
- **Improve the service to first-time applicants** so that, once contact is made with the system, all relevant benefits are identified and processed quickly and efficiently.
- Allocate **responsibility for Carers' Benefits to one senior member of staff** at each local office. This would allow flexibility to deal with benefits for dependants as well as benefits for carers themselves, and to make home visits to those unable to leave the house.
- Invest in and **support the work of the Citizens' Advice Bureau,** valuing their work tackling injustices and gaps in the system.

‘We will continue to work towards the implementation of a more effective Anti-Poverty Strategy that can unleash the potential of all our people.’

Delivering a Sustainable Environment



Climate change is one of the most serious long-term threats facing the world today. Evidence suggests that increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere contribute, at least in part, to climate change. Climate change will have serious, wide reaching effects on people, land, marine and wildlife. The Stern report has indicated that urgent action must be taken.

The SDLP is committed to taking action to reduce our carbon footprint so that we can avoid some of the worst effects of climate change.

We must have year-on-year environmental targets if we are to see meaningful change. That is why the SDLP will press for the annual publication of the 'State of the Environment' report. In a new Assembly the SDLP will advocate for resources and meaningful targets for the Sustainable Development Strategy and advance the introduction of an all-Ireland Environmental Protection Agency. The SDLP want to further develop North South co-operation on environmental issues that will benefit people on all parts of the island.

SDLP Goals:

Climate Change

- Introduce **stronger targets** and policies to meet international obligations with the aim of year on year reductions to reduce emissions to 20% below 1990 levels by 2010, with 3% reductions annually by 2050.
- **Promote renewable energy sources** including wind-power, tidal power and bio-mass.
- Build on the work of the Environment and Renewable Energy Fund by developing a **Renewable Energy Plan for Northern Ireland**.
- **Encourage micro-generation from renewable sources** by providing financial incentives such as rates rebates and fee free planning applications.
- **Encourage higher energy efficiency** and the integration of micro renewables in new and existing buildings.
- Plan for all **public transport bus stock to operate on bio-fuels and incentivise farmers to grow high energy crops locally**.
- Increase investment in public transport, encouraging the promotion and development of **sustainable transport routes** across the North (see also Regional Development section).

Environmental Protection

- The SDLP welcomes the Review of Environmental Governance and is committed to the establishment of an **All-Ireland Independent Environmental Protection Agency** to improve government and private sector accountability.
- Introduce marine legislation that will address the issues of **pollution and habitat protection**, legislate for a spatial planning strategy that will ensure the sustainability of our seas.
- Continue to campaign for the immediate cessation of reprocessing and **Mox production at the Sellafield site** and campaign for the earliest possible closure of the whole plant.
- **Increase penalties for polluters** who should be required to pay for the damage done, as well as pay for the restoration of the habitat to its prior condition.
- Call for all multi-national companies to commit to **'triple bottom line reporting'** which reports on environmental performance as well as business and financial performance in annual reports.

Halting Biodiversity Loss

- Work to ensure that all important wildlife sites in Northern Ireland are designated as **Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) by 2010**.
- Campaign for the provision of appropriate **resources** on improved management of important **wildlife sites**.
- Ensure staff capacity to improve the management and monitoring of ASSIs.

Waste management

- Develop a **waste management** strategy on the basis of **North-South co-operation**, to move away from landfill and maximise opportunities to 'reduce, reuse and recycle'.
- Establish a **real waste reduction target** to stabilise waste production.
- **Increase recycling targets**, with year-on-year reductions and widespread access to recycling facilities, ensuring that every household has access to a recycling bin or regular multi-material kerbside collections.
- Lobby for legislative change including **economic incentives to reduce, reuse and recycle**, an increased landfill tax, and landfill plans for specific materials.

- Secure an **all-Ireland approach to market recyclable material**, including exploring opportunities to advance the development of an all-Island tissue mill.
- Build on recent progress in terms of the new North-South Waste Enforcement network by:
 - securing effective enforcement powers North & South;
 - addressing the differential in the cost of landfill;
 - improving PSNI/Garda co-operation;
 - developing a waste disposal smart card system throughout Ireland; and
 - introducing tougher penalties to prevent illegal dumping.
- Examine the **health and environmental impact of energy recovery methods** including thermal processes as an option of last resort after opportunities for recycling and composting have been exhausted.
- Legislate for a **tax on plastic bags**.

GM Foods

- Continue to **oppose the development of GM crops** on the grounds of inadequate reassurance on the implications for health and the long term transfer of modified genes.

Education

- Widen children's knowledge and outlook by ensuring that **outdoor education** is included in **Citizenship classes** in the new curriculum.

Planning

- **Reform the planning system** to ensure a strategic, co-ordinated and design-led system.
- **Replace PPS 14** with a planning system that is fair to rural people and which cherishes the environment.
- **Improve the public consultation system** at an earlier stage to minimise formal disputes later and introduce a right of third party appeal for bona fide cases.
- **Improve enforcement of planning decisions** and increase penalties for breach.

'The SDLP is committed to taking action to reduce our carbon footprint so that we can avoid some of the worst effects of climate change.'

Delivering Balanced Regional Development



The failure of other parties to end suspension has allowed direct rule and the Treasury's agenda of water reform to proceed. Despite public opposition, unfair water charges are scheduled for introduction in April 2007. Public transport continues to be under-funded and as a result we have become a very car dependent society. Uncertainty continues to surround the future of the Belfast-Derry and the Belfast-Larne railway lines.

The SDLP views access to a sustainable transport system as essential not only for social inclusion but also to help meet our international obligations on carbon emissions.

It is imperative that investment is made in our public transport system to allow for long term planning that will meet future needs in a sustainable way. SDLP representatives have successfully lobbied for new trains to be used on the Belfast-Derry rail line. This has enabled passenger figures to increase by over 20%, demonstrating how viable these lines will be with significant capital investment. The SDLP is committed to delivering balanced regional development across the North.

SDLP Goals: Balanced Regional Development

- Within the next Assembly **legislate for decentralisation of government functions** and agencies including at least 2000 jobs to towns across the North, targeting areas with high unemployment. Enabling regional towns and rural areas to derive benefits from government led investment.
- Target areas of **under-developed infrastructure with enhanced support.**

Public Transport

- **Increase investment in public transport**, encouraging the promotion and development of sustainable transport routes across the North and linking new systems into existing and planned cross border networks.
- Plan for all **public transport bus stock** to be converted to operate on **bio-fuels.**
- Develop a **light rail system** for the **Belfast Metropolitan** area.
- Provide an **integrated, value for money public transport road and rail system within public, private, community and rural transport providers.**

- Increase **frequency of bus services** with additional bus stop facilities in rural areas.
- **Upgrade the Belfast-Dublin rail connection** to ensure a more frequent service that meets the needs of commuters.
- Secure **major capital investment for the Belfast-Derry rail line** to make certain that the line remains open for future generations, including consideration to dualling the line.
- Expand the **Rural Transport Fund** and the **Transport Programme for People with Disabilities** further to meet the needs of people who cannot access mainstream services.
- **Extend the concessionary fares scheme** to allow disabled and older people who cannot access existing public transport to use their concession on other transport services.
- Examine proposals to extend the use of **bus station facilities to private operators.**

Air & Sea

- Guarantee **air access to Heathrow airport** from the North.
- Develop a sustainable **aviation strategy** for the island.
- Support the **viability of trust ports** and introduce measures to give them **more commercial freedom.**

Infrastructure and Roads

- Develop a **new all-Ireland transport and infrastructure body** and develop a strategic development framework for economic corridors, Trans European Networks (TENS) as well as air and seaports (see also EU affairs).
- Expand **demand responsive transport initiatives**; particularly demand responsive services such as community taxis and rural rover bus services.

North-South

- Increased **co-operation between public transport providers**, to ensure improved services particularly in border areas.
- Explore opportunities for **cross-border co-operation on public transport development**, procurement and relevant grant aid.

Energy

- Ensure a **fully competitive all-island single electricity market**.
- Work to **reduce energy tariffs for domestic and business customers**.
- Promote **renewable energy sources** including **wind-power, tidal power and bio-mass**, particularly in areas beyond the reach of the natural gas network.

- **Extend the gas network** so that additional customers can benefit from an alternative source of energy.
- Advocate **recognition of the island of Ireland as a European Energy Zone** to assist in reducing costs, meeting targets, improving planning and ensuring better regulation of Energy suppliers.
- Increase support for energy efficiency measures with additional funding for efficiency programmes that target the vulnerable and people living in fuel poverty.

Water

The failure of other parties to agree has allowed direct rulers the opportunity to push through the Treasury agenda of introducing water charges. The SDLP has been **consistent** in its **opposition to new water charges** as we already pay for water through our rates and we should not be forced to pay twice. In the short term we will do what we can to reverse the damage that this legislation has caused and the way that this new company has been established. Such an obligation would require the same commitment and clarity from other parties. In the long term the SDLP will mitigate against privatisation of our Water Service.

- Within the next Assembly **scrutinise and review the water reform process** in terms of **fairness, affordability and sustainability**, with a view to legislating for restoration of the transparent link between rates and water, for which the Barnett formula does not make provision.
- **Oppose any plans to privatise the water service.**
- **Modernise the water service and improve water quality.**
- Review other options for the status and structure of the Water Service including mutualisation.
- Upgrade the **sewage system to meet EU** and modern environmental standards.
- Develop a **modern and streamlined procurement process** for all major capital and structural maintenance contracts in order to ensure increased accountability and transparency, providing better value for the public.

THE SDLP WILL CONTINUE TO OPPOSE SEPARATE WATER CHARGES AND WILL RESIST PRESSURES FOR PRIVATISATION OF THE WATER SERVICE

Delivering for Agricultural & Rural Communities



Over the past few years the farming community has faced unprecedented challenges. Globalisation, the Nitrates Directive, Cross Compliance and Single Farm payment regulations have brought many farms close to the limit of viability. We need local political intervention to ensure that the agricultural industry does not go the way of manufacturing and ship building industries here.

The recurring threat of avian influenza demonstrates the need for local ministers making decisions in the best interests of farmers in the North, just as Brid Rodgers did in the last Executive, taking firm control of decision making in order to prevent the devastation of a foot and mouth epidemic.

The SDLP is committed to fighting the farmers' corner ensuring sustained investment in agricultural initiatives and schemes over the period of the Comprehensive Spending Review. The SDLP will work to deliver for farmers by regenerating the rural community and develop sustainable farming communities.

SDLP Goals:

All-Island Strategy

- Develop an **all-island agriculture industry** involving sustained monitoring and dedicated resources.
- Complete an all-island **Animal Health Strategy** that focuses on an effective contingency plan and calls for co-operation on animal by-products, and improved monitoring of restricted herds.
- Establish a new **All-Ireland Food Marketing Body** to improve branding and food labelling of local produce intended for both the retail and food service sectors, and conduct a vigorous international marketing campaign capitalising on the green, clean image of Ireland.
- Tackle the issue of **beef exports** from Northern Ireland being stigmatised by international concerns about British beef owing to UK-wide food labelling practice.
- **Remove all cross-border trading impediments**, particularly those affecting the sheep sector.
- Develop an **All-Ireland strategy for the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy** to secure the future of the Irish fishing industry and communities.

A Fair Deal for Farmers

- Represent **local farmers** in the struggle to deal with EU and DARD bureaucracy.
- **Cut agricultural red tape** in line with EU promises, allowing a return to the day when farmers spend most of their time on the farm.
- **Simplification** of an unnecessarily complicated **sheep tagging system**.
- Prioritisation of the provision of **assistance to farmers** working to comply with the **EU Nitrates Directive**. Government grant aid must be increased to maximise EU grant income and achieve a Rural Development Programme on the scale necessary for Northern Ireland.
- **Review** immediately the effectiveness of **DARD advisory services**.
- **Secure entry to the Euro-zone** as a key priority in raising farm incomes and ensuring a competitive position for Irish farmers on the European market.
- **Promote the growth of co-operatives** between suppliers to large multiples. Such collaboration will enhance selling power.
- **Promote better use of ICT** to reduce paperwork.

Support Diversification

- Work for a **fairer rates relief package for agricultural properties**. Farmers should not be penalised for buildings necessary for diversification projects, cancelling out the rewards of hard work and innovation with heavy rates bills.
- Support farmers wishing to explore **diversification projects** and organic farming, and secure government grants and information services to encourage creativity and innovation.
- Continue increasing **tailored training opportunities for farmers**, as a means of promoting innovation, sharing skills and generating farming community networks.
- Develop a network of **cross-border agricultural liaison groups** in border regions which can benefit from shared learning exchanges and joint strategy development.
- Seek two year tax relief for **Biomass development** as introduced in the South of Ireland for rural projects and provide **incentives for farmers who grow energy crops** locally.

Investing in the Future

- Promote the formulation of an **Energy Procurement Policy** for Public Buildings that use local sources of renewable energy.
- Promote the capacity of rural and farming communities to lead the way in the **development of renewable energies** such as biomass by providing capital and support for such innovation.
- Work to deliver funding that will enable farmers to dispose of **plastic silage wrap free of charge** at local Council amenity sites.

- **Oppose the development of GM crops** on the grounds of inadequate reassurance and research on the implications for health and the impact of long-term transfer of modified genes.
- **Reform planning policy** to enable **development of rural businesses** such as agri-tourism on farms and introduce 'brown-field' policies, which would enable replacement of run-down agricultural buildings.
- Press for **higher relief barriers on inheritance tax**. Under the Conacre System tax relief on agricultural property is still at an unacceptably low level imposing large unavoidable penalties on the next generation of our rural communities.



Rural Development

The direct rule administration has failed in its pledge to become the champions of rural communities. Prohibitive planning legislation through the introduction of Planning Policy Statement 14 jeopardises the family and community way of life in rural areas. Ministers, who are not accountable locally, have failed to ensure meaningful rural proofing of all key policy decisions.

The SDLP is committed to developing effective joined-up government to address the issues that will deliver sustainable rural communities. We want to develop the opportunities announced in the National Development Plan to deliver a progressive approach that is necessary to sustain rural communities particularly in border areas. The SDLP will work to guarantee effective cross departmental working to ensure that the traditional rural way of life is protected and enhanced.



SDLP Goals:

Protecting Rural Communities

- Develop a cross cutting **Rural White Paper** to focus on the promotion of economic regeneration and social inclusion and strengthen the fabric of our rural society.
- Implement **'Rural Proofing'** that will ensure central government departments effectively monitor the impact of their policies on rural communities.
- Strongly **oppose government plans to close rural post offices** in the coming months. The post office acts as a rural hub providing the community with access to public services information, tourist information and the internet.
- **Oppose the direct rule moratorium on countryside development through unfair planning legislation PPS-14.** Replace PPS 14 with a system that is fair to rural communities and cherishes the environment.
- Develop a viable and **effective transport system for rural areas** that is demand responsive. Inadequate mobility and access to transport is a key contributing factor to social exclusion and poverty in our rural areas, particularly amongst the elderly, and country communities must have the same right to demand responsive transport services as their urban counterparts.
- Provide **sufficient funding for rural roads.**

Planning for the Future

- Development of an **all-Ireland strategy** aimed at optimising the potential for tourism **and recreational hubs in our rural areas.** Exploring possibilities for regeneration of the Ulster Canal as committed to in the NDP could provide a sustainable tourist hub that would benefit numerous rural communities.
- **Support** the good work of **existing rural community and voluntary organisations** who promote rural development through increased funding and facilities for groups by opening schools and community halls for their use.
- Promote **economic regeneration of the rural community** through investment in new innovation as well as continued support for ongoing good practice. Then optimise that innovation through extensive and effective marketing.
- Establishment of a **Rural Observatory** to support the role of the new National Rural Network. This will act as a cross-sectoral forum for academics, politicians and interest groups on rural issues to enhance and support rural development strategy formulation.
- **Eliminate broadband blackspots** that still exist throughout rural areas in the North. Unlimited availability of broadband is essential if rural areas are to become viable locations for competitive businesses. Telecommunications can be developed on an all-Island basis in line with priorities set out in the NDP.

Ag soláthar Acht Gaeilge

Tá an SDLP gníomhach ar son na Gaeilge agus ar son Acht speisialta leis an teanga a chaomhnú agus a chothú. Tá sé thar a bheith riachtanach go mbeidh an Acht bunaithe ar cheart Gaeilgí a dteanga a úsáid sa saol phoiblí gan bac gan deachracht.

Spriocanna an SDLP:

- Tacaíonn an SDLP le Acht Ghaeilge atá cuimsitheach, bunaithe ar chur chuige cheartasach a dhéanfaidh teanga oifigiúil den Ghaeilge agus a bhronnfaidh cearta fiúntacha ar chainteoirí na teanga i réimsí éagsúla – na hinstiúidí polaitiúla, an rialtas áitiúil, riar na córa, an tOideachas, agus na meáin chumarsáide ina measc.
 - Creideann an SDLP gurbh fhearr i bhfad dá gcuirfí an t-Acht bhfeidhm i Westminster toisc go bhfuil cumhachtaí ansin ar ghnéithe tábhachtacha den tsaol póiblí abhus, cúrsaí cánach agus craolachán ina measc, nach bhfuil údarás ag an Tionól orthu ach atá an-tábhachtach do chearta teangan an phobail ghaelaigh.
 - Gaelscoil iarbhunoideachais a bheadh ina saililit de Choláiste Feirste a bhunú ar an Chorr Chríochach mar chuid de ghreasán iarbhunoideachais in eochaircheantair ar fud an Tuaiscirt le linn na deich mbliana ata romhainn
 - Tógáil ar na comitintí a tugadh don ghaelscolaíocht i gComhaontú Aoine an Chéasta trí chiste forbartha deich mbliana a bhunú don ghaelscolaíocht a chinnteoidh:
 - Maoiniú leanúnach do Chomhairle na Gaelscolaíochta a thacóidh le tuismitheoirí an gaeilideachas a fhorbairt
 - Maoiniú do lontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta to ciste a bhunú le tacú le gaelscoileanna nua
 - Maoiniú le áiseanna a fhorbairt le tacú leis an Teidlíocht Oideachais a chur i bhfeidhm san earnáil ghaelscolaíochta
 - Maoiniú le haghaidh foirgnimh buan a chur ar fáil do naíscoileanna san earnáil Ghaeloideachais
 - Maoiniú le tacaíocht leanúnach a chur ar fáil d'fhorbairt na réamhscolaíochta san earnáil Ghaeloideachais
 - forbairt cúrsaí Gaeilge do bhunscoileanna Béarla
 - oiliúint inseirbhíse leanúnach do mhúinteoirí Gaeilge sna scoileanna sin
 - soláthar téacsleabhair, bogearraí, agus áiseanna ar line do na scoileanna ag foirstean do chumais agus aoiseanna na ndaltaí a bheas á n-úsáil
 - soláthar cuí do theagasc na Gaeilge mar ábhar do dhaltáí meánscoile a fuair a gcuid oideachais nó cuid de trí mheán na Gaeilge
- An Ghaeilge a bheith aiteanta sa Bhille Ceart
 - Níos mó maoinithe don chiste scannánaíochta agus teilifíse
 - Níos mó maoinithe d'Fhoras na Gaeilge a chuideoidh leis an teanga a fhorbairt ar fud na hÉireann
 - Glacadh uile-Éireann a bheith ag TG4 agus RTÉ agus a dhéanamh cinnte de go mbíonn rath ar an teanga sa ré dhigiteach

Delivering for the Irish Language



The SDLP has been at the forefront of the campaign for an Irish Language Act. We need carefully drafted legislation to protect the rights of Irish speakers. We will still be fighting to promote the rights of our Irish-speaking community long after it is written in law.

SDLP Goals:

- Support a **comprehensive Irish Language Act** founded on a rights based approach which will make Irish an official language and afford worthwhile rights to Irish speakers in various aspects of public life including: the political institutions, local government, the justice system, education, and the media.
- Demand the passing of an **Irish Language Act at Westminster** in order that reserved powers, such as broadcasting, will be fully covered by the Act.
- The establishment of an **Irish-Medium (IM) post-primary satellite of Coláiste Feirste in Cookstown** as part of a network of IM post-primary provision in key locations throughout the north over the next 10 years.
- Build on the commitments made in the Good Friday Agreement to IM education through the establishment of a 10-year development fund that will ensure:
 - continued funding for Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta to support parents to develop IME;
 - funding to allow Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta to set up a trust fund to support new IM education provision;
 - funding to develop resources to support the Educational Entitlement in IM post-primary provision;
 - funding to provide permanent premises for IM voluntary preschool provision;
- support for the continued development of IM preschool education;
- development of Irish language courses for use in English medium primary and secondary schools;
- ongoing inservice training in Irish language teaching methods for teachers in these schools;
- the provision of textbooks, software, and on-line resources suitable to the ages and abilities of pupils in those schools; and
- adequate measures for the teaching of Irish as a subject to secondary pupils who received some or all of their primary education through the medium of Irish.
- Ensure recognition for Irish in the Bill of Rights.
- Increase funding for the Irish Language Film and TV fund, to build on its impressive infancy and develop a durable institution to promote the Irish language.
- Secure increased funding to Foras na Gaeilge, to support an all-island approach to the promotion of the language and culture.
- Ensure all-Island coverage of RTÉ and TG4, and commit to ensure the Irish Language flourishes under the opportunities afforded by widespread digital TV uptake.

Delivering Arts & Leisure Opportunities



Under direct rule, culture, arts and leisure projects have not been provided with adequate support. The Arts Council receives significantly less money proportionately than those in England, Scotland and Wales and, consequently, has been limited in the support it can offer the sectors it serves and in the initiatives it can take.

The SDLP recognises that cultural and leisure activities have much to offer our society in its struggle for a shared future, with richly developed young people and a strong sense of community. An exploration of culture and the arts allows for learning through creativity and can be done so on a shared basis between communities.

We will develop all aspects of Irish cultural life, island-wide. We recognise that investment in leisure opportunities leads to improvements in lifestyle and diet, and as such merits government support. We have proved our capacity to negotiate this by successfully lobbying for increased funding to the Sports Council and the Northern Ireland Events Company.

SDLP Goals

Develop all-Island culture, arts & leisure strategies.

Arts

A thriving Arts landscape offers the chance to enrich and educate, to share and discover. Ireland has a proud artistic history, which we will respect and foster local talent.

Reverse direct rule funding cuts for the arts which have left the Arts Council with a substantially lower budget than its counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales.

- Develop a **cross-departmental strategy** linking all the relevant agencies in the development and promotion of community arts.
- **Support the Northern Ireland Theatre Initiative**, and its drive to create a regional theatre company.
- Encourage **greater investment in community-based arts schemes**, in recognition that the employment rate within the creative industries sector is growing faster than the UK average.
- Involve **young people in regeneration** of their own areas by developing relevant cultural schemes and strategically **harmonise development of the arts and development of community relations**.

Sport and Leisure Activities

- Equality and inclusion are at the core of our values, and we recognise the role sport and leisure have to play in making these our reality, as well as the valuable and sorely needed health benefits they offer.
- Ensure Northern Ireland is not excluded from the dividend of the 2012 London Olympic Games.
- **Invest in centres of sporting excellence**, modelled on those currently flourishing in Australia, to attract and develop athletes before and after the games.
- **Invest effectively in the promotion of sport and leisure** to offset future savings for the NHS that could be caused by high obesity levels.
- Recognise the potential for **leisure schemes as a tool against community division** and anti-social behaviour.
- Promote a **2 hour weekly minimum time allocation** on the school curriculum for **sport and physical education**.

Delivering Equality & Human Rights



The SDLP is committed to promoting equality and protecting human rights. Equality and Human Rights are not just slogans – they are a part of our founding philosophy. They remain as important under Mark Durkan as they were under John Hume.

A lot of promises were made in the Good Friday Agreement to protect rights that had been trampled on or ignored throughout the Troubles. But many of those promises have yet to be delivered. The SDLP is committed to making these rights a reality on the ground.

The Damage of Direct Rule

- Unjustifiable delay on the Single Equality Bill.
- Toothless strategy to tackle the fact that one in three children grow up in poverty.
- Go slow on action to tackle the unemployment differential.

SDLP Goals:

Promoting Equality

- **Deliver the Single Equality Bill**, to harmonise protection against discrimination upwards and guarantee equality for all groups.
- Impose **tougher penalties on persistent discriminators**, including exemplary damages.
- **Eliminate the differential in unemployment rates** between the two communities by 2012.
- Vigorously **oppose any dilution of fair employment monitoring** – a vital protection against sectarianism.
- Ensure that the British Government honours commitments to **end discriminatory rules restricting eligibility for key civil service posts** to UK nationals only.
- Help **eliminate the gap between men's and women's earnings by introducing equal pay audits**. We will minimise the burden on business by timing these with fair employment reviews.
- Address the shortcomings of the **Gender Equality Strategy** by **implementing positive action measures** and a well-resourced action plan.



- Ensure a **target of 40% women involved in public life** – we have met this with our candidates in this election.
 - Ensure **cross-departmental cooperation** to deliver the **rights** recently laid down in law for those with **special educational needs or a disability**.
 - **Prohibit public authorities from cutting back on expenditure for children with special educational needs**.
 - Deliver an **effective, well-resourced Sexual Orientation strategy**, alongside an annual action plan, to promote rights and awareness of rights within the LGBT community.
 - Develop an **anti-bullying policy**, including measures aimed specifically at homophobic bullying, to be implemented in every school in Northern Ireland.
 - Continue **training for party representatives** against all forms of intolerance, including racism and homophobia.
 - Provide **quality, accessible pre-school care for traveller children**, under the new Anti-Poverty strategy.
 - Ensure **full development of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act** by providing adequate funding to groups involved in equality consultations.
 - Develop a **cross-departmental strategy to review and address the needs of migrant workers**, to build on work to raise awareness of rights and of social welfare, education and health services.
 - Campaign for the UK government to sign the **UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers**.
 - **Oppose proposals to put Justice and Equality into the one department**. The SDLP will not give equality to the securocrats.
 - Deliver, upon the foundation of the Northern Ireland Strategy for Children and Young People, **effective rights protection for our young**, particularly in the area of mental health.
 - Invest in **education for Travellers**, so that in the medium-term all travellers' educational needs can be sensitively met in the integrated system.
 - Provide appropriate **accommodation to meet Travellers' needs** including the provision of transit sites.
- ## Guaranteeing Human Rights
- ### SDLP Goals:
- Deliver a **comprehensive Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland**, including socio-economic rights, by agreement between political parties and civic society.
 - Champion an **All-Ireland Charter of Rights** to institute a unified commitment to the highest standards of rights protection.
 - **Provide the Human Rights Commission with real powers of investigation**, as required by the UN's Paris Principles, and without the unnecessary limits of the Justice and Security Bill.
 - **Reverse the decision to export asylum seekers and refugees to Scotland**.
 - Consolidate the SDLP position as the most informed and engaged party on issues of human rights.
 - **Vindicate the human rights of those with mental health issues or learning disabilities** and, in particular, resolve the plight of those at Muckamore Abbey.

Delivering a Shared Society



Any party that claims to be democratic must also stand against intolerance and discrimination wherever they find it. We must learn the value of working together and living together. The SDLP will strive to construct a shared and equal society free of hate.

SDLP Goals:

- **Promote shared spaces.** Public authorities need to cooperate to ensure that shared spaces can flourish – for example, police to maintain security; councils to promote them, and transport to provide access.
- Bring forward new legislation to give the **Community Relations Council** power to support Councils' good relations work and to ensure that money spent by Councils delivers real outcomes. Councils that do not promote good relations should not receive funding for that work this should instead be administered directly by the CRC.
- **Work to develop mixed estates,** while ensuring an equal right to housing. In particular, the victims of sectarian harassment and other anti-social crimes should not be forced out of their homes and communities.
- Co-ordinate **cross-community activity for the young,** providing opportunities for integration and cooperation between schools, community groups, youth clubs and amateur sport teams.
- Protect the public from hate through **stronger incitement laws.**
- **Outlaw all sectarian or national flags flying on public property.** Public property belongs to all of us and should not be used to offend any of us.
- Develop a **strategy against hate crime** for the criminal justice system.
- **Prevent bands, that promote hate** or use paramilitary symbols, from parading.
- Introduce **Bonfire Regulations** to protect the environment and ensure payment if damage is caused.
- **Outlaw sectarian chanting** at football matches.
- **Eliminating hate and promoting good relations must be a cross-community project;** we must work to ensure involvement and willing participation from churches, political parties, voluntary and community-based organisations, trade unions and employers.
- **Promote Good Relations guidelines** amongst community based organisations and encouraging voluntary participation in Good Relations practices.

"We are all in debt to the SDLP for its sustained commitment, through one of the darkest periods of our history, to a form of politics which was resolutely anti-sectarian and unwaveringly peaceful and democratic."

Dick Spring TD
Former Leader Labour Party

Delivering Real Progress for Victims & Survivors



The SDLP believes that real peace and reconciliation will only be achieved when we acknowledge and account for the past and address the suffering of victims and survivors. Nothing less will do if we are to leave the past behind on a moral basis.

The SDLP is also concerned that the rights and needs of victims and survivors are not being met. Our proposals – set out below – are designed to put right this wrong.

SDLP Goals:

- **Convene the Victims' and Survivors' Forum.** The SDLP welcomes the commitment to a Victims' and Survivors' Forum. This is something for which we have long campaigned. We want to see it convened without delay. It should help ensure that the voice of victims is no longer ignored. We also want the Forum to design a process for truth, recognition and remembrance that puts victims' rights and interests first.
- **Victims' Commissioner** - The SDLP welcomes the commitment to a permanent Victims' Commissioner. We will work to ensure that any Commissioner raises the profile of victims' needs, promotes victims' interests and oversees the co-ordination of services and funding.
- **Implement a new overarching victims' strategy** to increase the effectiveness of service delivery and to accommodate all practical needs, including proper psychotherapy services.

- **Improve monetary compensation** available for victims, ensuring decent levels, awarded on the basis of need. We do not believe that the £2,000 sought by the interim Victims Commissioner is sufficient.
- **Sustainable funding of victims' groups.**
- **Redistribute paramilitary criminal assets** seized by the Assets Recovery Agency – or any successor body - to help finance better compensation and funding.

The OTR withdrawal "is a deserved reward for the astute political and parliamentary criticisms made of the British legislation from all sides of the Commons, and especially by the Social Democratic and Labour Party.

Irish Times Editorial on withdrawal of OTR legislation 12 January 2006

Truth and Remembrance

The SDLP has long believed in the need for a mechanism for truth and remembrance for our society to move forward.

Below is our proposal. But it is just that – a proposal. We believe victims and survivors themselves should have the greatest say in shaping any truth and remembrance mechanism through the Victims' and Survivors' Forum.

SDLP goals:

- Seek a Truth Body with members of independent, international standing, to direct the process of truth and remembrance for all victims be they of the state or paramilitaries.

- Task the **Truth Body** with compiling a **register of victims**, open to all, to allow those injured or bereaved to have their story heard, formally recorded and held in a public archive so that what happened to them is never forgotten.
- Give all victims' families the right to have the Truth Body **re-open police files** – and carry out investigations – as an alternative to the police doing so, where families want this. Victims would also have the right to waive, or not to waive, prosecutions.
- Support a **'Day of Reflection'** in recognition and remembrance of past events.
- Continue to press for increased action to be taken on finding the **bodies of the disappeared**, ensuring that adequate time, resources and modern technologies are employed.
- Keep the pressure on the British Government to hold an **independent public inquiry** into the murder of Pat Finucane, as they promised they would do.
- Work to ensure that the public inquiries into the murders of **Robert Hamill, Rosemary Nelson and Billy Wright** are not impeded and have the resources they need.
- **Support all families seeking justice** – as we have done for the Conlon family, the families of the Guildford Four and the Maguire Seven, for families like those of Rosemary Nelson, Robert Hamill, Robert McCartney, David McLain, John Tournay, Peter McBride and many many others.
- Oppose any dirty deal like the **Northern Ireland (Offences) Bill** that would deny victims the prospect of both truth and justice.

Delivering on International Affairs



The SDLP has a strong commitment to international co-operation, to rise to the challenges that do not respect borders. The inequality experienced by so many demands that a new principle of Trade Justice become international practice. Only an informed and coordinated response will begin to meet such a challenge. On international issues, the SDLP has shown itself to be a voice of reason and respect.

The SDLP has demonstrated its commitment to putting Northern Ireland on a global stage for the right reasons. The legacy of conflict in Northern Ireland can be of great value in the pursuit of peace elsewhere through sharing of experiences and frameworks for reconciliation. The SDLP has shown itself to be engaged and active on international affairs.

SDLP Goals:

- Continue to support a **united response from the International Community** to Iraq. We support the immediate restoration of water and electricity services. The SDLP have maintained their opposition to the war in Iraq.
- Lobby for the **full implementation of the G8 commitments to increase volume, quality and effectiveness of aid** and that the signatories ensure that debt cancellation be genuinely additional to aid flows.
- Campaign to ensure that the **Economic Partnership Agreements with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries** support each countries' development programmes and strategies for tackling poverty.
- Lobby for accelerated progress in the **Millennium Development Goals**, with particular focus on:
 - Achieving Universal Primary Education;
 - Ensuring Environmental Sustainability; and
 - Combating HIV/Aids, Malaria and other diseases.
- Support the work of the **All-Party Group on International Development** under the new devolved Assembly, and create an international network of expertise to allow, for example, soil experts from the North to assist with irrigation in Somalia.
- **Promote Fair Trade** goods and increased reliance on such products by public bodies and encourage the establishment of Fair Trade towns and cities across the north following Belfast's example.
- Reverse the decision to export asylum seekers and refugees to Scotland.
- Deliver a **cross-departmental strategy to augment protection and awareness of the rights of Migrant Workers**.
- Campaign for the UK government to sign the **UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers**.
- **Campaign vehemently against the use of our airports to facilitate Extraordinary Rendition** and oppose proposals to extend this practice to Knock airport.
- The SDLP believes that the only path for resolving the conflict is **an end to Israeli occupation, self-determination for the Palestinian people and the full implementation of international law**.

E.U. Affairs

The SDLP is the only major and consistent advocate of EU membership amongst all the parties in the North. Membership has paid handsome dividends in the South, and in a time of peace investment into Northern Ireland has never been more attractive. The SDLP has long been dedicated to bringing our strengths and skills to the attention of Europe.

- Campaign for a **coordinated approach to tackle the Darfur crisis**. Ensure the U.N. offers firm and long-term assistance, and closely monitors progress.
 - Continue the campaign for **entry to the Euro zone**. In the interim we will work to promote the use of the Euro by businesses, individuals and public services.
 - The population of the EU now stands at **500 million**. We will deliver **innovative strategies to capitalise on the opportunities** this presents.
 - Highlight the success and modernity of our agri-food sector, and **remove red tape** to allow it to flourish and be accessible across Europe (see also Agriculture section).
- Ensure **effective distribution of the Peace III fund**.
 - Campaign for the development of **Trans-European Networks in Transport, Energy and Telecommunications**, to establish firmly the North at the heart of Europe.
 - Work for a **coordinated European approach to encourage Fair Trade** conditions apply to as many contracts as possible. Develop sustainable partnerships in the developing world, while promoting local produce where possible.









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